



*Architectural Consultant*

Architecture • Interior • Project Management

## **Design & Access Statement**

**Conversion of Former Telephone Exchange to Dwelling  
at:**

**Telephone Exchange,  
Common Road,  
Whaplode Drove,  
PE12 0UF**



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The Application

This Design & Access Statement has been prepared in support of a full planning application for the conversion of the former telephone exchange to a dwelling at Common Road, Whaplode Drove, as outlined on the accompanying plans.

This application is to be made by JC Architectural Consultant on behalf of their client who intend to develop the building themselves to create a suitable small home which they will be able to enjoy whilst not away working at sea.

## 1.2 Drawing List

This application is accompanied by the following drawings, all of which have been prepared by JC Architectural Consultant.

0534-26-01 Proposed Conversion

0534-26-02 Proposed Outdoor Living Space

## 1.3 Planning History

The site itself does not have any known former planning history, since the termination of its former use in 1983 it has been left redundant and unused. There is however pre-application enquiry documents relating to the building which were issued in August 2025.

## 2. Site and Surrounding Context

### 2.1 The Site Location

The former telephone exchange building is located just south of the main village of Whaplode Drove, which in turn is roughly 12 miles from Spalding. The Village has a number of dwellings ranging in age from 19<sup>th</sup> century through to modern 21<sup>st</sup> century developments, with the main centre of the village being older and newer developments spreading sporadically away from here. Although there are a large number of business premises scattered throughout the village, a car garage, a shop and post office etc, the area is predominantly residential, with a number of new dwellings being constructed over the past few years. Beyond the village settlement is mostly agricultural land which is very typical of the area.

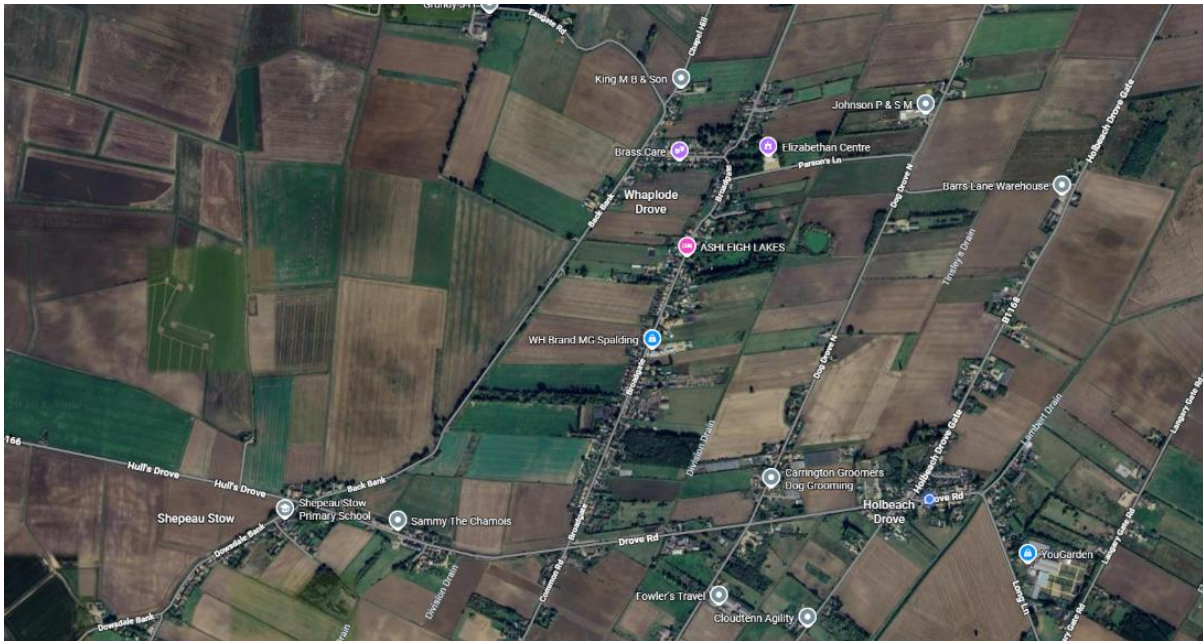
The area surrounding the site is predominantly agricultural land, although there are a number of dwellings scattered along the length of Common Road. The majority of these dwellings are clustered towards the north end of Common Road, where the former telephone exchange is also located. There is no real building line along the street given the spread out nature of the dwellings, there is also no real common style as the properties are all of varying ages. The main centre of the village is north of the site and is separated from Common Road by the B1166, Drove Road, although the centre of the village is only a very short walk from the site. The topography of the area is flat, as to be expected, and there are prominent public views from the North, West and South, with views from the East across the agricultural land to the rear.

