



Land at Sandwash Close, Rainford Industrial Estate, St Helens WA11 8LY

Statement by Gareth Middleton of GRM Property Consultants on behalf of owners of the freehold, English Land Limited (ELL)

May 2021

I am a Director of GRM Property Consultants Ltd and represented ELL in the purchase of their land at Sandwash Close in 2015. I have extensive working knowledge of the area and have been active in the industrial market, specialising in industrial agency and development since 1997. Through my experience I knew there was always good demand for industrial land and property in the locality but very little good quality supply. St Helens Council has shared this view and Site 9EA reflects this.

ELL view draft Site 9EA as part of the larger area of land that they purchased in a single acquisition in 2015. This land extends from Sandwash Close to the north-east and extends to Rainford Brook to the south west. It also forms part of the Rainford Industrial Estate, Rainford. The extent of this land ownership and additional access rights is reflected in Appendix 1.

The ownership and rights of access clearly exceed the extent of Site 9EA. It includes: 1) Northern Element (fronting Sandwash Close) - previously developed land comprising three to accesses and concrete bases reflecting previous industrial buildings, covering 1.44 acres; 2) Central Element - a cleared site comprises the main developable area and generally reflects the extent of Site 9EA, covering 18.24 acres; and 3) Southern Element - ponds and woodland allocated as greenbelt adjoining Rainford brook, covering 4.94 acres.

Importantly, the land benefits from an extant industrial planning permission (1291/017). This is a major factor which informed ELL's acquisition in 2015. This very flexible extant permission (granted in 1992) is for the erection of an industrial building (6500m²) as phase 1, plus additional phasing for industrial development across the 9.9ha site. The pre-commencement conditions were formally discharged by the Council and lawfully implemented in 1992/93. The works include the access road onto Sandwash Close, ground surcharging, surface water storage lagoon, and structural landscaping. The evidence of these works is visible on site and using aerial/street-level photography (e.g. Google Earth). In effect, this extant permission can be lawfully implemented at any time and is arguably deliverable.

ELL purchased the land in 2015 after an informal best bids process from the Bank of Ireland. The land was marketed by Sanderson Weatherall as an asset in administration. Therefore, any purchasers had to have the ability to purchase the land outright rather than by way of a conditional contract. ELL's philosophy is to buy land suitable for development and enhance it through the planning system to either build out themselves or sell on to other developers and occupiers. ELL was aware of the extant planning permission but also saw an opportunity to enhance the development potential. Ground investigations and preliminary services searches were undertaken to ensure there would be no constraints that would prevent implementation of a suitable scheme.

The additional credentials of this land for industrial development are clear to me. The land benefits ease of access to the A570 and A580 (which leads directly to the M6 motorway heading east and M58 heading north and connects to the wider national motorway network). The Super Port of Liverpool is also a short drive away. These factors make this a very well-located development site. The good available labour supply in St Helens and wider region also gives further confidence to potential occupiers. This was seen as an exceptionally good opportunity when ELL acquired in 2015 and still applies to this day.



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Following the land acquisition in 2015, ELL promoted vehicle access from both Sandwash Close and Pasture Lane via the local plan process. The access to Sandwash Close was relatively straightforward due to the 1992 extant permission and access rights. ELL's ownership of land fronting Sandwash Close also provided alternative access opportunities, and additional development land. Until relatively recently, market indicators showed a preference for an access from Pasture Lane in order to accommodate large format ("big box") logistics operators. In addition, in discussions with myself St Helens Council actively encouraged ELL to take up a collaborative approach with the adjoining landowner to the north in order to deliver a new access road via Pasture Lane via the local plan process. This was seen as a good 'win-win' position by the authority at the time. Furthermore, St Helens Council included the adjoining land in an early draft of the new local plan as safeguarded land for residential development. This further encouraged ELL to promote the land via access from Pasture Lane. This was also consistent with the previous 2012 planning permission (including access via both Sandwash Close and Pasture Lane) which was still valid at the time of the acquisition and ELL considered at that time to submit a new scheme. However, in the next iteration of the draft local plan, the safeguarded allocation on the adjacent land was deleted and the adjoining land shown to be retained as Green Belt. Furthermore, market conditions have considerably shifted over the past 18 months. This means ELL is no longer dependent on access via Pasture Lane and is confident their land can come forward via Sandwash Close.

