

Moving into pastures new

Miniclipper's new 100,000sq ft site in Burton upon Trent will enable the 3PL to reach a new customer base across the Midlands

The winner of this year's Motor Transport Business Excellence Award, Miniclipper Logistics, has officially opened its newest site in Burton upon Trent. Located on Avro Business Park between the M6, M42 and M1, it's ideally placed as an additional transport hub for the Bedfordshire-headquartered firm. MP for Burton and Uttoxeter Kate Kniveton visited the site to cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony.

Miniclipper is a 3PL that has almost 600,000sq ft of warehousing, which it runs alongside a transport arm of the business. Until now, the company's warehousing portfolio was based across four sites in Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable and Houghton Regis, all within a 15-mile radius. Its new Burton base, 100 miles up the road, adds nearly 93,000sq ft of warehouse space and the ability to expand its transport operations into the Midlands.

MD Peter Masters says: "It's a very exciting time for Miniclipper as this venture pushes us into pastures new. We've expanded our service further into the Midlands and this was very much a long-discussed strategic move for us." This will allow Miniclipper to offer its services to customers across Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, Derby, Stoke, Birmingham and Coventry among others.

The new facilities

Set on a 100,000sq ft site, the warehouse covers 92,826sq ft, leaving the rest for office space and a large yard. This was a significant factor behind choosing the site, says commercial director Jon Parish: "It's unusual to find a site with a footprint like this." To begin with there will be seven trucks operating from Burton, but there's ample room to run more trucks as Miniclipper's customer base in the area grows.

The new facility is manned by 11 staff plus the seven drivers and it's operational from 8am until 7pm. To ensure its drivers have the correct qualifications to deal with dangerous goods and machinery, Miniclipper enrolled its new recruits on a three-week training programme before they got behind the wheel. This covered ADR and forklift training so the drivers could hit the ground running.

The warehouse has three racking areas, including standard racking, very narrow aisle (VNA) racks and bulk storage on the floor. Since April the warehouse has been operational for Panasonic products and there's space for an extra 2,500 pallets, which Miniclipper aims to fill by early next year. This is the only warehouse capacity left



across the company's 50,000 pallet spaces, a testament to its impressive growth over the past five years.

Access to the warehouse is provided by a covered cross-docking area so trucks can be loaded and unloaded in all weather conditions. There's a six-bay dock-levelling area with a large turning circle to make it easy to reverse up to, and at the far end of the warehouse there's a full-height door for double-deck trailers. Miniclipper has four double-deck longer semi-trailers (LSTs) with rear-steer axles from Lawrence David on fleet and Burton can comfortably accommodate these.

To get the site fit for operation, it was completely overhauled, cleaned up and equipped with motion sensor LED lighting. Although Miniclipper's owned facilities are all fitted with solar panels, the new location is on a 10-year lease so the company is employing other strategies to minimise its environmental impact.

The transport fleet currently runs on diesel but its company car fleet has transitioned to electric, so there's electric vehicle charging on site. Assessing the potential for introducing electric trucks, Parish says: "We'll probably end up moving from diesel to hydrogen in one step rather than going via electric on the way." However, if Miniclipper does invest in electric trucks, Burton has a more robust infrastructure to support charging for an electric truck fleet compared to its Dunstable site.

In the meantime, Miniclipper is using Microlise telematics to monitor fuel usage and Paragon software to plan the most efficient routes. It's also updating and adding to its fleet. The new location opening coincided with the delivery of two new Volvo FH trucks and a DAF

XF tractor unit to bolster its 50-strong fleet. Miniclipper runs a mixed fleet of MAN, DAF, Iveco and Volvo trucks including tractor units and 7.5-, 10- and 12-tonne rigid.

The company

Miniclipper is a family-run business that was founded in 1971 by Mick Masters. Speaking at the Burton opening, Peter Masters explained: "My father responded to an ad in the local paper in Leighton Buzzard for a man and a van to operate a courier service into London." He identified a lucrative gap in the market that later led to the purchase of Miniclipper's first freehold premises in 1985, the same year Peter joined the family firm.

On Mick's retirement in 2005, he waved goodbye to 80 employees, a fleet of 35 vehicles and three sites. In the 52 years since Miniclipper's humble beginnings, Masters says: "We're now a multi-award winning 3PL with over 200 employees and a portfolio of over 300 customers operating from six sites. And I'm very proud that we now have a third generation in the family business as well."

As a FORS Bronze accredited operator, the company handles palletised freight and ADR goods. Miniclipper has been a Palletline member for more than a decade, part of UPN since 2021 and was a founding member of The Hazchem Network in 2005.

In 2023 alone Miniclipper won six awards including its MT accolade. This is the second time Miniclipper has been awarded MT's Business Excellence trophy. In 2018 the firm took home the prize thanks to the team's hard work to continually grow the company. Retired sales director Jayne Masters commented at the time: "We've got fantastic people who are committed to relentlessly improve the business and without them we wouldn't be here." This sentiment was echoed by Peter Masters at Burton's opening, where he praised local support for the new depot and the team who transformed the building into a fully operational warehouse and transport hub in a matter of months.

To support its growing warehousing and distribution services, transport operations were relocated to Dunstable in 2021. The 4.5-acre site saw a £5.5m investment to become the new home of Miniclipper's 24-hour distribution centre. Masters says: "Now we have a trunk route between the two depots. We can deliver freight to Burton, cross dock it and ship it out." This means driver nights out are minimised as any freight travelling further up the country can go through Burton.

As well as streamlining the company's UK-wide transport solutions, Masters explains "the new site is more of a transport strategy than a warehousing strategy, because we could have put warehousing somewhere close to the headquarters in Leighton Buzzard". Opting for a site further afield means Miniclipper can reach a new customer base across the Midlands.

The future

Annually, Miniclipper manages in excess of 300,000 warehouse picks, handles over 375,000 pallets and delivers 200,000 pallets. The expansion into Burton is a key facilitator in the next phase of its growth. In 2022 Miniclipper saw the best turnover and profit in the company's history, increasing turnover by 19.5% and profit before tax by 46.5%. Based on this impressive period and its new site, annual revenue of £25m is expected in the not-too-distant future.

To this end, transport operations from Burton launched at the start of September and, once the warehouse is full, there's scope to scale up logistics in the area. Four rigid and three articulated trucks will be based here for the foreseeable future, with the fleet growing as needed to meet demand. Masters comments: "This is definitely a future-proof site, we're not about short termism".

While the site has a decent size cross-docking area, the team is already planning to install a second one to maximise and optimise loading efficiency and capacity. After a successful recruitment drive, an in-house training programme is already under way at Burton. In dealing with driver shortages a couple of years ago, the team decided to launch a 'warehouse to wheels' programme, designed to upskill warehouse operatives and help them achieve their Class 2 licence with the option to go for a Class 1 afterwards. One of its new recruits in Burton has enrolled on the programme to become an HGV driver and two 'warehouse to wheels' graduates joined the driving ranks this year, significantly lowering the average age.

With the team already settling into its Burton premises, a 10-year lease term will give Miniclipper plenty of time to establish itself in the Midlands as a service provider, employer and member of the community. Masters says: "We look forward to bringing the community spirit that we pride ourselves on in Bedfordshire to the Burton area. We'll be actively pursuing opportunities so that we can support local causes and charities too." ■

ROOM TO GROW: The footprint of the Burton site, with space for a 92,826sq ft warehouse, office space and a large yard, was a significant factor behind choosing the site



Photos: Picture Press

VISITING DIGNITARY: Peter Masters welcomed local MP Kate Kniveton to the opening ceremony for Miniclipper's Burton site