

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 Stephenson Avenue,
Spalding, PE11 3SW**

CONTENTS	PAGE
1.0 INTRODUCTION	3
2.0 SITE CONTEXT	4
3.0 PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT	6
4.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT	11
5.0 CONCLUSIONS	15

1.0 Introduction

Murray Planning Associates has been instructed by CityFibre 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 town of Spalding. The infrastructure is to be located on land off Stephenson Avenue, towards the northern edges of the town.

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
- Existing Site Plan
- Existing Site Elevations 1
- Existing Site Elevations 2
- Proposed Site Plan
- Proposed Elevations 1
- Proposed Elevations 2
- CIL Form
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Application Forms & Ownership Certificates

2.0 Site Context

The site comprises an area of undeveloped land that is roughly triangular in shape. The site is a simple area of grassland with no discernible features or existing built form. The site is surrounded by chain link fencing along two of the three sides, with an earth bund forming the northern boundary.

The site lies within an urbanised setting, and within an industrial/commercial estate setting. The surroundings to the site are therefore a mix of business uses, housed in a range of different size and style of buildings. The site is therefore not located in an area of any particular architectural interest.



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

The site is accessed from Stephenson Avenue to the north-west, where there is an existing double gated access point. An electricity sub-station lies adjacent to the access point. The site is open in aspect from Stephenson Avenue so reasonably visible to short distance views. The built form of the surroundings prevents any longer distance views towards the site.



Above: View looking south-east across the site from near the site access point

Relevant Planning History

A review of the planning application register reveals there has been one recent application of some relevance. That being H14-0402-20 which sought consent for an industrial building to provide 3x small business units on the site. Permission was granted in July 2020, but has since lapsed, without the consent being implemented.

Since the planning permission was granted, the site has been marketed for sale with the benefit of the planning permission for the approved business use. However, there has been no interest in purchasing the site, suggesting a lack of interest/viability in the use of the site for business purposes.

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, 2023)

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. UK Digital Strategy (July 2022) - the UK Digital Strategy is a roadmap laid out by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in order to strengthen the UK’s global position in science and tech related fields. In particular, this development relates to the UK’s ambition to provide high quality digital infrastructure as outlined in chapter 1.1 ‘World Class and Secure Digital Infrastructure:’

"Digital infrastructure plays a vital role in our daily lives and is the foundation of a thriving digital economy. Every part of the UK needs world-class, secure digital infrastructure that enables people to access the connectivity and services they need... Our aim is to achieve at least 85% gigabit coverage by 2025 and at least 99% gigabit coverage by 2030".

5. Levelling Up The United Kingdom White Paper (February 2022) - the Levelling Up White Paper is the flagship document of the UK Governments plan to improve the economic and social opportunity more equally across the UK. Chapter 3.2.4 of the White Paper states "*By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population*".

4.0 The Proposed Development

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

The applicant (CityFibre) are rolling out a gigabit network across the UK, with the aim of providing full fibre broadband to a number of the larger towns and cities in the UK.

The fibre exchange comprises the construction of 2x fibre optic cabin units to be installed on a concrete base. The cabins each measure approximately 12m x 3.6m, and are 3.4m in height. The proposal also requires an external metre cabinet and two emergency backup generators to be installed within the grounds of the fibre exchange.

Five air conditioning units are also required to control the temperature within the cabin (so 10 air conditioning units are proposed in total). The site will be enclosed by 2.4m high palisade fencing.

Access to the compound will be derived from the existing vehicular access point off Stephenson Avenue. The compound itself will be accessed by a 3m wide set of double gates on the north-western boundary.

Principle of Development

The development lies within an urban area and within a defined settlement boundary. As such, development on the site is acceptable in principle, given the built up surroundings. Furthermore, the principle of development is also established by guidance within the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 114 in particular).

While the site does lie within an allocation of an established employment area, the development does not result in the loss of any buildings in active employment use. The previous planning consent for a business development on the site has lapsed, and the site was marketed for sale with the benefit of the planning consent, but no interest was forthcoming. This demonstrates that the site is not considered viable for business use.

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

Given the benefits of the proposal to the wider area, it is considered that the loss of a small piece of land within the employment allocation can be accepted on principle in this instance. Especially taking account of the guidance within Local Plan Policy 7, which supports development that is considered ancillary to the functioning of the area. The fibre exchange will enable a full fibre internet service to both residents and businesses in Spalding, including the immediate surrounding industrial estate.

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 86 sq m, the cabins are clearly small in scale in comparison with the built form of the surrounding buildings within the industrial estate.

The appearance is appropriate for the type of development proposed, while its impact has been reduced by ensuring development is somewhat screened from the surroundings by retaining the existing landscape features such as the bund to the north, while the site is not overly visible from the wider surroundings due to the existing built form.

Visual Impact

The site does not lie in sensitive surroundings, so far as built form is concerned. The surroundings are of a typical business park/industrial estate, with no buildings of any architectural merit in the area.

As such, an industrial estate is an ideal location for development such as the proposed, given it will only have a limited visual impact compared with a more residential area, or more sensitive area such as within a conservation area.

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 existing access point off Stephenson Avenue to the north-west. An existing double access gate provides access to the site, though a new dropped kerb would be required to provide proper vehicular access to the site. A new set of gates would be recessed into the site to prevent any highway blockage while obtaining entry into the site.

There is ample room retained within the site to allow for a maintenance vehicle to park, with more than sufficient room for vehicle turning also provided.

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 cabins will contain the noise of the equipment within.

The main source of noise output will derive from the air conditioning units. However, given the site surroundings are that of an industrial/business park, and the nearest residential (or other noise sensitive use) is some distance away, the site is not in a sensitive location so far as noise output is concerned.

5.0 Conclusions

The site is located towards the northern edge of Spalding, and within a mixed use setting of commercial and business uses predominantly. The site itself comprises a small plot of irregularly shaped land that is undeveloped grassland. The proposed development comprises the installation of fibre exchange infrastructure necessary to operate a gigabit full fibre internet service within the Spalding area.

The proposed scheme accords with the relevant development control policies in the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan, 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 existing built form and landscaping that envelops the site.

The proposal will not result in the loss of any land in active employment use. While not an employment related development, the proposal can be considered ancillary to the functioning of the surrounding industrial estate (and the wider urban area). The proposal does not therefore prejudice the aims of local plan policy 7 to protect the wider area for employment related uses.

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.