



Storage World, Middleton

Planning Statement

On behalf of

**Self-Storage Performance
Management International Ltd**

July 2026

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This statement is submitted on behalf Self Storage Performance Management International Limited (the applicant) in support of an application seeking full planning permission for:

The erection of a mixed-use building comprising a self-storage facility (use class B8) and ground floor commercial units (use class E) alongside associated access, parking, servicing infrastructure and landscaping.

- 1.2. The applicant purchased a former vacant 1970s warehouse building at Old Hall Street, Middleton (Comfy Quilts) in 2013 and set about a major refurbishment. Trading commenced in 2016 as FlexiSpace and then as Storage World, and the building evolved into a highly successful workspace and storage hub. It accommodated over 70 micro and small businesses, alongside a diverse array of other domestic and commercial customers requiring readily accessible and flexible storage space.
- 1.3. In June 2025 the building and its contents were destroyed in a major fire and has since been demolished leaving a vacant site and many displaced businesses and residents who have lost their belongings.
- 1.4. The Applicant has worked hard to minimise the impact of this devastating fire with a clear intention to replace the lost building. Following close engagement with Rochdale MBC, this application takes the opportunity to introduce a higher quality building with design and materials that better reflect its historic context, the edge of town location and introduces a wider mix of uses at ground floor to activate the street frontage in accordance with the Local Plan and Town Centre Masterplan.
- 1.5. It is a significant regeneration project comprising £12m private investment that is estimated to generate over 200 jobs. Through replacing the lost space within a smaller footprint, the proposed development will also help facilitate wider regeneration opportunities aligned with the Middleton Town Centre Masterplan, including on the balance of the site, which is suitable for residential development, pedestrian links and for any future expansion of the Middleton Arena.
- 1.6. The submission follows nine months of close engagement with Rochdale MBC, the Development Agency along with wider engagement with the Mayoral Development Corporation and surrounding community.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. The Applicant and operator of Storage World, has a long pedigree within the self-storage sector stretching back over 50 years in Manchester. The facility at Middleton converted a former industrial/warehouse building and offered flexible storage units at competitive rates within an accessible edge of town location.
- 2.2. This format proved popular with startup and micro-business customers as well as with traditional self-storage customers and developed as a business hub and incubator. Since 2016, over 500 businesses have located within the former building, with many expanding and using the facility as a springboard before moving on to find more permanent space in the surrounding area.
- 2.3. The applicant's key objective following the catastrophic fire is to replace the building with a suitable modern design that will bring back SME business activity and self-storage space as quickly as possible. Through close engagement with the Council planning and other departments, the applicant is keen to deliver a far better development, with a more appropriate design and format that will also bring wider regeneration benefits as set out through the application documents.
- 2.4. This Planning Statement considers the site and surroundings and, alongside the Design & Access Statement, sets the process followed to finalise the development now proposed. It reviews the relevant planning policies and other material considerations in support of securing approval.
- 2.5. The end design accommodates the replacement building on approximately half of the land within the applicant's ownership. This is a full application for approval to deliver this building without further delay. The red line 'application' site wraps around the building, its access and service yard. Within the wider ownership there are opportunities for further regeneration that will follow in due course and be subject of future applications.

Submission documents

- 2.6. As agreed through pre-application engagement with the Council, this application package comprises the following documents:
 - Planning application forms and cover letter
 - Location Plan
 - Existing Masterplan
 - Proposed Masterplan

- Proposed Site Plan
- Proposed Floor Plans
- Proposed Roof Plan
- Proposed Elevations
- Proposed External Works
- Proposed Streets Scenes
- Topographic Survey
- CGI images of proposal (for illustration)
- Planning Statement (including Statement of Community Involvement)
- Design & Access Statement (DAS)
- Energy & Sustainability Statement
- Transport Statement (TS)
- Heritage Statement
- Economic Impact Statement
- Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Sustainable Drainage (SuDS) Strategy
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Metric
- Phase 1 Preliminary Environmental Risk Assessment (Contaminated Land)
- Coal Mining Risk Assessment
- Crime Impact Statement (incorporating '*Designing Out Crime*' protocols)

3. Site Context

- 3.1. The former Storage World building occupied most of the 0.81Ha site in the applicant's ownership (see site location plan at **Appendix 1** and site photos at **Appendix 2**). The application site for the replacement mixed-use development is half (0.40ha) of the former site.
- 3.2. The land (blue line) comprises a vacant plot with the former building demolished to slab level. The site is generally level and is bounded, to the west, by existing public realm and public parking around Harbord Street and Assheton Way, beyond which is the retail core of the town centre.
- 3.3. To the immediate south is Middleton Arena, which provides a community focus for swimming, health and fitness and for cultural activities and events, the entrance to which faces the same area of public realm.
- 3.4. To the southeast the River Irk runs along part of the blue line ownership boundary in a cutting and, to the east, is Townley Street, on the opposite side of which is Lodge Mill, which was also subject to a major fire in April 2026 and has subsequently been part demolished to ground floor level.
- 3.5. Immediately to the north is Old Hall Street, to the north of which are the rear service areas for a terrace of small retail and other commercial properties fronting Market Place, which runs in parallel to the north.
- 3.6. Land stretching to the north of Market Place and wrapping around to the east of Townley Street is designated as the Middleton Town Centre Conservation Area, which is focussed on the area to the north of the application site which includes St Leonards Church (Grade I Listed), Jubilee Park and the historical buildings along Long Street.
- 3.7. It was extended in 2009 to include the land immediately adjacent to the north and east of the application site, capturing the traditional industrial streetscapes of Old Hall Street and Townley Street. The site is in proximity to other designated and locally listed assets within 100m, including the Royal Bank of Scotland and Providence United Reformed Church as set out in the Heritage Statement.
- 3.8. The application site is also at the eastern edge of the Middleton Town Centre and designated in the Local Plan with its immediate surrounds as an opportunity site for regeneration of mixed-uses including employment, residential and retail.

- 3.9. Vehicular access is currently provided from Townley Street, adjacent to the River Irk at the southeast corner of the ownership and along the northern side from Old Hall Street (into a former service yard) and from Harbord Street at the northwest corner of the former building, which is opposite a pay & display car park.
- 3.10. The site is highly sustainable location that is readily accessible by public transport with over 10 bus stops within 200m providing regular services in all directions (services include bus routes 17, 17A, 18, 59, 112, 113, 129, 163, 396, 415, 434 and 809). These routes provide regular services to other centres including Oldham, Bury, Rochdale and Manchester City centre. Middleton bus station is also located within a short walking distance (approximately 500m) to the west.
- 3.11. The entire site falls within a designated Coal Mining Reporting Area.

