Telephone Kiosk

Report to Council – 7 June 2021

**Background**

The telephone kiosk outside the Old Post Office was acquired by the Parish Council under the Post Office’s Adopt-a-kiosk scheme in 2010.

Since then, the kiosk has been used as a newspaper collection point, as a means of displaying information and posters, and as a deposit for second-hand books, which are available for “swaps” between villagers. The Council is responsible for the upkeep of the box and for its running costs – essentially the annual cost of the supply of lighting to the kiosk.

The kiosk was comprehensively taken apart and refurbished by the Council in November 2015 at a cost of £780. In more recent years, funds have notionally been allocated annually to its ongoing maintenance with a view to having it refurbished on a rolling 5 year cycle.

The timing for this was put on hold once the new owners of the Old Post Office developed plans to move the kiosk, as part of the overall improvement scheme for their property for which planning consent was granted in 2017. They now wish to go ahead with these plans and met with 4 members of the Council and the Clerk informally on 19 May to discuss them. The outcome of this discussion is recorded in the copy email attached to this report.

**Current Position**

As owners of the kiosk, a community asset, the Council is responsible for the costs of maintaining it. The cost of this, on an ongoing basis, is estimated today at some £1000 once every five years, and to this end, a notional sum of £200 has been earmarked each year in the 3 year action plan. The Council also settles an annual payment of £57 for the supply of electricity to the kiosk.

In 2020, Council had been advised that the residents at the Old Post Office would like to develop and look after the growing “mini-library” in the kiosk. North Yorkshire County Library Service had offered to help with the supply of stock, although this has not yet happened because of limitations to the service introduced during the pandemic. In preparation for this development, however, Council had been anticipating expenditure of some £300 on investing in internal improvements to the kiosk.

Now that the owners of the Old Post Office have decided to go ahead with the planned move of the kiosk away from the immediate frontage of their property to a new location against the field wall next door, they have explained their difficulties in meeting the full costs of relocation. At the Council meeting in May, members expressed broad support for the principle of helping them in some way. In bringing forward more detailed proposals for assisting them, however, the Council needs to consider its position as a public authority responsible for achieving best value in spending decisions made on behalf of local taxpayers.

**Analysis**

Following adoption of the kiosk, the Council had discussed the possibility of moving it onto the top of the village green, as this was thought to be a more appropriate place for residents to use it once it had been repurposed as a newspaper collection point. This possibility was not pursued for cost reasons.

Not least amongst these is the cost of transferring the power supply when the kiosk is in its new location. The cost of disconnection from the grid amounts currently to some £900+VAT; the costs of reconnection are not known but would probably be in excess of the disconnection charge.

It is these costs which are principally of concern to the owners of the Old Post Office who have been intending to complete the relocation of the kiosk for some time now.

In considering the provision of financial support to them, Council needs to bear in mind that there were no current plans or budgeted allocation for moving costs. When consent was granted for moving it, as part of the planning consent given for the development of the Old Post Office, it had been made clear to the householders that the Council, in not objecting to the move, would expect that all of the costs, including any necessary repairs to put right damage caused during the move, would be met by them. It would not normally be appropriate for the Council to help with the costs of private householders’ development schemes.

However, the relocation of the kiosk does provide us with an opportunity to review its purpose and to upgrade the asset. This process would suggest that there could be significant public benefits associated with moving the kiosk. They are as follows:

* The kiosk will be sited on a new base accessible from the level pavement, making it easier for residents to collect their papers, especially in weather conditions when the steps up to the kiosk in its current position become slippery and dangerous.
* As part of the move, the householders are prepared to refurbish the kiosk at their own expense and also to carry out internal improvement works to accommodate the “mini-library”. This would save on expenditure previously earmarked for maintenance and improvement costs.
* It would be of benefit to local residents to upgrade the lighting system in the kiosk by making use of modern battery powered lighting. This would, in time, create a saving for the Council as the annual payment for the electricity supply would no longer be required.

**Proposals and Recommendation**

Council needs to weigh very carefully the costs of providing financial support for the relocation of the kiosk in terms of the public benefits for the village.

If it is considered appropriate to help the residents financially, the most obvious means of doing so would be by picking up the costs of upgrading the power supply. This would mean paying the one-off costs of disconnection and then investigating and providing an alternative lighting system using technology now available for battery-powered sensor-activated lighting. The immediate cost to be borne would be the £900 disconnection charge. The cost of this would be found from the current budget by re-allocating funds no longer required for maintenance and new internal shelving.

Council is asked to consider and decide on this proposal.

Attachment to Council report

Telephone Kiosk

Email dated 20/5/21 sent to owners of Old Post Office

Hi Rob

Thanks for meeting me and members of the Council last night to discuss plans for moving the telephone kiosk.  We understand that you are hoping to have the box disconnected in early June, and then plan to loosen it from its concrete base, lift it and move it, with the help of a local contractor, on to the new base by the side of the field wall.  We then discussed the poor condition of the kiosk, which has not been maintained in recent years, pending relocation under the planning consent granted to you when you moved into the Old Post Office.  We also discussed the use of the kiosk, going forward, as a “mini-library”, as well as a collection point for newspapers, and noted that it will need some improvements inside to accommodate the display of donated books.

The Parish Council supports the relocation of the box, as it will be to the benefit of local residents to be able to access it direct from the pavement with no steps to negotiate.  The Council also supports the development of the “mini-library” and sees this with the potential to build into a valued community service, extending the use of the telephone kiosk in its new location to a much wider cross section of village residents.

For these reasons, the Council, in principle, wishes to support your plans and, at the next meeting on 7 June, will be considering and confirming the best means of doing this.  As you are aware, the kiosk is owned by the Council as a community asset, and we are responsible for its maintenance and running costs.   The supply of power to the kiosk is one of the running costs associated with its use by residents collecting newspapers during the dark winter months.  Since moving the box involves disconnecting the power supply, which is the Council’s responsibility, we will need to consider the requirement for this service, going forward, in the light of technology now available for battery powered lighting.

Previously, in its 3 year action plan, the Council had anticipated expenditure on upkeep of the kiosk on an annual basis, and was also expecting to consider funding proposals for internal improvements.

We now understand that you will be prepared, at your own cost, and with the help of local volunteers, to refurbish the box and to improve the internal shelving for display of donated books.  This will clearly be of benefit to local residents, as expenditure notionally earmarked for maintaining the kiosk over the last 3 years can be re-allocated.  The Council may wish to consider taking this opportunity to upgrade the lighting system in the kiosk.  In the meantime, please could you invite the grid operators to send to us their invoice for disconnecting the current supply, which should properly be made out to “Draughton Parish Council”, owners of the asset.