INTRODUCTION

Richard Lee Project Planning has been appointed by “U Lock it” to prepare the above proposal and supporting material for the application site which comprises part of the former National Grid depot.

In support of this planning application and in order to provide the Council with full information, the following “Design and Access Statement” has been prepared.

PHYSICAL CONTEXT

The application site lies within an established employment area to the south of the Bridgewater Canal. It covers approximately 0.73 hectares and is located towards the southern side of former National Grid depot to the north of Halton Road. Its boundary to the south comprises palisade fencing along its road frontage. Fencing runs along the site’s eastern boundary separating it from adjacent residential and business uses. Business premises surround the site to the south, east and west. Some housing overlooks part of the site’s Halton Road frontage.

To north lies a palisade fenced compound which houses retained operational National Grid apparatus.

The area comprising the application site is presently vacant and split into two levels connected by an existing ramp. Both levels are surfaced and are relatively flat. The site is accessed (vehicles and pedestrian) off Halton Road via a shared site entrance, which is gated at its junction with Halton Road.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

The site constitutes previously used land (brownfield) and is located within the urban area of Runcorn, approximately 1.5 km to the north west of the town’s centre. It is within an area which accommodates a mix of industrial, haulage, vehicle repair, manufacturing, business and residential uses. This former National Grid depot fronts onto Halton Road along which there is a regular bus service into the town centre.

The nearby buildings are not Listed and the site is not within a Conservation Area. Its development for storage purposes would be in keeping with the character of this “primarily employment area”.

The site is not identified by the Environment Agency as being at risk of flooding.

A comprehensive remediation scheme was completed in February 2012 by the site’s former owners, National Grid, prior to its sale to U Lock It. A copy of the verification
report prepared by Entec UK Ltd (July 2012) is included with the supporting documentation accompanying this planning application.

ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The application site is presently vacant. The proposed use will employ two people. It will provide a self-storage facility for local businesses and individuals.

PLANNING CONTEXT

Development Plan
The Development Plan for the application site comprises the adopted Halton Borough UDP. The "saved" policies contained in the UDP relevant to the proposed use are:

POLICY E3 PRIMARILY EMPLOYMENT AREA states:

"Development falling within Uses Classes B1 (Business), B2 (General Industry), B8 (Storage and Distribution) and Sui Generis industrial uses will be permitted in the Primarily Employment Areas identified on the Proposal Map."

The application site is within an area identified on the Proposal Map for this purpose. It forms part of an existing, long established storage depot. Its use was largely unrestricted and included various buildings, a gas holder, parking for HGVs and other vehicles across the site.

Compared to the previous uses of this part of the site, the proposed use does not amount to an intensification of use. The proposed storage containers will be sited on the ground, with no stacking, and would be up to 2.6 metres high and painted dark green. Given the previous use of the site and its adjacent employment uses, the proposed use would complement its neighbouring uses.

The steel shipping containers would be used for self-storage, which by its nature is low key and will not generate significant vehicle movements.

It is therefore contended the proposed use complies with the requirements of the above policy.

POLICY BE 1 GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT states:

"1 Development will be permitted provided that the following criteria are satisfied, where appropriate:
2 ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
   a It must be of a high quality of design that respects or where necessary creates local distinctiveness.
   b It must contain proposals for a carefully designed landscape scheme that reflects the essential character of the area and the use of the new buildings."
c It must avoid unacceptable loss of amenity to occupiers or users of adjacent land or buildings, by virtue of, noise disturbance, noxious fumes, and dust or traffic generation. Adjacent residential uses should not suffer unacceptable loss of amenity through overlooking, overshadowing or overbearing appearance.
d It must be compatible with existing and proposed surrounding uses.
e It must be designed in such a way that minimises the fear and risk of crime.
f It must not cause unacceptable levels of pollution or nuisance.

3 ACCESSIBILITY
a Proposals for the design and layout of roads, footpaths, accesses and servicing areas must comply with the Council’s standards.
b It must make adequate provision for, and be easily accessible by, pedestrians (including those with restricted mobility), cyclists, public transport and should have easy access to the existing rail network wherever possible in compliance with the Council’s standards.
c It must not overload the capacity of the surrounding highway network nor be detrimental to highway safety.
d New buildings where the public will have access must have adequate provision for people with disabilities or restricted mobility, particularly in terms of signage, access, facilities and car parking.
e It must not prejudice access onto the identified Greenway Network, and where appropriate, should improve or enhance greenway linkages.

