

North Yorkshire Council

Report of the Assistant Director, Place Shaping & Growth, Community Development

16 April 2026

BT Payphones

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval of the response to be forwarded to BT regarding the April 2026 batch of BT “last at site” payphone removals throughout North Yorkshire.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 Under the Universal Service Conditions there is a specific approach that BT must take when proposing the removal of a “last at site” payphone. The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the North Yorkshire Council response to be forwarded directly to BT regarding the April 2026 batch of BT “last at site” payphone removals throughout North Yorkshire (outside of the North York Moors National Park Authority area and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority area). North Yorkshire Council is a consultee on this matter. The final decision whether to remove a “last at site” payphone or not rests with BT.
- 2.2 In January 2026, BT informed North Yorkshire Council that they had placed further 90-day notices setting out their intention to remove some more “last at site” payphones across the North Yorkshire Council area (Appendix 1). The number of payphones subject to this report and seeking approval of the draft North Yorkshire Council decision to be supplied to BT is 9.
- 2.3 The proposed NYC responses set out a summary of the responses received to consultation undertaken by North Yorkshire Council to gather evidence to support or object to the proposed payphone removals. The response also sets out other evidence gathered by the Planning Policy and Place team.

3.0 BACKGROUND

Legislation

- 3.1 Under the Communications Act 2003, within North Yorkshire, BT are the designated telephony Universal Service Provider. Under the Universal Service Conditions they are required to ensure the adequate provision, repair and maintenance of public call boxes. There is a specific approach that BT must take when proposing the removal of a “last at site” payphone.

The Payphone and Telephone Box Removal Process

- 3.2 The guidance from Ofcom for the removal of payphones and telephone boxes was updated in June 2022. These changes have been made in response to the migration of telephones to Internet Protocol (IP) technology as the old telephone network was expected to be retired by December 2025. This means that public call boxes will need to be upgraded with new equipment to ensure they still work after this deadline. This change will have a significant effect on the future of public call boxes.

- 3.3 Ofcom have changed the decision-making process to make it easier for BT to remove unused or little used payphones and their telephone boxes but, strengthened the process for those that are still needed. The revised criteria protects “last at a site” payphones and telephone boxes, provides more flexibility on the services provided by public call boxes and ensures that public call boxes continue to work in the event of a power cut.
- 3.4 The “last at a site” payphone and telephone box is defined as greater than 400 metre walking distance from the next nearest PCB (Public Call Box). This is probably the case for most of the payphones and telephone boxes in North Yorkshire.
- 3.5 BT can only remove the “last at a site” payphone where:
1. all four mobile network providers have coverage at the site; or
 2. it is not located in an area with a high frequency of accidents or suicides; or
 3. the payphone has been used to make fewer than 52 calls over the past 12 months (i.e. the equivalent of one call per week) prior to the start of the representation period; or
 4. there is no other evidence of a reasonable need for the Public Call Box at the site.
- 3.6 The decision-making process has also been simplified. There is now only one 90-day consultation period which starts when BT displays a Notice in the PCB and gives written notice to the Local Authority. The local authority has 90 days in which to undertake consultation, gather evidence and report back to BT their comments, decision and those comments of any respondents. The Local Authority can still propose to object to the removal of a payphone, but it will be for BT to decide whether they remove the payphone and kiosk or not based on their information and that provided by the Local Authority. The decision whether to remove a “last at site” payphone or not rests with BT and is final.
- 3.7 The BT consultation also gives Parish, Town and City Councils the opportunity to adopt a telephone box for another use. BT advises that if any Parish/Town or City Councils wish to register their interest to adopt a kiosk they need to send this request to: payphones@bt.com, within the 90-day consultation period as BT would not actively approach them.
- 3.8 The North Yorkshire Council response to BT is required to be provided to BT to meet the deadline posted in the 90-day notices, in line with the Universal Service Requirements and in line with the Ofcom regulations and guidance provided in [Review of the telephony universal service obligation](#).
- 3.9 North Yorkshire Council needs to provide a considered response for each of the identified BT Payphones, whether to support the proposed removal or to object to the proposed removal within the deadline for responses to BT. The final decision rests with BT and is final.

