Murray Planning Associates
PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

PLANNING, DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Erection and siting of fibre exchange telecommunications infrastructure to provide a full fibre (gigabit) to the premises service

at

Land at Lingarden Bulbs, Wardentree Park, Spalding, PE11 3ZN

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1.0 Introduction

Murray Planning Associates has been instructed by UPP Ltd to prepare and submit a planning application for the installation of fibre exchange infrastructure necessary to operate a full fibre (gigabit) internet service in the Spalding area. The infrastructure is to be located on land within the grounds of Lingarden Bulbs Ltd, located towards the northern edge of Spalding.

The application has not been discussed with the Council through any pre-application enquiry.

This statement sets out 1) an assessment of the site context; 2) a summary of the relevant policy framework; 3) an assessment of the proposed development; followed by 4) conclusions based on the preceding sections.

This statement should be read in alongside the following documents and drawings:

- Site Location Plan
- Block Plan
- Proposed Floor Plan
- Proposed Elevations
- Proposed Site Plan
- CIL Form
- Tree Survey
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Application Forms & Ownership Certificates

2.0 Site Context

The site comprises an area of undeveloped land that lies within the grounds of a florist wholesale business (specialising in daffodil bulbs) located on an industrial estate towards the northern edge of Spalding.

The site comprises a warehouse of around 4645m^2, and a cold store of around 929m^2. There are also areas of outside storage, together with car parking and a yard for loading/unloading of HGVs. The majority of the site is built up, though there are pockets of greenery and undeveloped land along the site frontage to Wardentree Park to the east.

The focus of the application is on the south-eastern corner of the site. This is currently an undeveloped grassed area, with a number of mature trees along the site frontage. The site lies close to the southernmost point of access into the site, with a further site access point located further north.

The site lies within generally industrial surroundings, with industrial development located to the west, south and east of the site. Land becomes more rural in character to the north of the site, however the predominant character for the site is clearly that of a typical industrial estate, with a variety of building sizes, and no buildings or features of architectural merit.



Aerial view of the site and surroundings, with the approximate boundaries of the application site annotated in red

The site is generally well screened from the surroundings by mature trees and landscaping. In particular, there is a limited vantage point towards the site from Wardentree Park to the east, as a result of a number of mature trees and other landscaping. The built form of the surroundings also limits longer distance views towards the site from any aspect.



Above: View from within the site looking east towards one of the site entrance points, with the area the subject of the application being part of the grassed area in the foreground

Relevant Planning History

A review of the planning application register reveals there have been no recent planning applications made at the site.

3.0 Planning Policy Assessment

Policy Context

The site is located within the South Holland District Council administrative area.

At a local level, planning policies are contained within the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (adopted 2019).

National planning policy in the form of the Revised National Planning Policy Framework is also of relevance.

There are also some Government national policies and documents relating to the provision of faster internet connections that are considered a material consideration in the assessment of this application.

Revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021)

Paragraph 2 of the NPPF notes that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Paragraph 11 advises that decisions (on planning applications) should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. As such, development proposals that accord with the development plan should be approved without delay.

Section 10 sets out guidance relating to supporting high quality communications. Paragraph 114 notes that advance high quality and reliable communications infrastructure is essential for economic growth and social well-being. **Planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation**

mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections (our emphasis).

Paragraph 115 notes that where new sites are required (for communications infrastructure), equipment should be sympathetically designed and camouflaged where appropriate.

Paragraph 118 advises that local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only. They should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, question the need for an electronic communications system, or set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.

Local Planning Policy – South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (2019)

In the context of the Adopted Local Plan, the site lies within the settlement boundary, and within an area identified as an existing main employment area. The site also lies within a wider area considered at risk of flooding.

There are no policies relating to telecommunications or high speed internet infrastructure within the local plan. As such, it is clear that the guidance within the NPPF takes precedence in establishing a principle of development.

A number of local plan policies are relevant to the site and the proposed development. Those being Policies 1, 2, 4, and 7. These policies are looked at in more detail below.

Policy 1 – This policy identifies that within settlement boundaries (including Spalding where the site is located), development will be permitted that supports their role as sub-regional centres.