4 CONSERVATION OF THE NATURAL AND HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT
a It must ensure the retention, conservation, enhancement and integration of sites and features of particular historic, archaeological, landscape, ecological or amenity value.
b It must ensure the retention, conservation, enhancement and integration of features within and adjoining the site if they have intrinsic value or make a valuable contribution to the character or amenity of the site or surrounding area.
c It must not result in the unacceptable loss of designated greenspace or other important amenity open space.
d It must not use the best and most versatile agricultural land grades 1, 2, and 3a, and if any agricultural land is used the impact on agricultural viability and productivity should be minimised.

5 INFRASTRUCTURE
a It must include adequate provision for any necessary improvements to utilities and services resulting from the development. It must not result in unacceptable public expenditure to secure necessary improvements in infrastructure.
b It must meet the Council’s on site drainage requirements and where there are off-site drainage problems this must be dealt with to the Council’s satisfaction.

6 MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES
a It must not prejudice the planned development of a larger site or area for which comprehensive proposals have been approved or are in preparation.
b It must take into account the need for energy efficiency by means of building orientation, site layout and by use of passive and active energy saving designs.
c It must maximise the use of recycled materials within the development.
d It must minimise the amount of waste produced during construction and subsequent operation of the development.
e It must ensure that adequate onsite provision is made for waste storage and collection, in a suitably enclosed and screened area.
f It must promote means to reduce the demand for water, by making the best use of current resource.
g It must take into account the need and potential for sustainable drainage techniques.”

It is contended that the proposed use broadly complies with the relevant requirements of this policy.

POLICY BE22 BOUNDARY WALLS AND FENCES states:

"1 Boundary fences and walls, that require planning permission, will be required to be visually attractive, constructed of high quality and durable materials and appropriate to the character and appearance of the area in which they are located.
2 Where fences/walls are to be erected forward of established 'building lines' and areas that are particularly open, no structures above 1 metre in height will be permitted, unless overriding security or other such circumstances are satisfactorily demonstrated. Unless, special circumstances exist fencing above 2 metres in height will not be permitted in any location.”

The existing 3 metres high steel palisade fencing along the site’s frontage to Halton Road is to be retained. In order to ensure security for customer’s storage, it is proposed to erect similar fencing within the site. It is contended that this fencing is appropriate in this instance and will not harm the visual appearance of the area.

It is also proposed to re-position the site’s existing entrance gate to Halton Road by setting it back from the frontage and separating the site users.

POLICY BE17 ADVERTISING & ADVERTISEMENTS states:

“In considering any application for Advertisement Consent or enforcing the discontinuance of a display after the specified period, if considered reasonable, all of the following criteria will be considered:
Amenity
a Advertisements should be compatible with the character of their surroundings, including the scale and detailing of any building against which they are seen, by reason of their size, siting, height above ground level, materials, colour and design.
b Free-standing displays should be integrated with their surroundings by appropriate design and landscaping.
c) Advertisements on buildings should appear as an integral and not a dominant feature of the building.
d) Advertisements should not conflict with the character, appearance, architecture, setting or historical merits of Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings.
e) The advertisement should not lead to intrusive visual clutter.
f) The advertisement should not prejudice the amenity of the occupiers of nearby dwellings or other buildings, either by reason of inappropriate design or means of illumination.
g) In the right locations, (and in particular in relation to freestanding poster displays) whether advertisements can offer the opportunity to secure vitality and environmental benefits, by screening eyesores and redevelopment sites or providing a solution to the use of marginal land left by road works, albeit on a temporary basis where appropriate.

Safety

h) The effect of the advertisement upon highway safety, the safe use and operation of any form of traffic or transport, including the safety of pedestrians.
i) An advertisement should not impede the visibility of road users in the vicinity of junctions, accesses, bus stops and crossing points.”