The building acts a stand alone structure, although there are dwellings immediately opposite on the other side of Common Road. It sits on a small parcel of land which is surrounded on three sides by agricultural fields. This area of land is now generally overgrown and unkept due to the building being unused since its closure as a telephone exchange in 1983.

The site does not fall within the curtilage of any Listed buildings nor is it within a Conservation Area.

## 2.2 Local Amenities

Whaplode Drove is a small village in Lincolnshire, to the southeast of Spalding, and has all the facilities you would expect in a small village. Within a short walk of the site is a shop, a post office and a car garage, all of which can provide the necessary essentials. There are also a number of small businesses within the village including a sports massage therapist and a horse riding school, as well as a fishing lake and camp site.



*Site context of the village of Whaplode Drove.*

Further afield there are two primary schools in neighbouring villages and other shops and services. Within a short journey from the site there are a number of secondary schools and colleges as well as popular shops, restaurants etc, all well served by local bus companies with stops within a very short walking distance of the site. Regular public transport runs through the village and serves both Spalding in one direction and Wisbech in the other with services that run through the local small villages around the area. The nearest bus stop is at the south end of Broadgate, the main road running through the village, which is approximately a 1 minute walk from the site with much of the distance being served by a footpath and streetlights.

## 2.3 History of Telephone Exchanges

Telephone exchanges began their existence around the same time as the invention of the telephone, with the first recorded exchanges in the UK beginning their use in 1879. Simply speaking telephone exchanges served as the centre point for small geographic locations of the telecommunications system of the country, their size being depicted by the number of lines operated within that specific location. These buildings were operated by switchboard operators, usually women, who were required to physically connect the lines of the incoming call and the intended recipient.

These buildings were designed and constructed by the General Post Office who were responsible for the operation and support of these small exchanges that served local communities. The design of these smaller local exchanges were typically linear in form with a simple footprint that served predominantly to cater for its function only. However, the detailing and general quality of the construction was always very high which added to the general sense of pride, both in the building stock as well as working within the exchange. The rural exchanges were generally operated by women as there was very little employment opportunity for them in largely agricultural areas. On this basis the General Post Office and the telephone exchange network is considered to be the first mass employer of female workers and employment as a switchboard operator was considered to be an enjoyable and sociable employment.

Since the switch to large, automated telephone exchanges that serve far larger areas without the need for on site operators there have been a large number of these former rural buildings being converted into residential use. There are images of a small number of these conversions accompanying this application, from these it is clear to see the distinct design of the former exchange, even though they all differ in terms of the conversion. This specific telephone exchange saw its last use in 1983 and has remained redundant since then. The accompanying Structural Appraisal Report shows that the building is still in a sound structural condition, a testament to the overall build quality, but there are signs of its deterioration due to being left for over 40 years. The building has been subject to vandalism with a number of the window panes being smashed during that time and the surrounding land has become overgrown and leaves the building in a sorry state given its important and proud history.

## 3. Proposal

### 3.1 Proposed Development

The proposal comprises the conversion of the former telephone exchange building into a small dwelling and the erection of a structure to the rear of the existing building that will serve as an outdoor living and entertaining space to supplement the conversion. The existing building is small in footprint and therefore the proposal is for a small 'tiny' home to allow the applicant to have a small, manageable space to live whilst they are not away working at sea. There is also possibility that the conversion can serve as short term seasonal accommodation for farm workers given the largely agricultural employment within the area. The intention is to maintain the external appearance of the former telephone exchange as far as possible, given the historical importance and the architectural merit to the local area. Alongside this the internals will be brought up to a more suitable standard for living, in line with current Building Regulations.

The structure to the rear of the existing building will be used as supplementary living accommodation and for entertaining, very much with the intention that this space will flow with the rest of the living space so that the two areas feel connected. This structure will be constructed in a red brick to match the telephone exchange and a number of the details from the existing building will follow through on to this, including the slight projecting plinth to the bottom of the walls. The area is designed to be open so that the internal and external space work together, but the space has a living roof and shutters that can be closed off so the space can still be enjoyed when the weather is not so good.