Planning History

- 3.12. There is little relevant planning history. The site previously accommodated Albany Mill which was a large four storey cotton Mill that occupied the entire blue line area from its construction in 1884 until it was demolished in 1976.
- 3.13. In 1977 planning permission was secured for a replacement two storey industrial / warehouse building that manufactured bedding (Comfy Quilts) until that business closed in 2006.
- 3.14. The building was purchased by the applicant in 2013 who invested significantly to convert the building into a self-storage business. Permission was granted in 2016 for the building to be re-clad in modern panels along with new signage reflecting the business that had been rebranded as Storage World.
- 3.15. Because of the accessible town centre location, flexible storage space proved highly popular with startup and SME businesses as well as more traditional self-storage customers, and a local business community soon developed with a tight customer base, as demonstrated by the customer home addresses at the time of the 2025 fire (**Appendix 3**).
- 3.16. The accompanying Economic Benefit Assessment provides further detail about the contribution made by Storage World in the local economy and the objective is clearly to reinvest in a replacement modern building to attract back the displaced businesses back into the heart of the town as a critical component of the wider town centre regeneration and vision of the Council and new Mayoral Development Corporation.

4. Proposed Development

- 4.1. The proposed development comprises a purpose-built, high-quality self-storage facility with ground-floor active commercial uses including co-working space. Positioned prominently at the corner of Harbord Street and Old Hall Street, the scheme establishes a strong visual anchor while preserving key views toward Market Place and maintaining views to the Lodge Mill chimney.
- 4.2. The footprint and layout have been carefully arranged to optimise site efficiency, enhance pedestrian and vehicular circulation, and safeguard future redevelopment opportunities on the balance of the site as set out in the DAS.

Scale, Massing & Spatial Layout

- 4.3. Designed as a four-storey structure, the building features a roof set neatly behind a parapet wall to maintain clean, modern geometric lines. Its overall height aligns with the surrounding contextual scale, sitting lower than the adjacent Middleton Arena and matching the scale of the former Lodge Mill to the east.



CGI View of Proposed Development from Old Hall St intersection with Harbord St

- 4.4. The ground floor Storage World entrance is positioned on Old Hall Street adjacent to the site entrance and provides a dedicated reception area fronting the street.

- 4.5. The ground floor will include 860m² of commercial units (use class E) with street frontage, including the Storage World reception area. The core of the ground floor (1,421m²) along with the upper floors will provide storage units for self-store and other business customers (use class B8 with ancillary class E). Overall, the new building will deliver a gross internal floorspace of 9,293m².

Materiality & Façade Design

- 4.6. The exterior palette draws directly from the area's industrial mill heritage and local design guidance (including the LDA Design Guide), combining durable traditional materials with contemporary architectural elements:
- *Primary Wall Construction:* Red Multi Brick (Wienerberger Olde Woodford Red Multi Slip System) laid in stretcher bond with feature soldier course detailing.
 - *Feature Masonry:* Light grey glazed brickwork (Wienerberger California Light Glazed Brick) strategically applied to add subtle textural variety.
 - *Cladding Panels:* Vertically laid Kingspan Evolution Multigroove panels in Dark Copper Metallic alongside Kingspan AWP Flat Wall Panels in Beige Grey (RAL 7006).
 - *Glazing & Fenestration:* Thermally broken, polyester powder-coated (PPC) aluminium-framed windows, ground-floor active doors, and feature corner curtain wall glazing in Anthracite (RAL 7016).



Access, Servicing & External Works

- 4.7. Vehicular access is taken from a new access point along Old Hall Street, with space to accommodate a vehicle off the carriageway in front of the proposed security gate, which provides access to the yard and parking. The building is serviced from a recessed loading bay and turning zone.
- 4.8. The overall site layout accommodates a dedicated parking zone incorporating 2no. loading spaces and 22no. parking spaces. This includes 3no. DDA spaces; 2no. with EV charging and 2no. spaces outside the security gate for prospective customers and visitors.
- 4.9. There are 10no. secure cycle spaces located within the car park along with 12no. additional public cycle spaces near the Harbord Street / Old Hall Street corner.
- 4.10. Pedestrian access points are established along both Harbord Street and Old Hall Street. The surrounding hard landscaping utilises high-quality concrete paving in mixed sizes and tones, complemented by soft landscaping along key site boundaries to soften the edge, as set out in the Design & Access Statement (DAS).

5. Pre-Application Engagement

- 5.1. Soon after the fire, in Autumn 2025 the applicant team began to engage with senior officers and elected members at Rochdale MBC and the Rochdale Development Agency (RDA), initially to discuss and help manage the immediate impact of the fire for those affected, but soon after, to start to discuss the approach to replace the lost building.
- 5.2. The site had been identified for a long time as a part of a wider '*area of opportunity*' from the 2006 Unitary Development Plan and in the 2016 Core Strategy, and so the Council were clear from the outset that they would like the applicant to consider a different form of redevelopment rather than a direct replacement of what had been lost.
- 5.3. Officers recognised the importance of the micro and SME businesses that had located within building and were keen to ensure any permission secured a replacement that worked commercially for Storage World that could recreate at least the same economic benefits seen before.
- 5.4. Through a series of workshop sessions with the RDA and their design team who have in parallel been looking at wider regeneration opportunities across Middleton Town Centre to inform emerging policy, broad parameters for the proposed development were agreed, including that:
 - The new building should replace the same quantum of floorspace lost in the fire;
 - The footprint of the building should reduce, and the height should increase to accommodate up to four floors;
 - The siting of the building should be to the northwest corner to maximise commercial presence and to set the building away from the Arena and Townley Street;
 - This siting helps facilitate any potential expansion of the Arena should it be required in the future and the ability for a new pedestrian link to be created in due course, linking Assheton Way and Townley Street framing a view to the chimney of Lodge Mill;

- It also allows for additional residential-led development and regeneration on the balance of the site facing Townley Street, an important component of the emerging MDC vision;
- The building should introduce ‘active’ uses at ground floor level facing Assheton Way and, if possibly, wrapping around on Old Hall Street and facing the Arena;
- The design should be informed by consideration of past heritage significance of the site and surrounds and should avoid the use of standard cladding prevalent in typical storage buildings; and
- Being within a town centre location, the active ground floor uses would not require additional parking.

5.5. The evolution of the design has been shared and informed by multiple sessions with the RDA, RMBC including with input from heritage and urban design officers. It has also been informed by further technical reports including a Flood Risk Assessment, Transport Statement and Ecological survey.

5.6. Through this close and collaborative approach, the objectives have been incorporated into the proposed submission, and the outcome is for a building that delivers on the objectives and parameters set out. It represents a significant enhancement to the building lost in the fire and aligns with the Council and MDC’s wider objectives.