From experience gained from successfully operating their existing U Lock It premises in similar locations in Wincham and Middlewich the operators have found that clear, new signage to be an important factor for the business’ success. The signage is of an appropriate scale for the site and is not intended to be illuminated. It broadly complies with the relevant requirements of Policy BE17.

Taking into account the relevant saved policies, it is contended that the proposal is in accordance with the Development Plan.

**National Guidance**

The relevant national planning guidance is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Paragraph 14 of NPPF states:

“At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.”

Paragraph 19 of NPPF states:

“The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system.”

The proposed development supports these principles of sustainable development because it involves the use of a previously developed site located on a public
transport route with good access to Runcorn town centre. It is therefore contended that the proposed development complies with the principles set out in NPPF.

INVolVEMENT OF COMMUNITY AND PROFESSIONALS

The application proposal has been devised in consultation with locally experienced planning and highway consultants. No pre-application meetings/consultations have taken place as the proposed use broadly accords with previous uses on the site.

EVALUATION

In evaluating the potential for the site’s development it has been necessary in particular to carefully consider several constraints including the site shape, topography, the relationship to surrounding neighbours and the location of the access.

The application site forms part of a former National Grid depot and therefore the proposed use is considered appropriate. The principle of development of sites such as this conforms to current planning guidance and priorities. In preparing the layout care has been taken to address issues regarding access, circulation and impact on neighbouring properties. It has also been necessary to accommodate National Grid’s access right of way to its palisade fenced retained compound which houses operational apparatus.

It is not envisaged that traffic flows to and from the site will significantly increase as a result of the development.

PROPOSAL

The application seeks consent for the siting of containers on existing areas of hardstanding for self-storage, and a portakabin for use as the site office. It involves the re-positioning of the main gate to the site, the fencing off of the area to be used by U Lock It and changes to access and circulation within the site. It also involves the erection of five 8 metre high “towers” to support CCTV cameras for on-site security purposes. The proposal has taken into account the following factors:

- the site’s shape and topography
- character of neighbouring uses
- existing surfaces and perimeter fencing on the site
- government guidance in the development of brownfield sites

Land Use

The scheme provides for a self-storage use which is consistent with existing neighbouring employment uses and indeed the previous use of the site.

Amount of Development

The proposal is to use the site for the siting of 132 self-storage units within a secure compound.
**Layout**
The layout of the proposed use is dictated by the site’s size and physical constraints, the need to provide for a separate remote controlled customer access, parking and turning. Separate secure access is to be maintained for 24 hour access to National Grid plant which remains on part of the wider site in its own compound.

The proposed storage containers sit comfortably and wholly within the site with minimal impact on surrounding properties. The storage units have been sited to maximise numbers and to provide an accessible layout.

It has also been devised to provide good surveillance from the office at the entrance and surveillance cameras. Existing security lighting will be utilised to further enhance the security during the hours of darkness.

**Scale**
The height of the storage units will not exceed 2.6 metres.

**Appearance**
Care has been taken to ensure the layout of the use does not have a detrimental impact on the character of the area. The containers will be painted dark green and will be well maintained. It is also proposed to undertake landscaping along the strip to the rear of the existing fence along the site’s Halton Road frontage.

It is considered this proposal does not detract from the area’s character.

**Access**
The site is to be accessed through the existing vehicular access off Halton Road. The existing main gate will be repositioned, set back 6 metres into the site from the back of the footway on Halton Road. Two separate gated entrances are proposed at the new position. The first will serve the remaining National Grid compound and the wider site. The second will be a remote controlled electric gateway serving the U Lock It compound. This will also involve changes to the circulation arrangements within the site.

The aim of the layout is to ensure that all users will have convenient access to the storage units. No containers would be stacked so there is no need for vertical circulation. Access to all units and the office would meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Convenient and safe access can therefore be provided for all users. Whilst it is considered the proposal in planning and highway terms is acceptable, the applicant remains willing to discuss all aspects.

**Drainage**
The site is not located within a flood plain. It is already served by drainage as part of the wider industrial estate.
PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SITE

View along the site’s Halton Road frontage from the south

View across the site from Halton Road
View along the site’s Halton Road frontage

View of the site’s Halton Road frontage from the north
Existing site access off Halton Road