The current (April) 2026 batch of BT “last at site” payphone removals

- 3.10 In January 2026, BT informed North Yorkshire Council that they had placed 90-day notices setting out their intention to remove a further 9 “last at site” payphones across the North Yorkshire Council area (Appendix 1). The Parish and Town Councils affected are shown on the plan in Appendix 2 (please note that the Parishes of Grimston, Towton and Kirby Wharfe and North Milford are one Parish Council and it is the payphone in Towton that is the subject of this consultation).

4.0 NYC CONSULTATION, EVIDENCE GATHERED, ISSUES AND RESPONSE

Consultation Undertaken

- 4.1 The main purpose of the consultation is to provide evidence back to BT with respect to the 4 criteria set out in para 3.5 above. To aid with the decision-making process, Appendix 2 sets out on a map those parishes containing telephones identified for removal in 2025. Those parishes where there is more than one “last at site” payphone to be considered are shown in red.
- 4.2 North Yorkshire Council contacted the relevant Parish, City or Town Councils regarding the potential removal of the “last at site” PCBs in their area. The Council sought information with respect to the 4 criteria set out in para 3.5 as well as whether the Parish, Town or City Council was considering adopting the kiosk for another use. The relevant Parish, City or Town Councils were also asked to display a North Yorkshire Council Customer Notice advising of the 10 March 2026 deadline for the North Yorkshire Council consultation responses.
- 4.3 North Yorkshire Police were also advised of the current batch of BT payphones identified for removal. Responses were specifically sought regarding accident hotspots and any other evidence of a reasonable need for the Public Call Box at the site.
- 4.4 Members of the community provided responses to North Yorkshire Council.

Evidence Gathered and Issues Raised

- 4.5 A summary of the responses received, together with the relevant information gathered to support the Council’s decision in line with the 4 criteria set out in para 3.5 is set out in Appendix 3. This includes which kiosks are potentially to be adopted by the community.
- 1 “all four mobile network providers have coverage at the site”**
- 4.6 Poor or no mobile signal is identified for each PCB and settlement using the Ofcom mobile and broadband online checker for each of the 4 mobile providers (set out in Appendix 4). Indoor and outdoor signal as well as voice and data were checked. Providing a settlement consideration is considered to be more realistic and appropriate than just the signal provision at the payphone location. The local community will be aware which mobile service providers have a better-quality signal for their settlement and will purchase mobile service provider contracts appropriately. However, visitors to the region may not be aware of weaker signal areas for different service providers, so if an incident arises that does need emergency or helpline advice, they may not be able to use their own mobile phone. Emergency calls can be made on any mobile phone network, not just your own. But if no networks have any signal, a message stating “no reception” will be displayed and emergency calls cannot be made. This applies to many parts of rural North Yorkshire.
- 2 “it is not located in an area with a high frequency of accidents or suicides”**
- 4.7 BT provided information regarding the number of calls made to helplines in the past 12 months (set out in Appendix 3). Once again North Yorkshire Police have been approached and provided information regarding the number of incidents recorded by the police at the postcode for the PCB in the previous 12 months relating to Road Traffic Collision and Concern for Safety as well as the number of calls received by North Yorkshire Police from each payphone.

3 “the payphone has been used to make fewer than 52 calls over the past 12 months (i.e. the equivalent of one call per week) prior to the start of the representation period”

- 4.8 BT provided the number of calls made from each payphone over the past 12 months (set out in Appendix 3).