### 3.2 Site Layout

The site generally is small and linear in form, with little space to either side of the existing telephone exchange building. To the front the space will generally be used to allow for off road parking via the existing access bridge from the highway. The rear will allow for a small garden area that flows in to the proposed outdoor living space, which will be to the furthest rear part of the site.

## 4. Use

As previously mentioned, the site is currently vacant with the former telephone exchange being redundant. The proposal will form one new dwelling within this site that will front on to Common Road. The proposal allows for a private driveway to the front with a small drive and garden area that wraps around the building and connects to the outdoor living space proposed to the rear.

## 5. Amount & Scale

### 5.1 Existing

Currently there is the former telephone exchange building on the site and a small timber outhouse to the rear that would have served the switchboard operators until operations ceased at the building. Combined the footprint of these two structures amount to approximately 47m<sup>2</sup>, with the telephone exchange being roughly 45m<sup>2</sup> and the outhouse around 2m<sup>2</sup>.

### 5.2 Proposed

The proposal will see the conversion of the former telephone exchange to a small dwelling, the footprint of which will remain unaltered in size. The former outhouse will be removed and the proposed outdoor living structure will be erected to the rear, this totals approximately 36m<sup>2</sup> in size. The accompanying site plan clearly shows the connection between the existing telephone exchange, to be converted, and the outdoor living space to the rear and that there is ample area within the boundaries to accommodate this.

## 6. Layout

The layout is very simple given the constraints of the small footprint of the building. A new entrance door will be installed to the southwest elevation

to allow easy access into the main space from the driveway to the front of the building. The main space incorporates a living area and a small kitchen area to the front of the building. The accompanying floor plan shows, although small, there is ample space within this area to accommodate everything required. Two existing windows within this area will remain to bring light into the building, one to the front elevation and one to the side. A small hallway area leads from this space to both the shower room and the bedroom, both of which are of a surprisingly comfortable size given the footprint of the building. The shower room easily accommodates a full sized shower, W.C and basin and the bedroom will comfortably take a double bed and wardrobes for storage.

To the rear of the site the outdoor living and entertaining space will be a single open structure that allows for flexible use. There will be seating within this space along with an open fireplace and an outdoor cooking area to really allow for this space to accompany the living space created by the conversion.

## **7. Landscaping**

### **7.1 Soft Landscaping**

The landscaping throughout will generally remain low level and easily manageable, the gardens to the three sides will generally be laid to lawn for easy maintenance given their minimal size. There may be some low-level planting to borders to give a soft break between the garden and the boundaries of the site but this will be kept to a minimum so that the maintenance of the soft landscaping can be as simple as possible.

### **7.2 Hard Landscaping**

The driveway to the front of the existing building will form the majority of the hard landscaping, this will be a simple grave drive to form the car parking area accessed directly off the highway. There will be a simple path around the building and a pathway to the outdoor living space to the rear, all of which will be in a suitable external flagstone.

The boundaries will likely be left open given the proximity of the boundaries to the buildings. The front boundary facing the highway has a dyke with an existing access bridge over so this will be left as existing, albeit tidied significantly to give greater visual integrity. The remaining three boundaries, if any form of fencing are to be installed, may likely be a simple post and rail fence, no higher than 1m, to allow for the views across the surrounding agricultural land to remain.

## **8. Appearance & Materials**

The external appearance of the former telephone exchange building is important to its history and will therefore be maintained as such. The style follows a common theme for this type of building but also blends that with the use of locally appropriate materials which gives significant importance to its appearance. The existing red brickwork external walls will be repaired where necessary, inline with the comments made in the Structural Appraisal Report, and the same will be applied to the rosemary tiles to the roof. The windows will be replaced on a like for like basis and the green finish of these will also be incorporated. The new/replacement doors will tie in with the theme of the fenestration generally and will also be finished in the green to match.

The outdoor living space will take some themes from the former telephone exchange, including the use of the red brickwork and the incorporating of some detailing, but it is also intended to be seen as a stand alone structure to emphasise the importance of the existing building by not trying to compete with it. The flat living roof that tops the building will see vegetation be allowed to grow to blend the structure in to its surroundings, the intention being that it will sit comfortably both with the telephone exchange and the surrounding landscape and not detract from either.