Statement of Community Consultation

5.7. The collaborative engagement with RMBC over the past 10 months has been undertaken in parallel with a far wider public engagement campaign seeking community feedback on the new Mayoral Development Corporation and in response to the draft Town Centre Masterplan.

5.8. Feedback from this wider engagement was planned for end July and, in agreement with RMBC, the applicant had held off undertaking separate public consultation on this specific site given the ongoing MDC work. However, the community feedback session was postponed because it coincided with the transition to a new Prime Minister and, in the absence of this July feedback, we decided to start to communicate the proposed plans online hosted on the P4 website, and enable the community to provide feedback, which will continue to be monitored during the application process.

5.9. The applicant distributed approximately 80 leaflets (copy at **Appendix 4**) in the streets surrounding the site including within the Middleton Arena building itself. The QR code links to the webpage with further information on the process undertaken, and a survey questionnaire to facilitate any public feedback.

5.10. At the time of submission, initial responses [circa 25 received to date] had been received from a mix of local residents and employees and were consistently circa 60-70% supportive of the proposed development, including agreeing that:

- It is important to deliver a suitable replacement building to provide flexible spaces for SME businesses to reoccupy after the fire last year
- It is a good idea to replace the building lost on a smaller footprint to facilitate additional town centre regeneration opportunities
- The proposal includes ground floor units that will activate the street frontage and be available for a mix of town centre uses
- The design and proposed materials will enhance the site
- The application is supported

5.11. Additional one-off comments received include:

- *The site should not be allowed to store e bike batteries in future*
- *The mixed uses should not include vape shops or more take aways*
- *Could the site be used for a football pitch*
- *The development should include offices*
- *Positive that the land will be repurposed*
- *The proposal looks fantastic and a great starting point to improve the centre*

5.12. We will continue to monitor community feedback received which can be considered along with the feedback from the statutory consultees during the determination of the application.

6. Relevant Planning Policy

- 6.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 6.2. At the time of the submission, the statutory Development Plan for the application site comprises:
- The Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan Document for Greater Manchester (adopted 2024);
 - The Rochdale Core Strategy (adopted 2016); and
 - The saved policies of the Rochdale Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (adopted 2006).
- 6.3. Other material considerations include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Middleton Town Centre Masterplan (2022), and the strategic objectives of the emerging Middleton Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC).

Places for Everyone (adopted 2024)

- 6.4. Following its formal adoption in March 2024 the PfE Joint Development Plan sets strategic objectives for Greater Manchester.
- 6.5. **Strategic Objective 3** (a thriving and productive economy) sets a sub-regional mandate to build a highly resilient, competitive, and diverse economy across Greater Manchester. It requires a responsive supply of high-quality employment land and modern commercial floorspace is maintained to meet shifting business needs. The policy places a priority on the intensive reuse and optimisation of urban brownfield land, supporting infrastructure that generates localised economic productivity, high-value employment, and GVA growth.
- 6.6. **Policy JP-Strat 6** (northern areas) includes Rochdale and seeks a '*significant increase*' in economic competitiveness, market resilience, and productivity of these areas, to be delivered by:
- A focus on reclamation, remediation, and re-use of previously developed brownfield land through targeted urban regeneration;

- Significantly enhancing and expanding the commercial role, mixed-use diversity, and visual appeal of established town centres and their immediate periphery; and
- Requiring high quality architecture, robust materiality, and sustainable urban design standards.

- 6.7. **Policy JP-Strat 7** (northeast growth corridor) is focussed close to the north of Middleton for significant economic growth around Atom Valley and includes the proposed Metrolink extension to Middleton town centre.
- 6.8. **Policy JP-G 9** (a net zero carbon Greater Manchester) requires that major commercial and employment-generating developments actively support the sub-region's transition to a net-zero carbon future. Proposals are expected to demonstrate high levels of climate resilience, incorporating carbon demand reduction measures through a fabric-first approach to architectural design, alongside the proactive integration of on-site low-carbon and renewable energy networks.

Rochdale Core Strategy (2016)

- 6.9. The Core Strategy sets out the spatial vision and strategic plan for the borough up to 2028. It identifies where major employment, retail, and commercial infrastructure should be focused, including directing workspace retention and intensive urban renewal toward designated economic corridors and edge-of-centre opportunity areas that support the long-term vitality of Middleton.
- 6.10. In the spatial portrait of the Borough in respect of the township of Middleton, the Plan sets out that improved access to local jobs is a priority and it identifies development opportunities in the wider centre, including for office use.
- 6.11. **Strategic Objective SO1** (delivering a more prosperous economy) seeks to deliver through a coordinated range of spatial measures. These include identifying quality employment sites and areas to increase the number of local employment opportunities, establishing thriving and vibrant town centres, and supporting the borough's unique economic assets and competitive image to actively attract private sector inward investment.
- 6.12. **Strategic Objective SO3** (improving design, image and quality of place) seeks to raise the design quality of spaces and promote sustainable development. This includes improving gateways into the borough, protecting and enhancing heritage and natural assets, and creating new identity and character where it is currently lacking.

- 6.13. **Strategic Objective SO4** (promoting a greener environment) aims to promote a sustainable, low-carbon environment through development that minimises its contribution to global climate change. It requires that new schemes ensure high energy efficiency, actively reduce localised flood risk, and fundamentally improve the visual and structural quality of urban spaces.
- 6.14. **Spatial Strategy Policy SP3/M** (the strategy for Middleton) seeks the comprehensive revitalisation of Middleton Town Centre. The policy targets regeneration projects immediately surrounding the Middleton Arena (including the application site) to explore and unlock the commercial and physical potential of other key areas around the town centre edge.
- 6.15. **Policy E1** (establishing thriving town, district, and local centres) identifies Middleton as the second largest town centre within the borough's formal hierarchy of retail and commercial destinations. The overarching thrust of this policy is to sustain, promote, and enhance the long-term economic viability and vitality of the borough's town centres, ensuring they remain the focus for intensive commercial, community, and mixed-use development.
- 6.16. **Policy E2** (increasing jobs and prosperity) seeks to ensure that land is readily available for employment uses, and that the total number and quality of local jobs is increased to support a low-carbon economy. The policy seeks to protect and retain existing employment sites outside of designated Employment Zones where they are deemed most suited for continued, high-value employment or workspace operations.
- 6.17. **Policy E3** (focusing on economic growth corridors and areas) confirms that the application site is strategically positioned within the defined 'Middleton Town Centre / Oldham Road Corridor.' Within this designated zone, Policy E3 outlines municipal support for the structural regeneration and intensification of existing employment areas to secure long-term economic growth and modernised business use.
- 6.18. **Policy P2** (protecting and enhancing character, landscape, and heritage) directs development to conserve, enhance, and positively promote heritage assets (both statutory and non-statutory) including through consideration of impacts upon their setting.
- 6.19. **Policy P3** (improving the design of new development) requires all new development to adhere to high standards of architectural design. The policy requires that schemes address core design principles, including demonstrating that they:

- Enhance the borough's identity and sense of place by respecting context;
- Ensure buildings contribute positively to the townscape and are well proportioned;
- Incorporate measures that design out crime and ensure developments and spaces are safe to use and access; and
- Design buildings and spaces to that quality and appearance can be maintained over time.