4 “there is no other evidence of a reasonable need for the Public Call Box at the site”

Heritage and Conservation Concerns

- 4.9 Listed Building status and whether the payphone is within a Conservation Area were also checked. For those PCBs that are Listed Buildings, unless there is evidence provided to retain the use of PCB, the telephony will be removed by BT, but the kiosk will remain. For those Kiosks that are Listed Buildings, and where the local community has expressed an interest to adopt, the kiosk will be retained and will be reused for an alternative use. However, for those Listed buildings where the community has not expressed an interest to adopt, BT will retain the kiosk, it will remain as a feature in the street scene, but it will be locked by BT.
- 4.10 The only exception to this would be if listed building consent had been granted. Removal of the kiosk in the absence of such consent would constitute a criminal offence. Although the telephony equipment itself will be a modern replacement that is not contemporaneous with the kiosk, in legal terms it still forms part of the listed structure. National Guidance from Historic England in [Consent for Adapting K6 Telephone Kiosks | Historic England](#), sets out that Historic England would normally only consider commenting on a listed building consent application for works to a listed kiosk if it was being proposed for removal, not for lesser works. This means total loss in NPPF terms (Policy HE5 NPPF Dec 2025). Therefore, it is for BT to check whether the removal of the telephone equipment would be deemed to affect the character of the kiosk as a building of special architectural or historic interest.
- 4.11 The loss of the equipment from the box will need to be considered in the consent process as to whether the loss of the equipment affects the historic and architectural interest of the box and whether other uses are proposed to re-use the phone box. The applicant will need to undertake that assessment. Listed Building Consent will be needed to remove any telephony equipment from a listed phone box. As would any other physical alterations to the phone box.
- 4.12 If it is deemed that the removal of the equipment will affect the character of the listed structure, listed building consent will be required from the relevant Local Planning Authority. Therefore, the removal of the telephony from a Listed kiosk will require Listed Building consent.
- 4.13 Some of the BT payphones are traditional red kiosks but, are not Listed Buildings. For these kiosks, the contribution of that payphone kiosk to the landscape is considered in terms of the setting of a Listed Building or a conservation area. For those kiosks that are “traditional” red kiosks that are not Listed Buildings, if BT considers that there is insufficient evidence to retain the payphone and the community has not expressed an interest to adopt, they will be removed by BT.

Visitor and outdoor recreation information

- 4.14 North Yorkshire attracts many visitors and businesses to the area. There is the potential for increased injury and risk of accident when enjoying the outdoor landscapes and activities available.

Other information relevant

- 4.15 Consultation responses included information stating concerns for river safety.

Adoption Results

- 4.16 The response from the Parish, City and Town Councils regarding adoption is included within the consideration set out in Appendix 3.

North Yorkshire Council Response

- 4.17 The North Yorkshire Council response is set out in Appendix 3. North Yorkshire Council objects in the first instance to the removal of each of the “last at site” payphones due to the cumulative impact of the “last at site” payphone removals across North Yorkshire and the relevant evidence provided for each payphone with respect to the 4 criteria set out in para 3.5. The evidence produced and information provided for the retention of the payphones as well as information from North Yorkshire Police and comments from the Parish Councils and members of the community to support this decision.
- 4.18 However, North Yorkshire Council supports those Parish, Town and City Councils that have started the process or have advised North Yorkshire Council that as a last resort, they would be willing to adopt the kiosk for another use should BT consider the evidence and to continue and remove the payphone.
- 4.19 As well as further information and comments received from members of the community and the various Parish, Town and City Councils, information previously raised by North Yorkshire Council regarding the removal of “last at site” payphones is set out once again in the response introduction. This information is applicable for each of the payphones and remains relevant and important. Concerns previously raised include:
- BT’s move to Digital Voice - during power outages, unless there is a reliable/useable mobile phone signal then the BT PCB will become the only means of making emergency calls. The various storms over recent months once again proved the vulnerability of many parts of the North Yorkshire area with many villages suffering power cuts.
 - Issues around emergency planning and safeguarding:
 - Poor mobile phone coverage and access to networks
 - Power outages cause genuine concern.
 - Safeguarding concerns including domestic violence, self-neglect, suicide and other abuse
 - Ageing population
 - Rural isolation
 - North Yorkshire is a very popular visitor destination with large areas of rural landscapes and activities to enjoy. Unfortunately, incidents and accidents needing emergency or helpline advice will happen, and North Yorkshire Council would urge BT to carefully consider the potential impact that removing a “last at site” payphone could have on visitors to the region and the community.
 - Mobile disability gap. Demographic differences across North Yorkshire, such as where there is a distinct older, disabled or vulnerable population which could be less likely to have a mobile phone.
 - Areas of a high visitor population could be more vulnerable as visitors do not have access to a landline or have a mobile phone that cannot be used in each location due to differences in mobile service provision across North Yorkshire. These visitors may also have disabilities.

