URBAN DATA WHITWORTH MODULAR DATA CENTRE

PLANNING STATEMENT

APRIL 2026

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of a full planning application for the installation of a small-scale, Modular Data Centre (MDC) at a vacant industrial land south of the Dresser Centre, Whitworth Street, N11 2NE. The proposal, brought forward by Urban Data Limited, is designed to contribute to local digital infrastructure capacity, business resilience, and wider sustainability goals.

Urban Data Limited is part of the AMP Clean Energy Group which develops, owns and operates a range of energy projects and owned by the infrastructure fund Asterion Industrial and the UK's National Wealth Fund.

This statement sets out:

- A description of the proposed development.
- Identifies consideration for site selection.
- Sets out environmental impacts associated with the proposed development.
- Demonstrates how the proposed development is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), aligned with the Rochdale Borough Council planning policies.
- The proposal is technically appropriate to the site and surrounding land use.

1.2 Who is Urban Data Limited?

Urban Data Limited are part of the AMP Clean Energy (AMP) group. AMP owns and operates the Flexibility Energy Facility (FEF) located immediately adjacent to the west of proposed development.

AMP owns and operates renewable, low carbon energy facilities, and FEF across the UK. We have over 225 assets operational and provide service and maintenance to over 1,000 customer sites and have 175+ staff nationwide.

Urban Data Limited is an AMP Clean Energy group company that is developing several modular Data Centre proposals across the UK, specifically in close proximity to AMP Clean Energy's existing FEFs.

AMP is owned by the infrastructure fund Asterion Industrial and the UK's National Wealth Fund, The UK Government's strategic investment platform.

1.3 What is a Data Centre?

A Data Centre (DC) is a secure facility designed to house computer systems and associated components such as servers, networking equipment, and data storage infrastructure. It enables the storage, processing, and distribution of digital information, forming the physical backbone of the internet, cloud services, and modern telecommunications.

DC's are essential for supporting a wide range of digital functions including:

- Cloud computing and software hosting.
- Telecommunications and mobile network services (e.g. 5G).
- Online retail and financial services.
- Public sector digital services, such as health, education, and emergency systems.
- Smart city infrastructure, including sensors, energy grids, and traffic systems.

Modern data centres – especially modular facilities like the one proposed – are designed for efficiency, scalability, and low environmental impact, with minimal operational impacts.

1.4 What is a Modular Data Centre?

A Modular Data Centre (MDC) is a type of DC that is constructed using prefabricated, self-contained units or "modules" that are manufactured off-site and then transported to the development location for rapid assembly. Each module typically houses key infrastructure such as servers, cooling equipment, and power systems.

Key characteristics of modular data centres include:

- Scalability: Additional modules can be added as demand for data capacity grows, without requiring major structural changes or new buildings.
- Speed of Deployment: Because modules are built off-site, installation is significantly faster than traditional construction, reducing disruption and lead times.
- Flexibility: The layout can be adapted to fit irregular or constrained sites, making them ideal for urban or previously developed locations.
- Sustainability: Modular designs reduce material waste, energy use, and on-site construction impacts and incorporate low-carbon energy and smart cooling technologies.
- Minimal Impact: Modular data centres require limited site preparation, generate low levels of noise and emissions, and operate largely unattended, with only occasional maintenance visits.

A modular data centre offers a compact, efficient and future-ready solution for delivering critical digital infrastructure in a low-impact form that aligns with modern planning and environmental goals.

1.5 Growing Demand for DC capacity

The UK Government's 2024 estimate shows Great Britain's colocation data centre capacity is about 1.6 GW, with just 0.052 GW in the Northwest. But by 2028 capacity is set to nearly double to enable digital expansion, cloud services and the surges in AI demand.

In September 2024 DCs were officially designated as Critical National Infrastructure and in January 2025 Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced the AI Opportunities Action Plan committing to 20 times increase in sovereign compute capacity by 2030.

2.0 Site Information and Background

2.1 Location and Planning History

The proposed development is located land to the rear of the Dresser Centre which is used as ad hoc open storage. The site location is shown on the accompanying location plan drawing.