6.20. Design and Access Statements should demonstrate how the design principles have been taken into account in the design of the development proposals.

6.21. **Policy T2** (improving accessibility) highlights the Council's objective of locating development where there is good access to public transport, to minimise the need to travel by car.

6.22. **Policy G2** (energy and new development) expects all new development to follow the established sustainable energy hierarchy:

1. *Demand reduction*: Achieving a baseline reduction in energy demand through passive design and optimised building fabrics.
2. *Energy efficiency and low / zero-carbon technologies*: Designing building systems to improve energy efficiency and integrating on-site renewable energy networks.
3. *Allowable solutions*: Implementing wider energy efficiency and targeted carbon emission reduction measures.

6.23. **Policy DMI** (general development requirements) requires that all development proposals demonstrate that they are:

- Of high-quality design that enhances the visual and spatial quality of the immediate area;
- Compatible with surrounding town centre land uses and the local urban grain;
- Safe and non-intrusive, ensuring they do not adversely affect the amenity of neighbouring residents or users through visual intrusion, overbearing impact, overshadowing, or an unacceptable loss of privacy;

- Engineered to mitigate against any localised environmental pollution;
- Capable of providing safe, satisfactory, and segregated vehicular access and egress layouts; and
- Optimised to minimise all opportunities for crime against people and property.

Saved Policies of the Rochdale UDP (Adopted 2006)

6.24. Although over 20 years old, the saved policies of the UDP remain part of the statutory development plan.

6.25. Part One **Policy G/D/1** (defined urban area) seeks to direct development proposals to sites located within the urban area to maximise brownfield utilisation and preserve the open countryside.

6.26. **Policy BE/20** (new development affecting conservation areas) requires that development proposals preserve or enhance the character or appearance of a designated conservation area through careful consideration of architectural and spatial design principles within their wider context.

6.27. **Policy R/4** (areas of opportunity) outlines that development will be permitted where it is consistent with appropriate land uses and development principles for each area. Proposals are required to demonstrate:

- that any proposal will help (and not constrain or prejudice) the satisfactory overall development of the entire allocated site over the longer term; and
- how context-driven design principles have been employed to secure an appropriate quality of architecture, visual appearance, and detailing.

6.28. **Policy R/4(g)** (Assheton Way / Townley Street, Middleton area of opportunity) is a designation which includes the application site and its surroundings up to Market Place. The policy allows for development proposals that complement the physical and economic regeneration of Middleton town centre and clarifies that the following land uses are acceptable components for development proposals:

- Civic, cultural, entertainment, and leisure uses;
- Non-food retailing (including retail warehousing);
- Business use (incorporating commercial workspaces and storage); and

- Targeted retail, financial and professional services, and food/drink outlets provided these specific active elements are positioned within the primary frontages facing Old Hall Street and Market Place.

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

- 6.29. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It is a material consideration of significant weight.
- 6.30. Paragraph 11 requires local planning authorities to apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking, this explicitly means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay. Paragraph 8 confirms that achieving sustainable development requires the planning system to pursue three overarching, interdependent objectives (economic, social, and environmental) in mutually supportive ways to secure net gains across all fields.
- 6.31. Section 6 underlines the Government's commitment to building a strong economy. Paragraph 85 sets out that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand, and adapt. It advises that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking account of both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.
- 6.32. Paragraph 87 advises that decisions recognise and address the specific requirements of different sectors, including for storage operations in suitably accessible locations. The framework establishes support for business hubs and encourages local areas to build on their economic strengths.
- 6.33. Section 7 seeks to ensure the vitality of town centres through, inter alia, making sure of the range of uses permitted in primary and edge of centre locations.
- 6.34. Section 9 promotes sustainable transport including through actively managing patterns of growth in accessible locations, where there is a genuine choice of transport mode.
- 6.35. Paragraphs 114 and 115 require that applications ensure appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be taken up, given the type of development and its location.
- 6.36. Section 11 is focused on ensuring the effective use of land, giving *substantial* weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land for development to help

meet identified needs. There is clearly strong national support and encouragement for the development of under-utilised land to meet development needs.

- 6.37. Section 12 is about achieving well designed places and seeks to encourage development that (paragraph 135) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area; are visually attractive; sympathetic to the local character and history; establish a strong sense of place; and optimise the potential of the site.
- 6.38. Paragraph 139 advises that significant weight should be given to innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.
- 6.39. Paragraph 141 requires that commercial advertisements and corporate signage should be carefully designed and sited to avoid visual clutter or detriment to townscape character.
- 6.40. Section 14 (meeting the challenge of climate change) supports the transition to a net-zero future (paragraph 161), encouraging the re-use of existing resources, supporting renewable and low-carbon energy infrastructure, and taking account of climate impacts (including overheating, water scarcity, storm, and flood risk).
- 6.41. Paragraph 163 advises that climate change should be considered in preparing planning applications, taking account of the range of potential climate impacts, including flood risk and drainage.
- 6.42. Section 16 is about conserving and enhancing the historic environment. Paragraph 200 requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting, at a level of detail proportionate to their importance.
- 6.43. Paragraph 212 states that:
- 6.44. *‘When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.’*
- 6.45. Paragraph 215 sets out that *‘where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm*

should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'

Other material considerations

Emerging Rochdale Local Plan (Draft Reg 18)

- 6.46. The Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan to replace the 2016 Core Strategy and the remaining saved policies of the 2006 UDP. Public consultation on the Preferred Options (Regulation 18) took place in 2025.
- 6.47. The emerging policy is at an early stage and has not been subject to examination, so only carries limited weight. However, the draft policies reinforce the borough's commitment to a '*brownfield-first*' spatial strategy, the optimisation of town-centre peripheral plots for employment-generating uses, and expectations for climate change resilience and architecture-led urban renewal.

