

3.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

The intention of the proposed development is to provide a high bay import and distribution centre for a major blue chip UK retailer plus additional warehousing floorspace. This will involve the demolition of a number of existing buildings, a number of which are old, redundant and possibly unsafe buildings, on this part of the West Bank Dock Estate and the construction of new buildings and associated infrastructure on the site. The Application Boundary and proposed layout of the scheme is presented in the drawings at the rear of this section. Building elevations, site sections and proposed floor levels are presented in a series of drawings in *Appendix 3*.

The breakdown of the proposed development is as follows:

- Regional Distribution Centre comprising 109,451 sq m (gross external area) of floorspace within Use Class B8. This includes ancillary office accommodation, a separate vehicle management unit and other ancillary uses. The main warehouse building accommodates both a low bay and high bay component.
- A separate warehouse building comprising 35,010 sq m (gross external area), within Use Class B8. This includes ancillary office accommodation.
- Car parking and trailer parking to serve both buildings.
- Car parking to replace existing car parking serving the adjacent O'Connor's rail freight terminal that would be lost to the development.
- Trailer parking.
- Amended access arrangements including a western access to Foundry Lane (involving a replacement bridge crossing Ditton Brook), eastern access to Desoto Road and road link to the O'Connor's rail freight terminal.

- Miscellaneous, associated infrastructure, including gatehouses.
- Diversion of Steward's Brook, initially on a temporary route and subsequently a permanent route.
- Landscaping.

It is intended that the Regional Distribution Centre will be occupied by a single user and the development has been designed to meet a particular user's specification. The development will provide a regional warehouse and distribution centre for the firm's network of northern distribution units feeding a national network of retail stores.

The second warehouse is likely to accommodate two units of 22,296 sq m and 3,716 sq m (GEA). The larger unit is intended to provide alternative accommodation for a distribution company currently located on the site, whose existing buildings would be demolished.

It should be noted that the above gross floor areas have been used throughout all assessments associated with this project. Given, however, that the development proposals have evolved over several iterations as the development constraints have been evaluated and accommodated, some of the drawings may have slightly different figures annotated. In all cases the figures above take precedence.

The new development will receive goods via road from the east (via new access arrangements on to Desoto Road) and from the railhead on the adjacent O'Connor's freight handling facility. The new short road link between the freight handling facility and the development will enable containers to be delivered to site and decanted into the warehouses. The O'Connor's facility is also within the ownership of Westlink Group Ltd, thereby providing an integrated multi-modal development.

From the development site, goods will be distributed by road and where possible, by rail. The proximity to the rail handling facility provides opportunity for goods to be distributed via the rail network.

The high and low bay units on the Regional Distribution Centre site have been designed to provide a 'cross-docking' facility where, on one side of the unit, loading and unloading facilities are provided for rail containers which are taken inside the building and on the other side, traditional lorry access is provided with traditional dock levellers and roller shutter doors. Approximately 5% of the floor area has been allocated to related office / welfare facilities.

The site layout has been influenced by a number of factors. These include:

- The existing topography of the site;
- The various boundary conditions and site constraints including Steward's Brook, the railway lines and other water courses that surround and enter the site;
- The technical requirements of both the rail container delivery and the road access; and.
- The need to provide future connectivity to adjacent areas.

The layout has been designed to create the minimum impact on these features and from a sustainability perspective provide the most efficient use of the land available for the development (land-take).

There will be no chemicals storage or materials likely to fall under the COMAH Regulations or other hazardous substance notification or permitting regimes stored on site.

Architectural drawings, as listed in the schedule in *Table 3.1* below, are presented in Appendix 3.1.

Table 3.1 - Schedule of Architectural Drawings

TABLE 3.1: SCHEDULE OF ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS	
Drawing No.	Description
06026 – WP01	Overall site plan
06026 – WP02	Highbay Warehouse ground floor plan
06026 – WP03	Highbay elevations
06026 – WP04	Highbay building sections

06026 – WP05	Warehouse 2 ground floor plan
06026 – WP06	Warehouse 2 building elevations and sections
06026 – WP07	Overall site sections
06026 – WP08	VMU floor plans
06026 – WP09	VMU elevations
06026 – WP10	Goods out office elevations
06026 – WP11	Goods In office elevations
06026 – WP12	Battery charge elevations
06026 – WP13	MHE elevations
06026 – WP14	Existing site with building outlines
06026 – WP15	Phase 1 site plan

Westlink Group Limited sees this site as a 'flagship' development for the organisation and it is anticipated that the project will become a benchmark for future proposed sites across the UK. It is appreciated that, to achieve this, the client and design team need to work in close contact with the Local Authority and Statutory Authorities during the detailed design development.