The site is 576sqm of vacant industrial land adjacent to the existing Flexible Energy facility to the north (application 122250/FO/2018). The site is currently used for informal storage of building materials and has an existing elevated canopy. The site was originally developed at some time between 2005-2013 according to ariel photography.

2.2 Development Drawings

The planning application is accompanied by the following drawings:

- Location Plan
- Proposed Site Plan
- Existing Site Plan
- Existing North Elevation
- Existing East Elevation
- Proposed North Elevation
- Proposed East Elevation

2.3 Site Selection

Data centres require suitable space, connectivity to the fibre network and power supply. The proposed site has all three of these.

Specifically, though data centres require a very secure power supply. The proposed site is located adjacent to an existing Flexibility Energy Facility which is able to provide that resilience.

The proposed DC will have an electric demand of 2MW, 50% of the capacity of the adjacent FEF.

This means that the DC can draw power from the electricity network, but should that connection fail, it can draw power from one of the FEF engines. Should that engine fail, the DC would be able to draw power from the second FEF engine.

By locating the DC at this location, it therefore has a very high level of power security which will place it as one of the highest 'tiers' of DC.

2.4 Site Selection

The application site is located within a well-established employment and industrial zone, surrounded by logistics, warehousing, and energy generation activities. Access is via an existing gated access on Cheam Close, with clear public and right-of-access routes marked.

No new access roads are proposed; vehicle access for installation and occasional maintenance is fully supported by the existing layout.

2.5 Development Description

The proposed development will consist of:

- Two 11kVa Transformers on concrete basis.
- Four prefabricated modular DC units, measuring 14m long x 3m wide x 3.7m high each.
- Module 1 and Module 2 serve as power modules.
- Module 3 and Module 4 serve as data processing/storage modules.
- Four external chiller units located on top of the DC modules.
- Screening around the chillers taking the modules to a total height of 6.6m.
- 2.4m high palisade boundary fencing.

Modules will be installed on existing concrete base with a maximum structure height of 6.6m AGL

2.6 Construction

The construction of the site would take approximately 8 weeks with most of the equipment being fabricated off site and delivered to site. The modules will be lifted into position from the adjacent vacant industrial land, accessed by the existing gates on Cheam Close.

2.7 Operation

The proposed site will be unmanned but will have frequent inspections for both operational and security reasons. The proposal allows for a single vehicle to park to the front of modules.

Additional parking would also be available within the FEF compound to the west if required.

2.8 Energy Consumption

DC's require large amounts of energy to operate and lowering the carbon footprint of society's data use is vital. The proposed DC location adjacent the FEF is designed specially to do just that.

During periods of high wind and solar penetration the DC will draw power from the electricity network. However, during periods of high demand or low renewable generation it will pull power from the adjacent FEF. Whilst the FEF uses natural gas to generate electricity, its proximity means it will not have loses that occur through the distribution of energy through the network.

As such the proposed DC will be able to one of the lowest carbon footprints of its type, whilst also have some of the lowest power costs – making the site attractive to premium data tenants.

3.0 Planning Policy Review and Context

The below highlights the relevant national and local planning policy relevant to the application.

3.1 Compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (Updated December 2024)

The proposed development of a modular data centre at Whitworth Urban Data is consistent with the most recent **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024)**. The following paragraphs demonstrate how the proposal aligns with key policy objectives:

Chapter 6 – Building a Strong, Competitive Economy

Paragraph 84 of the NPPF (2024) states that:

"Planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors, including digital infrastructure..."

This directly supports the case for locating a data centre in a site like Whitworth, where there is existing industrial and utility infrastructure, road access, and an established employment zone. The development will enable economic growth, digital investment, and local technological resilience.

Chapter 10 – Supporting High-Quality Communications

Paragraph 118 highlights that:

"Advanced, high-quality, and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being." It further directs local planning authorities to *"support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology..."*

The proposed data centre is a critical piece of this infrastructure, enabling the delivery of cloud computing, telecommunications, and digital services to both public and private sectors. Its modular design allows flexibility and scalability in response to growing demand.

Chapter 11 – Making Effective Use of Land

Paragraph 127 encourages planning decisions to:

"promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment."