Oldham and Rochdale Urban Design Guide SPD

- 6.48. The SPD was jointly adopted by Rochdale and Oldham Metropolitan Borough Councils to establish a unified framework for raising the quality of individual developments, while improving the economic image of both boroughs. New development proposals are expected to demonstrate compliance with the following urban design principles:
1. **Character:** enhancing localised identity and a distinct sense of place
 2. **Safety and inclusion:** ensuring public realm and buildings are safe, secure, and welcoming for all users
 3. **Diversity:** providing economic and spatial variety and choice
 4. **Ease of movement:** ensuring places are highly accessible and easy to move through via sustainable transit modes
 5. **Legibility:** ensuring the purpose and navigation of layouts can be easily understood
 6. **Adaptability:** anticipating and planning for future long-term operational or structural changes
 7. **Sustainability:** minimising the overall ecological and carbon impact on the built and natural environment

8. **Designing for future maintenance:** specifying quality materials and architectural detailing so that building quality can be cost-effectively maintained over time
9. **Good streets and spaces:** formulating cohesive building lines that create attractive, functional outdoor spaces
10. **Well-designed buildings:** constructing durable, sustainable buildings appropriate to their specific commercial function and wider townscape context.

Design and planning process - a guide to good practice SPD

- 6.49. Sitting below and complementing the Urban Design Guide, this SPD provides detailed, procedural guidance on design methodologies including advocating early localised context analysis and engagement.

Middleton town conservation area appraisal (2008)

- 6.50. The conservation area was originally designated in 1978, focussed on the Grade I St Leonard's Church and historic buildings along Long Street, well to the north of the application site.
- 6.51. In 2009, the conservation area was extended south to Market Place and also wrapping around to the east of Townley Street, which contained a collection of former mill buildings (now largely derelict or destroyed by fire).
- 6.52. The application site is not in the conservation area, but it does lie within its setting and for this reason, the application includes a heritage impact assessment that has helped inform the design evolution to ensure that the proposal preserves or enhances the setting of the designated heritage asset.

7. Key Planning Considerations

- 7.1. Having set out the background context and review of relevant policies, this section focusses on the key planning considerations relating to the determination of the application.

Principle of Development

- 7.2. Following the catastrophic fire in June 2025, the application seeks permission to replace the building (and uses) lost with a redevelopment of 9,293 m² (GIA) of high-quality mixed-use floorspace which is broadly the same floorspace and volume lost.
- 7.3. The proposal seeks to regenerate a previously developed site at a prominent edge of town centre location within the defined urban area to meet an identified economic need. This effective re-use of suitable brownfield land closely aligns with UDP saved policy G/D/1 and paragraphs 124 and 125 of the NPPF which indicate that substantial weight should be afforded in favour of such development. By accommodating the required floorspace within a consolidated 0.40ha footprint, the scheme doubles the efficiency of the site compared to the former building.
- 7.4. It also accords with PfE policy JP-Strat 6 (northern areas) which calls for a significant increase in the economic competitiveness and market resilience of these areas including through urban reclamation and brownfield restoration.
- 7.5. The application proposes a mix of uses that accord with the statutory development plan, which includes this site within an area of opportunity for business use incorporating commercial workspaces and storage (policy R/4 (g)). The scheme incorporates 860m² of Class E active commercial ground-floor frontage along Harbord Street and Old Hall Street, in compliance with Policy R/4 (g)'s requirement for active town centre frontages.
- 7.6. Furthermore, by consolidating the replacement commercial building onto the application site, the scheme safeguards the remaining 0.41ha of the holding, with the development acting as a catalyst for future regeneration.
- 7.7. National planning guidance and policies within the statutory Local Plan and emerging Plan and Town Centre Masterplan all promote redevelopment of previously developed land and so the principle of development is clearly

acceptable, and the application is in accordance with the development plan and so should be approved in principle.

Build Back Better

- 7.8. Core Strategy policy E1 and SP3/M (the strategy for Middleton) seek to regenerate previously developed land to enhance the townscape and wider environment. Through extensive collaborative engagement with the Council, Development Agency and their design team, the proposed development has significantly evolved to align closely with the Council and MDC vision for the wider regeneration aspirations in Middleton town centre and to *build back better*.
- 7.9. The proposed development seeks to recreate the economic capital lost in the fire, comprising a flexible storage facility that was an incubator for micro and small local businesses as well as providing a more traditional self-storage function.
- 7.10. However, through the agreed amendments to the design, the proposal can also facilitate much wider and substantive benefits, acting as a catalyst for further regeneration on the balance of the former Storage World site. By siting the replacement building at the corner of Harbord Street and Old Hall Street, space is reserved on the remaining 0.41ha holding for any potential future expansion of the Arena.
- 7.11. Furthermore, a second development plot, suitable for mid-scale residential use on the balance of the site adjacent to Townley Street will be brought forward in due course, along with potential wider regeneration plans in the vicinity of Old Hall Street and Market Place, aligned with the MDC objectives.
- 7.12. The proposed replacement Storage World building will also facilitate a new pedestrian and cycle link to be delivered as a part of the wider regeneration plans, linking Assheton Way with Townley Street and potentially improving pedestrian accessibility to the Arena car park.
- 7.13. This link and wider area of public realm will frame a key view to the Lodge Mill chimney and will benefit from natural surveillance from the commercial units with active frontages on the south elevation of the replacement Storage World building and from the proposed future residential development and possible Arena extension.

Design Quality

- 7.14. Through engagement with the RDA design team and drawing on the research and findings of the Heritage Assessment that is submitted with the application,

the design of the replacement building makes a significant positive impact on the street scene in this important location.

- 7.15. The siting and massing have been carefully considered to repair the current gap facing Assheton Way and introduce commercial units at ground floor to activate the frontage onto the existing public realm and providing complementary town centre uses adjacent to the Arena entrance.
- 7.16. The Heritage Assessment concludes that the development will result in neutral, slight and moderate positive impacts on the significance of the designated heritage assets, which comprise the setting of the Middleton Conservation Area and other designated buildings in the vicinity, including Warwick Mill.
- 7.17. Furthermore, the Heritage Assessment has informed the proposed materials, which incorporate historic references to the former mill building within its design, including the brick pilasters and recessed panelling, which help visually link and integrate the proposed development within the wider historic townscape.
- 7.18. The Design & Heritage Statement provides further details and explanation of the design and relating to the proposed boundary treatment, energy performance and landscaping.

Economic Impact

- 7.19. An Economic Benefits Assessment is submitted with the application, which sets out that the proposed replacement Storage World building is estimated to generate over 200 jobs and support over 70 SME businesses once back operational.
- 7.20. It represents private capital investment in the order of £12m in Middleton town centre that could generate circa £32.6m in societal benefits, providing a major boost to the town centre.
- 7.21. Furthermore, as the first phase of regeneration, the development will act as a catalyst and enabler for wider benefits associated with future residential development on the balance of the site that could support circa 100 residents, significantly increasing expenditure in the local area and delivering associated health and wellbeing benefits.
- 7.22. At the heart of this project, however, is the objective of replacing a building that had become a vibrant business hub. As set out in the Economic Assessment, there are local businesses that have been displaced and would like to re-establish themselves in the new development.