Policy 2 – This policy sets out general guidance on design, noting that development should comply with a number of criteria. These criteria include ensuring that the size, scale, and layout of development are appropriate, while ensuring there is no adverse impact on trees, and the general character and appearance of the surroundings.

Policy 4 – This policy relates to flood risk, and confirms that development will be permitted within areas at risk of flooding subject to compliance with a number of criteria. Criteria 2 notes that one such justification for development in a flood zone is the provision of essential infrastructure that provides wider sustainability benefits to the community.

Policy 7 – This policy advises on development in main employment areas, noting that such areas are allocated for main employment uses (B1, B2, and B8). Development for non-Class B uses will only be supported if the applicant can demonstrate the development is ancillary to the effective functioning of the area.

Other Policy Considerations

Central government are keen on ensuring that access to full fibre internet is sped up, and that Councils have their part to play in delivering the necessary infrastructure. This is detailed (among other documents) within the following:

1. Government press announcement 27/8/20[1]… "Government ministers are calling on local councils to help ensure people can access better broadband and mobile connectivity crucial to the UK's coronavirus recovery". A summary of this announcement is as follows:

    - Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman and Local Government Minister Simon Clarke have today written to local authorities setting

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ministers-call-on-councils-to-help-deliver-digital-connectivity-ambitions

out how they can help boost gigabit broadband rollout and 5G mobile coverage.

- Government ministers are calling on local councils to help ensure people can access better broadband and mobile connectivity crucial to the UK's coronavirus recovery
- We want to help people get access to fast and reliable connectivity. It is a top priority for this government.
- Councils have a vital role to play in the rollout of digital infrastructure and while there is good work going on up and down the country, there is more we can do.

2. OFCOM (UK telecommunications regulator) "Supercharging investment in fibre broadband" announcement 8/1/20[2], summarised as follows:

    - As demand for internet data accelerates, the UK's infrastructure needs to be upgraded. Full-fibre broadband connections can deliver much faster speeds than copper – up to one gigabit per second. They are also up to five times more reliable, and less likely to slow down when lots of people use them at the same time.
    - So today we are proposing new, flexible regulation that will help fuel a full-fibre future for the whole of the UK.
    - Having a choice of networks has delivered significant benefits to people, such as innovation, better services and competitive prices. In 2017, we set out a range of pro-investment measures that kickstarted full fibre rollout by a range of broadband companies. Since then, full fibre coverage has trebled."

3. Government manifesto pledge - "The Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review - setting the UK's broadband targets" [3]. A relevant extract notes

[2] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2019/supercharging-investment-in-fibre-broadband

[3] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/building-digital-uk#the-future-telecoms-infrastructure-review---setting-the-uks-broadband-targets

that "*The aim is to see 15 million premises connected to full fibre by 2025, with coverage across all parts of the country by 2033".*

4.0 The Proposed Development

The proposed development comprises the development of a fibre exchange. The development will serve the surrounding area and provide full fibre (gigabit) internet services to residents and businesses in the local area.

The applicant (UPP[4]) is rolling out a gigabit network across the east of England and East Midlands. They already operate in a number of towns in the East Anglia and East Midlands areas[5].

The fibre exchange comprises the construction of a single fibre optic cabin unit. The cabin is small in scale, measuring approximately 3.04m x 2.235m, and is 2.71m in height. Access to the compound will be derived from the nearest access point to the site, to the north of the cabin.

No boundary treatment around the cabin is proposed. All existing landscape features surrounding the site (including all mature trees) are to be retained in full. The cabin is to be raised off the ground to alleviate potential flood risk.

Principle of Development

The development lies within an urban area, where the principle of new development is generally accepted. While the proposal does lie on undeveloped land, the site serves no real purpose, being an area of greenery around an existing industrial unit. The development will retain the majority of the green space, including the green frontage to Wardentree Park, and all nearby mature trees.

The principle of development is also established by guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 114 in particular). In addition, other

[4] https://upp.com/portal/
[5] https://upp.com/portal/locations

government policy not related to planning (detailed above) confirms the need for local authorities to encourage the growth of full fibre infrastructure.

The development does not result in the loss of any land in active employment use. The proposal is considered ancillary to the surrounding business uses (as well as providing benefits to the wider area), and is therefore considered to be in compliance with Policy 7 of the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan.