The proposal achieves this by redeveloping a previously used brownfield site within a defined employment area. It makes productive use of vacant industrial land without conflicting with surrounding uses or requiring greenfield development.

Chapter 14 – Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change, Flooding and Coastal Change

Paragraph 163 emphasises that :

"New development should be planned to avoid increased vulnerability to the range of impacts arising from climate change."

The proposed modular data centre aligns strongly with this principle: the modular form significantly reduces embodied carbon, supports energy efficiency, and offers future adaptability (e.g., integration with adjacent to FEF centre). The site is not within a flood risk zone, and no significant alterations to drainage or land levels are required.

Chapter 15 – Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

Paragraph 184 states that:

"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by… remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land."

The development site has previously been cleared and contains minimal ecological value. The proposal involves no deep excavation or significant land disturbance. The development's compact footprint and the use of pre-assembled components ensure that impacts on the surrounding environment are kept to a minimum.

3.2 Compliance with Manchester Local Planning Policies

Set out below are Manchester City Council planning policies that support the application:

Spatial Strategy and Growth (Policy SP1)

Policy SP1 (Spatial Principles) establishes Manchester as a major regional economic centre, supporting significant levels of employment growth and infrastructure delivery.

The policy promotes:

- Concentration of development in accessible urban locations
- Delivery of sustainable economic growth
- Efficient use of previously developed land

The proposed modular data centre aligns with this spatial strategy by contributing to employment-generating infrastructure within the urban area, supporting Manchester's role as a key economic hub.

Economic Growth and Employment (Policy EC1)

Policy EC1 (Employment and Economic Growth in Manchester) provides strong support for employment-generating development.

Key principles include:

- Supporting sectors that contribute to Manchester's knowledge-based and digital economy
- Encouraging development that delivers high value employment and economic output
- Promoting investment that strengthens Manchester's regional and national economic role

Data centres directly align with EC1 as critical digital infrastructure, supporting innovation, data-driven industries and wider economic activity.

Protection and Enhancement of Employment Land (Policy EC2)

Policy EC2 (Existing Employment Space) seeks to:

- Protect land and buildings used for employment purposes
- Support redevelopment and intensification for modern economic uses

A modular data centre represents a modern employment use, consistent with the policy objective of maintaining and upgrading employment land for emerging sectors.

Policy CC1 (Primary Economic Development Focus) identifies the City Centre and fringe as the primary focus for economic development.

Policy EC3 (The Regional Centre) supports:

- High density, high-value employment uses
- Infrastructure that enhances Manchester's role as a regional and national economic centre

As the site lies within the Regional Centre, significant weight should be given to development that contributes to digital and commercial infrastructure capacity.

4.0 Environmental Review

The DC is entirely in keeping with the commercial and industrial nature of the surrounding area. As such the potential impacts are very limited and are offset by the significant benefits the project offers.

Aspect	Comment
Landscape	The DC is entirely in keeping with the commercial and industrial nature of the area.
Ecology	The applicant commissioned environmental consultant SLR to assess the site. The site has been devoid of vegetation since before 2021 and therefore as the site supports no vegetation it is exempt from requiring a BNG assessment. A note to that effect is attached to the application
Traffic and Transport	The modular approach to the DC means that most of the site will be built off site and assembled on site. This will dramatically reduce construction related traffic, but the applicant welcomes a suitably worded pre-commencement condition for a Construction and Traffic Management Plan if required by the Highways Authority.
Air Quality	The DC does not produce any air emissions and therefore will not impact air quality.

5.0 Planning Balance and Conclusion

This planning application seeks to deliver a discrete, functional, and future-proof modular data centre in a highly suitable industrial location.

It is supported by:

- Strong national policy backing for communications infrastructure and digital growth;
- Alignment with Manchester's local planning policies on employment, design and environmental protection.
- A development form that is scalable, sustainable, and low impact.

We respectfully submit that the proposed scheme should be approved on the basis that it:

- Makes effective use of previously developed land
- Supports national and local digital infrastructure ambitions
- Generates minimal environmental or operational impact
- Enhances the borough's economic competitiveness and resilience