3.2 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Design, Materials and Contribution to Urban Context

The design of the buildings and the site have been developed in response to the following criteria:

- Reference to the 'Landscaping Strategy and Design Guide' prepared by Atkins for HBC.
- The juxtaposition of the site in relation to planned or anticipated neighbouring developments.
- The connection of the buildings to the road and rail links throughout wider area creating a balance between development, access and the environment.
- The legibility of functions within the building from the public realm.

- The use of form, detail and materials to create visual interest and scale appropriate to the external spaces which the buildings address.
- The creation of environments which are welcoming to pedestrians (site workers and visitors).
- The provision of security by the use of overlooking, lighting, and the avoidance of uncontrollable spaces.
- The use of a consistent palette of materials of high standard throughout the development including microrib and profiled metal cladding to building walls and roof, aluminium double glazed windows, and steel doors (see *Appendix 3.1*).

Detailed Design

The main unit has been designed to optimise the site area and respond to the above criteria:

- The height of internal spaces have been defined to maximise the racking / pallet potential of the spaces;
- The buildings external appearance will be functionally driven in the main, and in this regard, an honest approach has been taken to detailing. The buildings will have consistent elevational treatments, and the materials and colour will be consistent throughout the site. For the Regional Distribution Centre a very simplistic look has been designed for the building, with vertical long span cladding, coloured white to blend in with the skyline and reduce potential visual impact. The second warehouse will complement this and adopt similar principles.
- The building elevations will be broken at lower levels by vehicle docks and fire exits. Key areas of interest, will be provided by the offices pods, which will be a focus for activity. For the Regional Distribution Centre, the external office pods comprise of goods in being provided on the northern elevation and good out on the southern.
- In terms of the scale and form, the buildings, by their nature, are largely driven by the scale of the operations and processes which they are designed to accommodate.

- The size of the buildings are also influenced by the need for an efficient distribution operation, and the economies of scale which govern this.
- In terms of building heights, the High Bay element of the Regional Distribution Centre has been specified as a result of the operational requirements of the racking system proposed. The nature of the operation, and the requirement for a particular volume of mechanised racking results in a ridge height of 40 metres. The remaining floor space of the Regional Distribution Centre will accommodate buildings with a ridge height of approximately 18 metres, which is a standard height for distribution buildings on this scale. The height of the second warehouse is informed by the existing operations of the user it is intended to accommodate.
- As the proposed Regional Distribution Centre is cross docked, activity will result on both of the main (long) elevations. However, activity at the return elevations will be limited. These shorter elevations (which attract less activity) have been oriented towards sensitive receptors.

Access

The site is well served by, and is adjacent to, substantial road and rail links. Internal road and rail links will be enhanced and reconfigured to create the most efficient and economic use of the current site area.

The development will be accessed as follows:

Car access

The car parking (900 spaces) serving the Regional Distribution Centre will be accessed via an improved access arrangement from Foundry Lane, to the west of the site. This will necessitate a replacement bridge across Ditton Brook. The car parking serving the second warehouse will be served from the improved access arrangements to the east, off Desoto Road. The new car parking for the O'Connor's rail freight handling facility will be accessed via its existing road access arrangements.

HGV access

All HGV access to the site will be from the east, via the new access arrangements to Desoto Road. Access to the east to Foundry Lane will be restricted and only allowed in an emergency. This will

discourage any additional HGV movements towards and through Halebank village. An HGV link to the O'Connor's rail freight handling facility is proposed.

Pedestrian and cycle access

Pedestrians and cyclists will be able to access the site from both the west and east improved access points.

The application of consistent complementary pathways, roads and aprons to the buildings in terms of materials and layouts, appropriate for their use in all cases, will create a recognisable hierarchy and this palette of materials will assist the buildings in establishing the 'sense of place'. All aprons and access roads have been checked and approved by ADL Traffic consultants in terms of tracking and vehicle movements.

- The internal road network will provide the optimum vehicular accessibility to the proposed units.
- In terms of pedestrian and cycle specific provision, the proximity of the site to local highways and pathways offers an opportunity for accessibility by non car modes to be secured.
- Footways will be provided along the road network where necessary.. Secure cycle parking will also be provided and parking for the disabled will be located as close to the main entrance point of the building as feasibly possible.