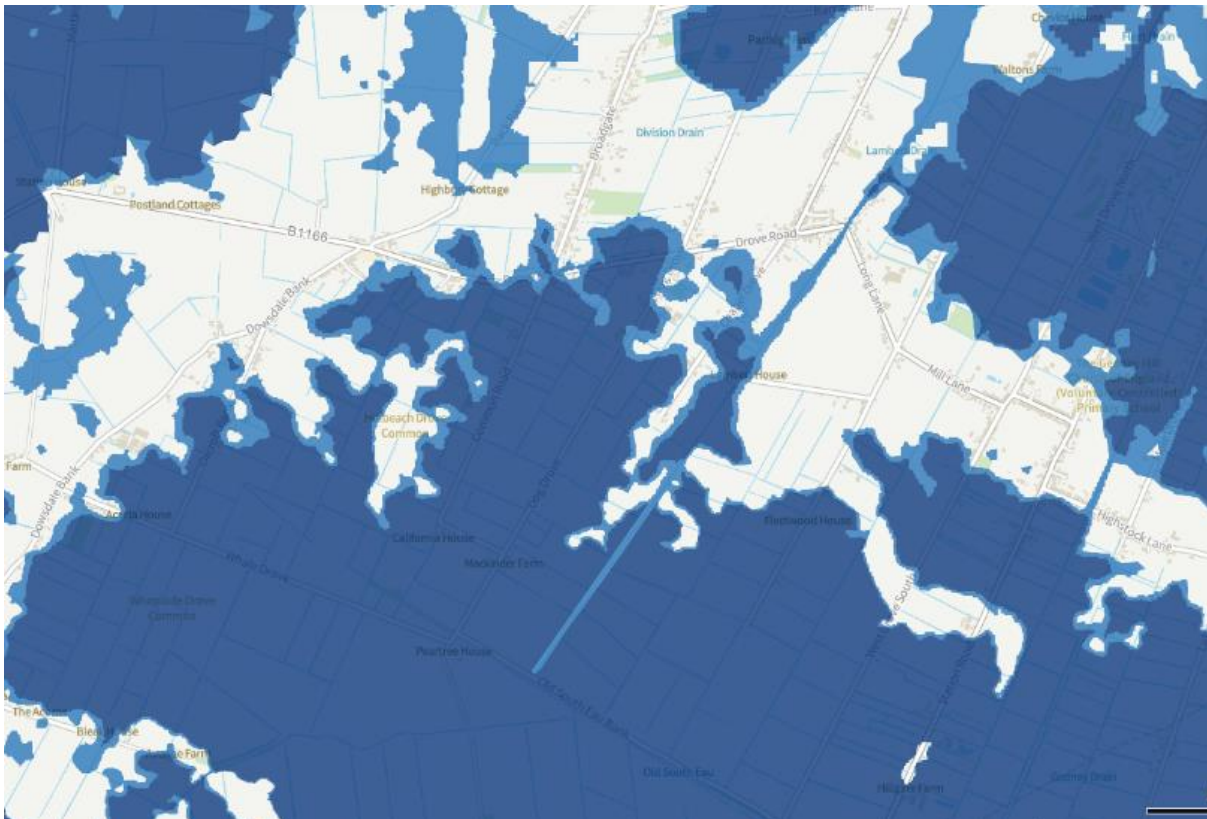
## **9. Highways Implications**

There are no implications to the highway as there is an existing access on to the highway via a small bridge across the dyke. Common Road is also a very infrequently used road so there is likely to never be any conflict between vehicles accessing the site and passing vehicles. There is no kerb

at this location so there will be no requirement for the formation of a dropped kerb, in reality the proposed gravel driveway will likely extend across the access bridge and up to the highway edge.

## 10. Flood Risk

The site sits within Flood Zone 3 as highlighted on the Environment Agencies Flood Map and therefore it is a requirement that an accompanying flood risk assessment be submitted with this Planning application. A brief assessment has been prepared, however, given the proposal is for the conversion of an existing single storey building this is minimal in its content and focuses on efforts that can be made to prevent the danger imposed by the risk of flooding.



*Environment Agencies flood map with the site to the centre.*

## 11. Land Contamination

It is understood that there is no land contamination within the site nor is there any contamination within the building itself.

## 12. Impact on the Surrounding Area

The former Whaplode Drove telephone exchange is a building of historical importance, both to the development of telecommunications in rural areas and the mass employment of female workers, but also locally as the building has a prominent silhouette that can be seen from all directions across the surrounding flat agricultural land. The building has been out of use since its closure in 1983 and has been left to deteriorate over the last 40 years with clear signs of decay and mistreatment over this time. There has been clear vandalism with smashed windows and the surrounding land has been left to overgrow with potential damaging consequences to the structure if left much longer. The cumulation of all of this is that the building generally detracts from its setting in its present state and, if left for much longer, the historical importance of this former telephone exchange could be lost forever.

