

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 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 near the roundabout junction of Wardentree Park and the B1180, located towards the northern edge of Spalding.

The application has not been discussed with the Council through any pre-application enquiry. However, please note that a near identical application (H14-0692-23) is currently under consideration on a site a short distance north from the application site. The applicant intends to develop one of the sites (assuming both secure planning permission).

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 Elevations
- Proposed Site Plan
- CIL Form
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Application Forms & Ownership Certificates

2.0 Site Context

The site comprises an area of undeveloped land that lies on the eastern side of Wardentree Park, in close proximity to a roundabout junction with the B1180 to the south. The site lies within mixed retail and industrial uses towards the northern edge of Spalding.

The site comprises an area of grassland that acts as a boundary between new retail development to the east and Wardentree Park to the west. The site is relatively open in aspect, though obscured from some aspects by surrounding built development. Some pumping station infrastructure lies to the north of the site. Some trees have recently been planted along the northern boundary of the site, otherwise the site is sparse in landscape interest.

The site lies within generally industrial surroundings, with industrial development located to the west and north of the site. There is a newly developed retail area to the east of the site and further industrial use to the south of the B1180. 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

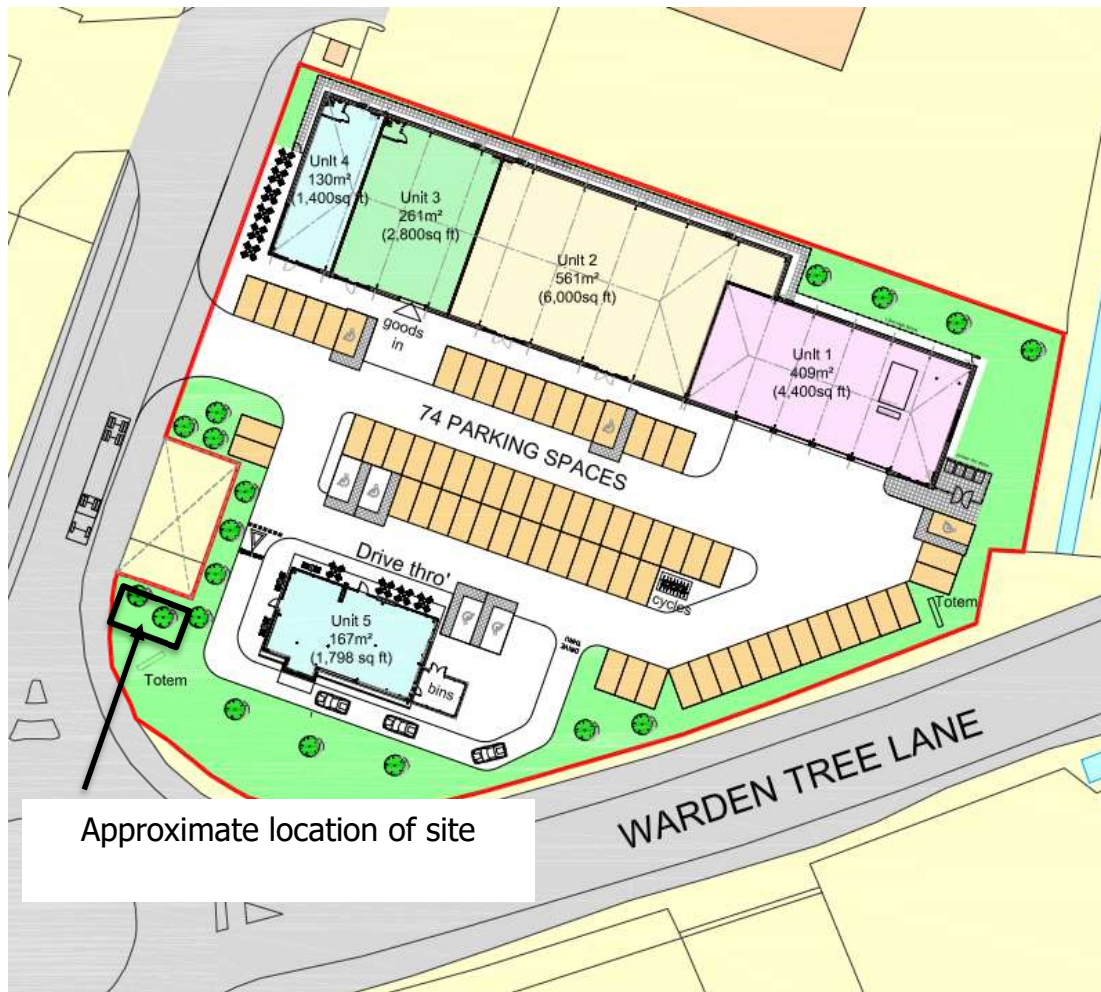
The site is largely open to the surroundings. The site is open in aspect from Wardentree Park and is visible from the roundabout junction to the south. Longer distance views of the site are not considered possible due to the built up nature of the surroundings.



Above: View from Wardentree Park looking east towards the application site, with the new retail development in the background

Relevant Planning History

The site lies within the boundary of a recent planning application for the retail development to the east. This application (H-14-1252-18) was approved in July 2019. The approved site plan (extracted below) showed the site as being part of a landscaped area.



Above: Extract of the approved site plan from H-14-1252-18, with the site the subject of this application being part of a landscaped surround

Condition 5 of the decision notice associated with H-14-1252-18 required further detail to be submitted in respect of landscaping details. An application to clear this condition (H-14-0011-21) was duly submitted and approved in February 2021. The approved landscape plan showed 3x new trees and some ornamental shrub planting were to be planted along the southern boundary of the pumping station (the northern boundary of the application site). The street view image provided above (page 6) demonstrates that 3 new trees have indeed been planted, while there is also some low lying greenery visible that is presumably the ornamental shrub planting.

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 27/8/20¹... "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 8/1/20², 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 (UPP⁴) 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 areas⁵.

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 pedestrian only, with maintenance parking to take place in the nearby retail park.

No boundary treatment around the cabin is proposed. All existing landscape features surrounding the site (including the recently planted trees nearby) are to be retained in full.

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 retail development. The development will retain the majority of the green space that envelopes the retail development to the east.

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 the existing built form. The site lies adjacent to existing infrastructure in the form of the existing pumping station to the north, which also aids in reducing the visual impact of the development.



Example of the cabin that would be utilised. The finish is a light grey brickwork effect.

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 within the grounds of a non-descript retail development, while longer distance views towards the site are not possible due to the existing built form surrounding the site.

There are three recently planted trees towards the northern boundary of the site. The development will not impede the future growth of the trees, and the cabin will eventually lie under the canopy of these trees, further reducing the visual impact.

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 that water sensitive equipment within the cabin is 1.2m above ground level, with the ground level itself being 3.5m AOD, resulting in any water sensitive equipment being 4.7m AOD. As such, a substantial flood event 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.

Parking would likely take place within the car park serving the retail development to the north and east of the site. Failing that, there are areas of Wardentree Park with unrestricted parking, and the maintenance vehicle would park there. No heavy tools are required to be transported from the vehicle to the cabin, and thus maintenance engineers are able to park flexibly in relation to the cabin.

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 mixed retail and industrial use setting. The site comprises a small area of undeveloped land on the fringes of a recently built retail development. 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 built form of the surroundings preventing long distance (and some short distance) views.

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.