- 7.23. This has been a driving factor in pressing ahead with a detailed application and a planning performance agreement and to work closely with the Council to maximise the potential of securing permission within the statutory time periods and pressing ahead for the development to commence as soon as possible.
- 7.24. NPPF (paragraph 85) advises that significant weight should be given to the need to support economic growth and productivity, and the Economic Benefit Assessment estimates that the proposed development will yield an impressive benefit-cost ratio of 3.53.
- 7.25. As well as providing flexible space for displaced and future businesses and traditional storage customers, the new development will also integrate a mix of Class E uses at ground level, suitable for a town centre and to help activate the street frontages.
- 7.26. It is anticipated that these units would be suitable and available for a mix of retail, leisure and / or office, service, co working spaces, bringing additional activity and jobs to the town centre.
- 7.27. The development overall will help enhance commercial confidence, drive footfall and act as an important catalyst for the wider regeneration plans in the vicinity.

Other Material Considerations

Highways

- 7.28. As set out within the submitted Transport Assessment, the proposal has been designed to satisfy Core Strategy Policy T2 (improving accessibility) and Policy DM1. The site is located within the urban core and has a high national connectivity score of 76.22. It benefits from multiple bus stops all within 150m and it is within immediate walking distance (500m) of the central Middleton Bus Station which is a major public transport node.
- 7.29. Vehicular access for customers is from a new entrance off Old Hall Street, with room to pull off the road before a security gate. Detailed vehicular tracking ensures that the service yard can readily accommodate loading and turning manoeuvres within the site.
- 7.30. As a replacement building of the same floorspace, the traffic generation is aligned with the previous (pre-fire) position. Parking is provided within the rear yard for Storage World customers, including 22 car parking spaces, 3no. DDA spaces and 2no. EV charging bays and secure cycle storage.

- 7.31. As confirmed through the pre-application meetings, no additional parking is required for the proposed E class uses in this location within the town centre, given the readily available parking in the immediate vicinity.

Flood Risk, Drainage and Climate Resilience

- 7.32. The Flood Risk Assessment and sustainable drainage strategy prepared by Tier Consulting confirms that the site lies within Flood Zone 2, which has a medium risk of flooding. Development in Zone 2 is generally permissible for most land uses identified in the 'less vulnerable' list found at Annex 3 of the NPPF, which include the uses proposed.
- 7.33. The results of the predictive flood modelling establish that the risk of fluvial flooding is low, with an annual baseline probability of between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000 years. The water depths during the 1 in a 1,000 year event are considerably less than 0.2m verifying that fluvial flood risk to the building is of low significance.
- 7.34. The FRA sets a minimum floor level to mitigate flood risk in accordance with PfE Policy JP-G 9 and the lower base plinth will incorporate low-permeability materials and water-resistant sealants around all active commercial shopfront glazing and door thresholds.
- 7.35. Furthermore, all electrical wiring, distribution mechanisms, and sockets will be positioned a minimum of 450mm above the finished floor level well above any potential localised flooding.
- 7.36. Aligned with national drainage requirements and saved Policy EM/8, the proposed site grading ensures that extreme storm exceedance flows follow natural topography, routing controlled pathways safely away from the primary building envelope.
- 7.37. Below-ground attenuation tanks are proposed to ensure that post-development peak discharges are restricted to greenfield runoff rates, ensuring no detrimental downstream flood or capacity impacts on the nearby River Irk catchment.
- 7.38. The site-specific recommendations of the FRA will be worked into the detailed architectural design, so the scheme robustly complies with Core Strategy Policy SO3, saved UDP Policies EM/7 and EM/8, and PfE Policy JP-G 9.

Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain

- 7.39. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment were carried out in June 2026 by Arbtech Consulting Ltd to evaluate baseline habitats, protected species potential, and net gain

requirements. The initial assessment covered the entire ownership (0.81Ha blue line) rather than the application site.

- 7.40. Even the wider site consists entirely of developed land and sealed surface (u1b), comprising hardstanding from former driveways, parking spaces, and concrete building foundations from a previous structure. This yields 0.00 baseline area habitat units, although the 43m section of the River Irk adjacent to the southern boundary generates 0.29 baseline watercourse units.
- 7.41. However, the red line application site (0.40ha) is circa 20m+ from the water course and incorporates zero baseline units and the application is therefore BNG exempt.
- 7.42. In terms of impact on habitat, four statutory designated sites lie within 2km, including Alkrington Woods LNR (470 m SW), Hopwood Woodlands LNR (1,320 m N), and Rochdale Canal SSSI / SAC (1,525 m NE).
- 7.43. The proposed development doesn't trigger high-risk activity criteria within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone, and no direct or indirect adverse impacts on designated sites are anticipated.
- 7.44. The site contains no trees or buildings capable of supporting bat roosts or nesting birds. However, the adjacent River Irk corridor provides functional foraging and commuting habitat for bats and otters.
- 7.45. The PEA makes recommendations to mitigate any impact on ecology including through a construction environmental management plan and approach to lighting, which can, if necessary, be controlled by planning conditions.

Ground Conditions

- 7.46. A phase 1 desk study and preliminary contaminated land risk assessment was prepared by GeoAssist in November 2021 and is submitted with the application. The assessment was commissioned to evaluate potential geo-environmental and geotechnical risks associated with historical land uses, to satisfy the requirements of the NPPF and land contamination risk management guidance to determine the site's suitability for continued commercial land use.
- 7.47. The desk study incorporated historical ordnance survey mapping, environmental database searches, and a site walkover to construct a preliminary conceptual site model. The findings were as follows:

- *On-Site Historical Summary:* Historical mapping reveals that the site was originally part of Middleton Hall and Gardens (1851) before being developed as a Cotton Mill with an associated chimney (1891). It later housed an electricity sub-station (1954–1955) and general works (1978–1984) prior to its operation as a self-storage facility.
- *Contamination Risk Profile:* The baseline risk for ground contamination across all historical on-site uses and surrounding off-site features (including a historic gasometer, gas works, and depots situated 30–40m south) is classified as ‘low risk’ for a commercial end-use. No obvious evidence of contamination was identified during the baseline site walkover.
- *Ground Gas Regime:* Although there are multiple infilled reservoirs and generic infilled land within a 250m radius of the site boundary, the potential risk for ground gas generation and subsequent lateral migration is classified as ‘Low to Moderate’ risk.
- *Coal Mining Legacy:* Official records from the Coal Authority confirm that the site is situated within a Coal Authority development high risk area. The property is underlain by the Pennine Middle Coal Measures (Sandstone, Siltstone, and Mudstone) with coal seams believed to be at or close to the surface. Consequently, the geotechnical hazard and structural risk to development from unrecorded shallow coal workings are classified as a high risk.

