

Earley Town Council

Amenities and Leisure Committee Meeting – 13th September 2023

Agenda Item 13.

TELEPHONE BOX – SILVERDALE ROAD

At its meeting on 5th July 2023, the Amenities and Leisure Committee discussed the future of the red telephone box in Silverdale Road (adjacent to the parade of shops) which had been adopted by ETC to prevent BT removing this iconic structure.

Councillors have had several discussions about how best to repurpose the structure and have looked at examples of repurposing from other local councils around the country. The kiosk is in poor condition and will need repairs carried out but the Town Council has already repurposed the red telephone box in Wychwood Crescent to house a defibrillator and so has the supplier contacts and experience to do such work. Councillors were mindful that the position of the kiosk makes it very visible to pupils and parents of both Aldryngton Primary School and Maiden Erlegh School and were keen to find a use appropriate to this. It was decided at the July meeting that the kiosk would remain in its current location as moving it would incur significant specialist costs and the structure would lose its power supply.

The Committee agreed that Reading University be contacted to explore some kind of partnership working project. The Town Clerk contacted Molli from External Relations at the University, suggesting the idea whilst acknowledging that the summer break at Reading University would probably mean few responses would be received until the autumn. She circulated my email to various departments at the university and several expressions of interest were received from subject leaders within days. Respondents were excited by the idea of such a project and keen to work with the Town Council. Initial suggestions have included a project by the Typography & Graphics department, a Climate Education kiosk, a well-being project using technology for mindful meditation and an art gallery space. We have agreed to talk further later in September once classes have resumed.

In the meantime, requests have been received by the Town Clerk from two WBC councillors, Cllr Stephen Newton and Cllr Norman Jorgensen following a site meeting they attended with WBC highways officers, MERA and others (no ETC representatives were in attendance as ETC were not informed of the meeting until after the fact). The borough councillors have asked that ETC consider removing the telephone kiosk, either storing it or placing it on another site. They suggest that the kiosk is in poor condition, is not suitable for alternative use at this location and restricts the flow of children coming out of school. The secretary of MERA has also been in contact following that same meeting with a similar request, suggesting that the retention of the kiosk would hamper highways measures intended to improve safety in the area. There has been no contact from WBC highways department nor has any request been made by them.

Jo Friend
Town Clerk
September 2023