

# **PLANNING, DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT**

**Internal and external alterations to existing  
building to facilitate use as a B8 data centre**

**at**

**Unit 4, Ashdon Road Commercial  
Centre, Ashdon Road, Saffron  
Walden, CB10 2NQ**

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.0 SITE CONTEXT</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.0 PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5.0 CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>17</b>

---

## **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 Saffron Walden. The infrastructure is to be located within a business unit that forms part of a business/commercial centre, located on the north-eastern edge 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 alongside the following documents and drawings:

- Site Location Plan
- Existing Site Plan
- Existing Site Elevations
- Proposed Site Plan
- Proposed Elevations
- CIL Form
- Application Forms & Ownership Certificates

## 2.0 Site Context

The site comprises of part of a recently completed building within a small commercial centre located on the north-eastern outskirts of Saffron Walden. A new housing development lies to the west, while a large building material facility lies to the north-east of the site. Land becomes more rural to the south and east of the site.

The site lies within a mixed urban and rural setting, being within the urban edge of Saffron Walden, and more open and expansive land to the south and east. The site lies to the east of an un-named road, with access to Ashdon Road a short distance to the south.



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

The site is positioned above the Ashdon Road level, but is visually contained by existing landscaping along the roadside. There is further landscaping to the east that will likely prevent any view towards the site from this aspect, while the large builders merchant building to the north will also prevent views from this aspect.

The building itself is a modern construction finished in grey metal cladding. The frontage features a large roller door and a bank of windows, with the main entrance to the building on the south west elevation. The rear elevation is largely void of features, save for a small bank of windows at first floor level.



View looking north-east towards the site (May 2023)

### Relevant Planning History

There have been two recent planning applications at the site. The first being an outline application submitted in 2020 for the provision of 4x commercial buildings (B1, B2 and/or D2 use), one of which being the unit the subject of this application. The application was approved in February 2021.

A reserved matters application followed the outline consent, and was again approved. The result being a full planning application approval of 4x commercial units, which have recently been implemented.

### 3.0 Planning Policy Assessment

#### Policy Context

The site is located within Uttlesford District Council administrative area.

At a local level, planning policies are contained within the Uttlesford Local Plan (2005), and the Saffron Walden Neighbourhood Plan (2022).

National planning policy in the form of the Revised National Planning Policy Framework is also of relevance, while 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 – Uttlesford Local Plan (2005)**

In the context of the Adopted Local Plan, the site lies within land identified as an employment allocation.

The policies relevant to the site and the proposed development are S1, E2, GEN2, ENV11, and T4 of the District Local Plan. These policies are looked at in more detail below.

**Policy S1** – This policy notes that development should take place within urban boundaries, with most new development to take place in the larger settlements in the district, including Saffron Walden.

**Policy E2** – This policy relates to safeguarding employment land (including land identified as SW6 on the proposals map). The policy notes that non-employment uses will be restricted in allocated areas. The policy does state that the development of employment land for other uses will be permitted if the employment use has been abandoned, or the present use harms the character or amenities of the surrounding area.



**Policy GEN2** – This policy provides general guidance on what constitutes high quality design and sets out a number of criteria that development should comply with. All development proposals are expected to be compatible with the scale, form, layout and appearance of the surroundings.

**Policy ENV11** – This policy advises that noise generating development will not be permitted if it would be liable to adversely affect nearby development.

**Policy T4** – This policy relates to telecommunication structures. Most of the policy appears to relate to mobile phone masts and ancillary structures. As such, the policy does not appear to be relevant to proposals for fibre exchange telecommunications developments, other than criteria c, which requires the siting and appearance of the proposed apparatus to minimise impact on the visual amenity, character and appearance of the surrounding area.

#### Saffron Walden Neighbourhood Plan (2022)

Policy SW10 of the Neighbourhood Plan relating to the provision of high quality communications infrastructure. The policy requires all new homes and commercial premises to make provision for fibre to the premises connectivity, allowing residents and businesses a choice of at least two independent providers.

#### **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<sup>1</sup>... "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 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<sup>2</sup>, 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.

---

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

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

- 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”<sup>3</sup>. A relevant extract notes 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*

---

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

*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 Saffron Walden, and provide full fibre (gigabit) internet services to residents and businesses in the local area.

The applicant (CityFibre) is 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.

Internally, the fibre exchange comprises the construction of a fibre optic cabin unit. A backup generator (only used in the event of a power cut) will also be located within the building. The development also requires air conditioning units to control the temperature of the building, which will be located internally, and ducted to new vents on the walls. The existing first floor will be retained, but unused.

Externally, only minor alterations to the front and rear elevations are proposed. The main changes comprise the installation of 4x vents on the rear elevation to enable fresh air into the building (two of which will replace some existing windows), and to extract hot air to maintain temperature control within the building.

Minor works including the installation of 2x bollards and installing a new security door on the front elevation also form part of the proposal.

### 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).

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.

The industrial estate is allocated as a protected employment area. However, the proposed B8 use remains within employment use, and the use does not conflict with the surroundings. Indeed, the proposed use will provide a benefit to nearby businesses, as well as residential (and other) uses in the area.

### Scale & Appearance

The development would be entirely contained within the existing building. As such, there is no increase in scale of development. The floorspace of the building (circa 322 sq m) provides ample space to allow the data centre use to operate. The existing first floor (circa 167 sq m) will not be used as a result of the development.

The external appearance of the building would remain largely similar. The 4x proposed vents will result in the most notable external alteration to the building. However, the vents are to be placed on a largely blank façade of an industrial building, and would not therefore look out of place relative to the host building, nor would they result in any meaningful change to the character and appearance of the building.

### Visual Impact

The site does not lie in sensitive surroundings, so far as built form is concerned. The surroundings are commercial/industrial uses, with no

buildings of any architectural merit in the area. The nearest residential use is over 100m to the west.

Given the external alterations to the building are relatively small in scale, it is not anticipated that this would result in any adverse visual impact on the surroundings.

### 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. 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.

Vehicular access to the site would be as per the existing arrangement, whereby parking is provided to the front of the building. There is easy access from the site to the wider strategic highway network.

### 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 main source of noise output will derive from the air conditioning units that control the temperatures within the building. No mechanical ventilation is required, and all of the development will take place within the building, thus reducing the external noise associated with the development.

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 on the outskirts of Saffron Walden, and within an urban setting. The proposed development comprises minor alterations to a business unit to facilitate a B8 data centre use within the premises. The development will provide benefits to residents and businesses of Saffron Walden through the provision of full fibre to the premises infrastructure.

The proposed scheme accords with the relevant development control policies in the Uttlesford Local Plan (as well as the Saffron Walden Neighbourhood 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 development will take place within an existing building, with only minor alterations to the external appearance required. The site lies within an urban area, and in a setting where development of this type is considered most appropriate.

The site forms part of an established employment site allocation, but the proposed use as a data centre (Class B8) would be classified as employment use.

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.