Over the past 18 months, I have witnessed the significant take-up of "big box" B8 requirements on other sites in the borough. Demand is therefore being met elsewhere. In parallel, I have observed a significant growth in demand for smaller/medium sized footprint industrial units, especially from SME operators. This is corroborated by latest industrial advice from agents DTRE and Sanderson Weatherall, enclosed as Appendices 3 and 4.

This shift in market realities now informs and encourages ELL's development strategy for their land. This is also buoyed in St Helens Council now advocating smaller and medium format Class E, B2 and B8 uses on Site 9EA. As a result, the Pasture Lane access is no longer a prerequisite in market terms. Possibly a nice to have but not essential to deliver ELL's land and Site 9EA for employment development.

Since ELL acquired the land in 2015 there has been no shortage of interest from occupiers and developers. However, it has been marketed on a fairly low-key basis pending the outcome of the local plan process. A decision was made to keep these enquires on hold as long as possible and once the new local plan is adopted to give greater certainty for all parties, and a full marketing exercise can ensue.

The appointed agents have supplied lists of recent enquiries in 2020/2021 a handful of which specifically engaged with us. They reflect a range of small and medium sized operator demand. The most notable being in the last 6 weeks, a confidential food importer who are already in the area in poor quality accommodation in a neighboring local authority. They use the Liverpool Port and require a production and chilled warehouse facility. The other most notable interest was from a local based business in January 2020 who wished to purchase the entire plot and construct their own facility. This was put on hold due to COVID-19 and will be resurrected no doubt soon. It is also worth noting that these operators and other SME enquiries are comfortable with site access only via Sandwash Close. This contrasts with the "big box" logistics operators who previously preferred Pasture Lane.



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Infrastructure in terms of existing highways and utilities serve the site very well. We have supplied analysis by highways consultant and utilities consultants in the appendices which demonstrate the deliverability of the development. There are no reasons why this development cannot come forward in the near future. The appetite for this employment generating scheme is very real.

The agents appointed on behalf of English Land have provided a summary of what limited existing industrial and new build supply is available in a 5-10 miles radius approximately contained in the appendices. I have also included an up-to-date availability schedule showing that there are currently no vacant industrial units available in Rainford. This includes the immediate area around Sandwash Close and also Lords Fold to the north of Rainford. There is a single stand-alone office building at Millbrook Business Park, Mill Lane that has recently come on the market of c.4300 sq ft. There is a plot on the corner of Sandwash Close and Mill Lane which has been created recently due to a small workshop being demolished for safety reasons. As far as we are informed there are no plan by the owners to rebuild in the foreseeable future. Whilst there are still a few To Let boards visible these are now out of date. The only land that is currently vacant belongs to English Land and fronts Sandwash Close. This has been set aside to be incorporated into the scheme with 9EA and was bought at the same time as a single transaction. Whilst this land could accommodate an industrial unit (see plan in appendices) it can also be used to further improve accessibility to the scheme with an alternative access onto Sandwash Close. Whilst this is not essential it may be a future consideration.

For information, Appendices 7, 8 and 9 indicates how our client's land can be feasibly and viably developed in line with ELL's land ownership and access rights, the extant planning permission, Site 9EA, and market demand. Appendix 7 primarily reflects the 1992 extant permission, including the implemented access road. Appendix 8 is consistent with the extant permission but also provides an alternative layout to reflect a mixed format to reflect current demand and includes the development of the vacant land fronting Sandwash Close, including alternative access or combined access with the existing access road. Appendix 9 also provides an alternative layout to reflect a smaller and medium format, including the development of vacant land fronting Sandwash Close. ELL intend to use these indicative plans in future marketing of the site.

Gareth Middleton

for GRM Property Consultants Ltd

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