Sustainability

The new buildings will achieve high standards of environmental design as part of a sustainability agenda for the whole of the site. The design of individual buildings is respectful of orientation, materials specification and energy management strategy, so as to demonstrate responsible environmental design principles. This is discussed further in *Section 15 – Sustainability*.

Steward's Brook Diversion

The development proposals that have been put forward, provide an opportunity to improve the environmental conditions on the site and eliminate the pollution loadings to the Brook from the historic contaminants on the development site. A number of diversion options have been evaluated using the following guiding criteria:

- There must be no net loss of open (unculverted) water course associated with the development;
- The diverted water course must be sealed to prevent exposure of the water flowing within it from site based soil pollutants (i.e. contaminated groundwater leaching from the galigu and other soil contaminants into Steward's Brook);
- The new channel must not be sized such that it could lead to constricted flows that would cause upstream flooding that would not otherwise have occurred;
- The section of Marsh Brook that receives the flow from Steward's Brook must be enhanced and improved to ensure that it can be classed and adopted as main river by the EA;
- Allowance needs to be made for a suitable riparian buffer zone to enable the EA access for maintenance and other works along the open channel;
- The diversion of Steward's Brook must not increase the risk of flooding on the development site or the land bordering Marsh Brook as a result of the diverted flows; and
- The proposed diversion must be capable of implementation within a reasonable timescale (within the development process timescale) and must be practically achievable and technically deliverable.

Based upon these assumptions and an examination of site levels, infrastructure requirements and physical constraints, a workable solution has been found that involves diverting the Brook via a newly constructed channel into Marsh Brook. Marsh Brook will be cleaned and upgraded in advance to render it capable of being adopted as Main River by the EA.

3.3 SITE MANAGEMENT

The site will be managed under an umbrella facilities management contract resting with the primary occupier and will cover the maintenance and control of issues such as:

- Site Drainage
- Roadways Management and Maintenance
- Wastewater Disposal and Monitoring

- All Site Licensing Requirements
- Landscape and Environmental Management
- Green Travel Planning
- Landscaping and Buried Services
- Security (Access and Boundary)
- COMAH Response
- Community/Regulatory Liaison.

In addition a Tenants Handbook will be produced and agreed with the Local Authority that will set the conditions of operation on the site and spell out the site's environmental charter. This will include legislative compliance requirements such as controlling nuisance (noise dust and odours) and sustainability provisions (see *Section 15 – Sustainability*) such as adhering to waste management principles (promoting recycling and recovery).

3.4 ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Fundamentally, two alternative approaches exist for the application site: (i) to retain the site in its current form and condition (i.e. the 'do nothing' approach) or (ii) to undertake redevelopment to provide enhanced and optimised use of the site as a rail-linked distribution centre (i.e. the 'do something' approach). It is considered that the 'do nothing' approach will result in the continued steady decline in the economic viability of the site and associated potential increase in the environmental risks and liabilities emanating from it. As such it will provide no contribution to, and actively detract from the proposals to develop the rail freight potential of the wider area.

Due to the poor state of both the site and the majority of the buildings, if the proposed development does not take place, the industrial estate as it stands may become non-financially viable, and may even be made redundant by similar facilities which may be proposed elsewhere. The resultant loss of employment to the area would be unfortunate as the potential for the site is so significant.

If the site were to remain viable then it would likely be subject to further ad hoc development, producing buildings of dubious quality which would be of little or no benefit to the environment and the vision that the Local Authority has for the area.

When considering the 'do something' approach, consideration has been given to whether the proposed development offers the most appropriate development solution for the site. However, given that the land use proposed does not conflict 'in principle' with Halton Borough Council's aspirations for the site, there is no need to consider alternative approaches beyond the application site area. Consideration should therefore be given to whether the mix of uses proposed and the relationship between rail and road access offers the most appropriate solution or whether another mix is more appropriate. Further discussion of this issue is contained within the Planning Statement in Volume 1 of this Application, but fundamentally the road/rail balance is considered to have been optimised for the site by providing efficient use of the site for warehousing and onward road based transport and integrated links with the adjacent sister operation which provides a rail head and rail freight facilities. It is recognised that there was a previously approved scheme proposed as Innovis, involving buildings for multiple tenants and direct rail access to buildings. However, this solution has proven to be technically and commercially less viable than the current proposals and was vested with a previous developer who has sold their interest in the site. The proposed development is geared specifically to an end user and provides a viable means of delivering the early development of the site, whilst maintaining the focus on creating a multi-modal distribution facility.