7.48. To mitigate the identified geotechnical risks and validate the preliminary low-risk contamination profile, the assessment recommends measures that can be controlled by planning condition, including:

- *Phase II intrusive ground investigation:* to confirm the exact composition of underlying materials and collect representative soil samples for quantitative chemical analysis
- *Ground gas monitoring program:* to definitively establish the ground gas protection regime required for the building
- *Geotechnical foundational assessment:* to evaluate the structural integrity of the Made Ground and inform safe foundation design
- *Coal mining risk assessment:* to evaluate ground stability risks arising from potential historic shallow coal workings.

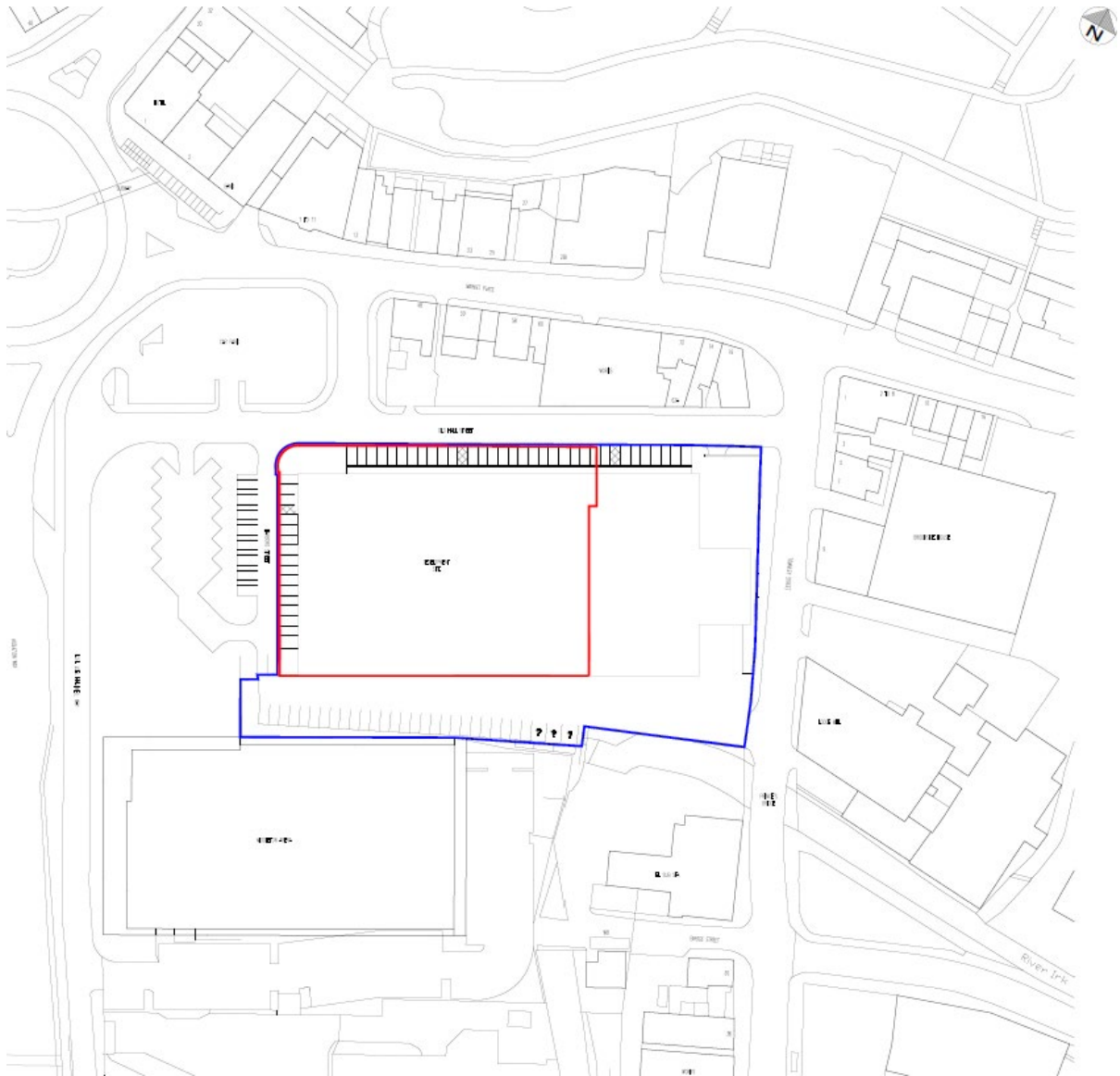
7.49. In summary, all technical matters relating to highways, flood risk, ecology, and ground conditions have been comprehensively assessed. The site is demonstrably suitable for the proposed development, and any minor residual technical requirements can be appropriately secured via standard planning conditions. Accordingly, the scheme represents sustainable development in full accordance with the relevant policy framework, as concluded in the following section.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. This application for development to replace the former Storage World building lost in the fire last year proposes a form of development and uses that are clearly in accordance with the statutory development plan and therefore be approved.
- 8.2. The mix of uses and economic benefits, design and wider potential benefits will all have a positive impact on the future regeneration of Middleton town centre.
- 8.3. The design has evolved through extensive collaboration with the Council, the Development Agency and their wider design team to ensure that it complements and hopefully acts as a catalyst for further regeneration in the surrounding area.
- 8.4. The scale, mass and materials draw reference from the historic research and the site's past, when Albany Mill was present on the site until 1975. In terms of impact on heritage significance of the setting of the adjacent conservation area and other designated heritage assets within the wider area, the impacts are all neutral or positive. As such, the proposed development helps to preserve or enhance the significance of the designated heritage assets.
- 8.5. The £12m investment in the site and construction will deliver significant economic benefits in terms of job creation and welcome boost to the local economy through spending and business rates. It will also provide modern suitable and flexible space for those businesses that were displaced in 2025.
- 8.6. The application is supported by a range of other technical reports which identify no material considerations which weigh against the presumption in favour of sustainable development in this case, or which can't be mitigated, if necessary, through appropriate planning conditions.
- 8.7. This is clearly a sustainable development proposal, in terms of its accessible location, redevelopment of previously developed land and energy efficient design. It will reinstate an important business community and introduce wider town centre uses that will bring a significantly boost to this part of the town centre and we would be grateful if planning permission could be approved without delay.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Site Location Plan