The conversion of the existing building, as well as the remedial works to the site, will only contribute positively to the local setting. The structure, which has been established to be of historical and architectural merit, both locally and nationally, would be restored and therefore retained and the architectural features which give the building its local distinctiveness will be maintained and improved upon. Given that the building is clearly visible from all directions, these works will improve the street scene and visual amenity from further afield in all directions, something that would not be achieved if the proposal were not to be allowed which can clearly be demonstrated by the lack of use for the building since being taken out of service in the early 80s.

## 13. Justification for the Development

Policy 23 of the South East Lincolnshire Local Plan (SELLP) states that 'Proposals for the conversion of existing buildings which are located outside defined settlement boundaries to residential use will be permitted provided that', they meet the following five criteria:

- The building is structurally sound and capable of conversion without the need for significant extension, alteration or rebuilding;

- The building is of architectural or historic merit or makes a positive contribution to the character of the landscape, to justify conversion to ensure retention;
- The proposal is in keeping with its surroundings;
- The design is sympathetic to the character and appearance of the building in terms of architectural detailing and materials of construction; and
- Development leads to an enhancement of the immediate setting of the building.

These five points are crucial in the justification of any conversion development to residential use within open countryside and will therefore be addressed in turn.

The building has been assessed by a structural engineer, and a Structural Appraisal Report has been prepared and submitted as part of this application. This report generally states that the building is in very good structural condition, much due to the quality of the built form, and with some minor localised repairs would be both suitable and capable of the conversion. A number of the structural issues raised were considered to be a result of external factors, notably the exterior vegetation left to become over established, the removal of which will both improve the structure and the setting of the building at the same time. There is no proposal to extend the telephone exchange, instead a garden structure is proposed to the rear of the building. A number of the architectural features of the telephone exchange will be incorporated in to this, including the use of the red brick and stepped brickwork detailing to ensure some unity between the two structures, but this separation will ensure that the built form of the telephone exchange remains unaltered and the proposed structure will not in any way compete with this. It is appreciated that the floor area of the telephone exchange building does not meet the guidelines set out in the Nationally Described Space Standards, however, it is considered that the retention of the historical built form would be a more important factor and the additional living space to meet these guidelines would be achieved through the flexible garden structure that would be much in line with what would be allowable under permitted development if a dwelling were already in this location.

It is undeniable that the building is of both historical and architectural merit, the former use of the structure brings with it its own history that, if the proposal were not to be allowed, would likely be lost. But the architectural

detailing and quality of materials and built form give the structure great historical merit, even if minimal, that reflects local material use and design. As demonstrated, there is little use for the building given that it has been left to deteriorate for over 40 years since taken out of use and it is therefore likely that it would be lost in the not too distant future due to decay. The justification for the conversion is clear to ensure that this historically important building is retained into the future.

The proposal is in keeping with its surroundings given that the main structure on site is to be retained and this has been constructed in materials that blend in easily with those of the surrounding area. A red brick and rosemary tile roof are very typical for the area and certainly ensure the design is sympathetic to the area. The proposed garden structure is to be built in a similar red brick with similar detailing and, although proposed with a flat roof to demonstrate subservience to the main telephone exchange building, this will be a living roof that will allow the structure to blend in comfortably to the setting of the surrounding agricultural land.

Much as above, the proposal is for the conversion of an existing building which generally is in keeping with the local character and appearance. The proposed garden structure also exemplifies this for the reasons already stated.

The conversion of this former telephone exchange can only be seen as a positive contribution to the immediate setting of the building. Generally speaking bringing the building back in to use will result in the enhancement of the structure as well as the site itself, which will be cleared and maintained in its new domestic drive and garden form. The proposed garden structure will further enhance the setting due to its well thought out design that will both tie in with the existing building but also blend in to the surrounding agricultural landscape.

Given the above justification it can clearly be demonstrated that the proposal complies with policy 23 of the SELLP, both in terms of the conversion, and therefore retention, of the former telephone exchange, but also the erection of the garden structure to the rear. Both elements have been well thought out in terms of their design and impact on the nature of the site and it's surroundings and it is therefore strongly requested that the Local Authority allow this application to be approved.