Given the benefits of the proposal to the wider area, it is considered that the loss of a small piece of undeveloped land can be accepted on principle in this instance.

Scale & Appearance

The scale of the proposed development would be single storey in height. The built development is kept to the smallest operational size possible. At around 6.8 sq m, the cabin is clearly very small in scale in comparison with the built form of the surrounding built form.

The appearance (see photo below of the proposed cabin) is appropriate for the type of development proposed, while its impact has been reduced by ensuring development is largely screened from the surroundings by retaining the existing landscape features.



Example of the cabin that would be utilised. The finish is a light grey brickwork effect. The black section is normally installed underground so is not visible to the surroundings, but in this case (due to the need to elevate the cabin to alleviate flood risk), the black section would be visible, but will be painted white to blend in with the rest of the cabin

Visual Impact & Trees

The site does not lie in sensitive surroundings, so far as built form is concerned. The surroundings are of no particular architectural merit. The visual impact on the surroundings is minimal due to the site being largely enclosed by mature trees and landscaping, and being within the grounds of a non-descript warehouse site.

There are a number of mature trees in the vicinity of the site, which have been surveyed in the accompanying tree survey. None of the trees are particular good specimens, being 'C' rated trees.

No trees are to be removed as a result of the development proposal. Two of the nearest trees will need a minor prune/crown uplift to accommodate the

proposed development, but this will not affect the long term health of the tree.

Flood Risk

The site lies within an extensive area of land that is considered at risk of flooding. Accordingly, a bespoke flood risk assessment (FRA) has been carried out.

The FRA advises the cabin is to be raised 0.8m above ground level to mitigate any flood impact affecting the development. Furthermore, it should be noted that water sensitive equipment within the cabin is over 2m above ground level. As such, a flood event up to 2m high could take place, and the cabin would remain operational.

It is considered the proposal has fully taken into account the flood risk of the site, and a design has been provided that fully mitigates the flood risk, including taking account of climate change and the potential for larger (higher water level) floods in the future.

Parking & Traffic Generation

Once operational, it is anticipated that on average, a maximum of two visits per month would be needed (1-2 hours per day on site) for general maintenance purposes. As such, the level of parking is acceptable to serve the development.

Access to the site would be via the nearest existing access point to the site, located to the north of the cabin. The maintenance vehicle will park either on street (there are no on street parking restrictions), or within the grounds of the host business.

The level of traffic generated by the proposal is considered acceptable, and will barely be noticeable in comparison with the traffic movements associated with the various uses around the site.

Noise

Given the previously discussed traffic generation associated with the site, there will be little noise impact on the surroundings so far as traffic noise is concerned. The cabin will contain the noise of the equipment within.

Unlike some fibre exchange cabins, this development does not require the use of any air conditioning units. The development will therefore have no noise emissions that could adversely affect the surroundings.

Security

While the compound is not enclosed with any form of boundary treatment, the cabin is designed to be 'vandalism resistant'. In any case, the development does not stand out as an obvious target for any criminal activity.

5.0 Conclusions

The site is located on the northern outskirts of Spalding, and within a predominantly industrial setting. The site comprises a small part of the grounds of a warehouse associated with flower storage and distribution. The proposed development comprises the installation of fibre exchange infrastructure necessary to operate a gigabit full fibre internet service within the wider Spalding area.

The proposed scheme accords with the relevant development control policies in the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (2019), and aligns with the policies contained within the National Planning Policy Framework. There is a clear principle of development for full fibre infrastructure such as that proposed in this instance, both through planning policy and other government policy as detailed above.

The scale of development is small, in comparison with the form of the built-up surroundings. The appearance is typical for infrastructure such as this, and the visual impact of the development is limited due to the mature trees and landscaping that envelop the site (particularly to the east).

The proposal will not result in the loss of any land in especially active use. While the site lies within an employment land allocation, the proposal does not result in the loss of any employment floorspace, nor jeopardise the existing employment operations at the site. Furthermore, the proposal can be considered as an ancillary feature to the industrial estate surroundings, given the benefits it will provide to the local area.

In summary, it is considered that the proposals are appropriate, are supported by planning policy and will not impact upon any interests of acknowledged importance. The proposal will bring considerable benefits to the wider area,

and we therefore conclude the proposed development should be supported by the Council accordingly.