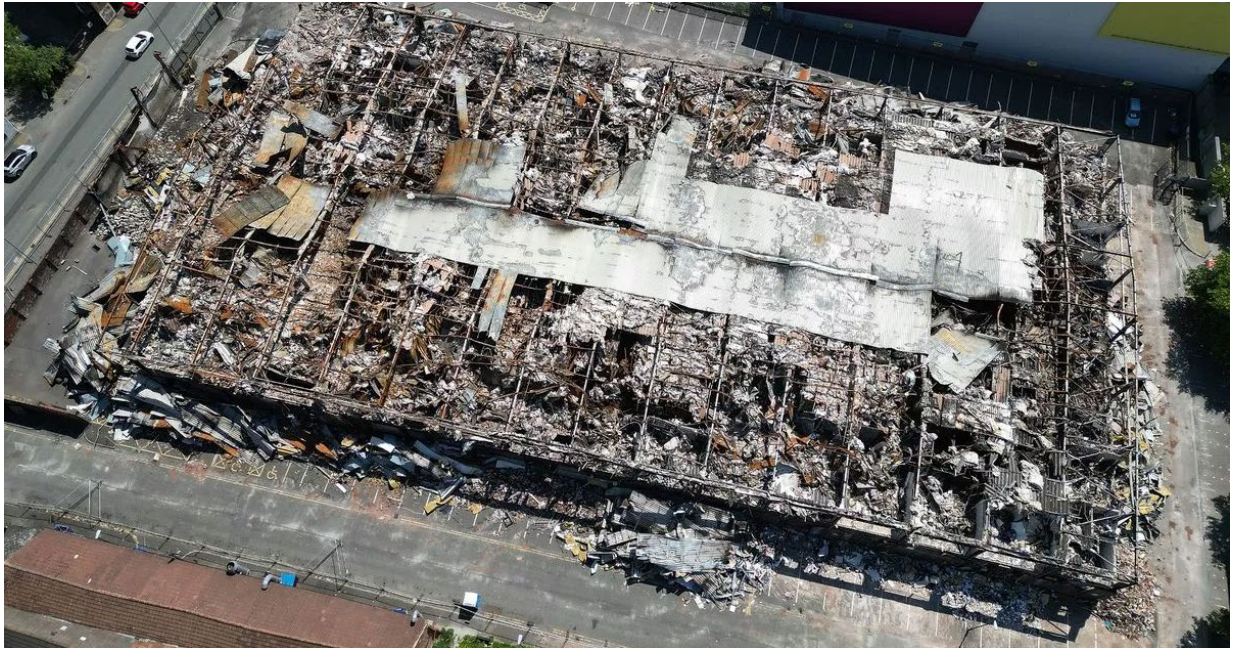
Appendix 2: Site Photographs



Photograph of Storage World facility in Middleton prior to fire.



Photograph of Storage World facility in Middleton post-fire (taken from Sean Hansford, Manchester Evening News, 2025)



Aerial View of Storage World facility in Middleton post-fire (taken from Sean Hansford, Manchester Evening News, 2025)



Cleared Storage World site in July 2026 from southeast corner on Townley Street

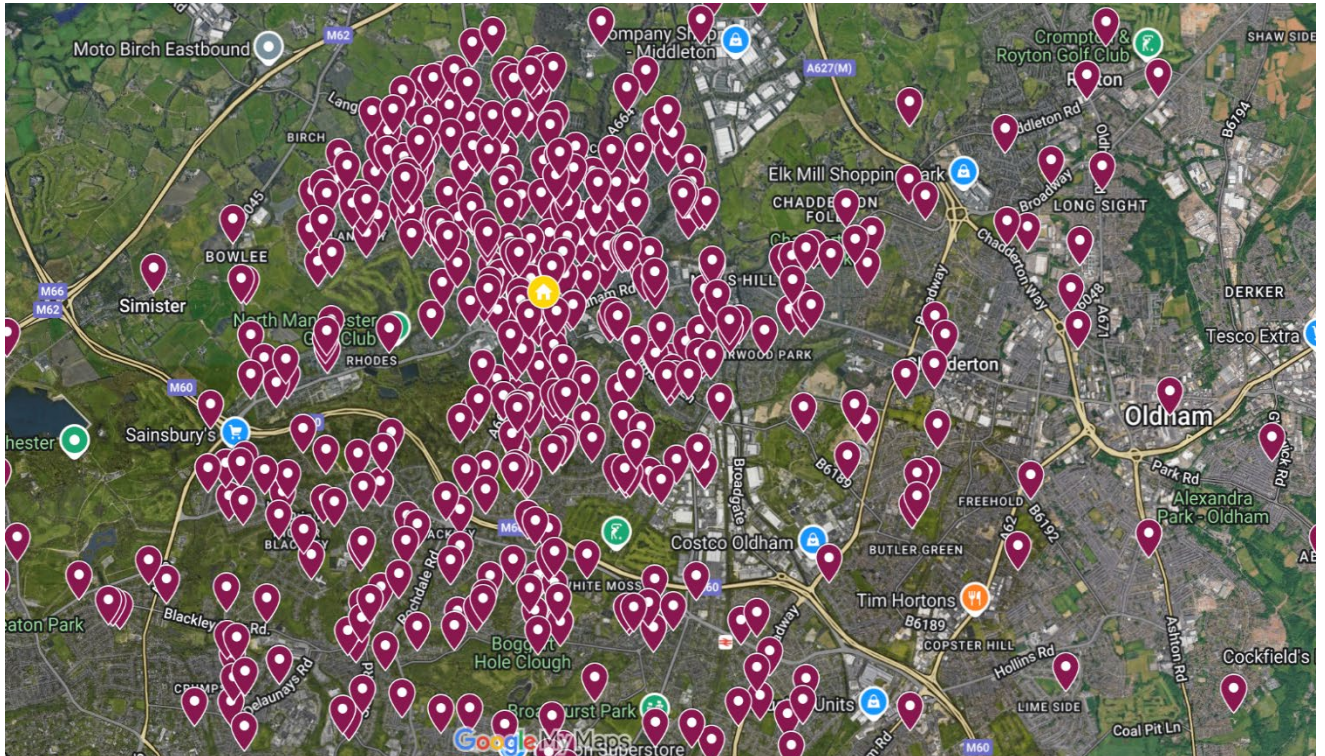


Lodge Mill opposite site on Townley Street following April 2026 fire



View north along Townley Street with application site to left and conservation area to the north and ahead

Appendix 3: self-storage customer addresses at time of 2025 fire



Appendix 4: Consultation Leaflet

Land at Old Hall Street, Middleton

Community and stakeholder engagement



Please be advised that a detailed planning application will be submitted in early August for the redevelopment of the former Storage World site at Old Hall Road in Middleton town centre.

More information and a short survey can be found through this QR code, where you can provide feedback, or alternatively please e mail contact@p4planning.co.uk