What happens next?

- 4.20 BT will consider the North Yorkshire Council response for each “last at site” payphone together with any further requests received seeking adoption of the kiosk from the community not recorded in this report. BT will publish their decision. The decision by BT is final. However, within 21 days of receiving the BT decision, North Yorkshire Council have the opportunity to seek an independent review of the BT decision.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 5.1 The decisions by North Yorkshire Council to object to the “last at site” payphone removals will help the Council to deliver its Corporate Plan Vision to build on North Yorkshire’s natural capital, strong local economy and resilient communities, to improve the way local services are delivered and support a good quality of life. The retention of BT payphones across the authority will help to deliver the spatial elements of the Council’s ambitions in relation to Place and Environment, Economy, Health and Wellbeing and People.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 The Council has a duty to undertake consultation and respond to BT within the 90-day deadline in line with the specific approach that BT must take when proposing the removal of a “last at site” payphone set out in the Ofcom guidance. Under the Universal Service Conditions BT are required to ensure the adequate provision, repair and maintenance of public call boxes.
- 6.2 The alternative option is to not respond to this current “last at site” BT payphone removal. This would not be in the public interest as the community are not informed and as such are not given the opportunity to be involved, respond and potentially adopt a kiosk for another use should BT continue to remove the payphone based on no further evidence provided.

7.0 IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES/ORGANISATIONS

- 7.1 The response to BT has involved the input of information from other teams within the Planning Service and wider Council teams. The response also involved the gathering of evidence from North Yorkshire Police as well as the relevant Parish, Town and City Councils.
- 7.2 The decision by BT could have a potential negative impact on the rural communities for the removal of telephony, but can also be seen as positive factor when the kiosk is adopted to another use for the community, such as the site for a defibrillator, new small community/volunteer library or book exchange, or tourist information point.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from responding to the consultation.
- 8.2 The resources for delivering the response to BT, for “last at site” payphone consultation and management of the process, are included in the Council’s existing budget for service delivery of the Planning Policy and Place team.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The requirement to respond to BT is set out in the Ofcom guidance. Under the Universal Service Conditions BT are required to ensure the adequate provision, repair and maintenance of public call boxes.

- 9.2 North Yorkshire Council are a consultee. The “last at site” payphones and kiosks are the property of BT. There are no legal implications for North Yorkshire Council.
- 9.3 Any legal implications regarding the retention of a Kiosk:
- identified as a Listed Building that subsequently has the telephony removed but is not adopted remain with BT.
 - Identified for adoption transfer to the community group adopting the kiosk.

10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 An impact screening assessment has been undertaken (attached at Appendix 4). The response by North Yorkshire Council raises the following equality concerns along with evidence to support our response.
- Emergency planning and safeguarding:
 - Poor mobile phone coverage and access to networks
 - Power outages cause genuine concern.
 - Safeguarding concerns including domestic violence, self-neglect, suicide and other abuse
 - Ageing population
 - Rural isolation
 - Mobile disability gap. Demographic differences across North Yorkshire, such as where there is a distinct older, disabled or vulnerable population which could be less likely to have a mobile phone.
 - Areas of a high visitor population could be more vulnerable as visitors do not have access to a landline or have a mobile phone that cannot be used in each location due to differences in mobile service provision across North Yorkshire. These visitors may also have disabilities.
- 10.2 The decision whether to remove a “last at site” payphone or not rests with BT.

11.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 A climate change screening assessment has been undertaken (attached in Appendix 5). The proposed North Yorkshire Council response to BT includes reference to the use of the BT payphones:
- Adoption to another use by the community
 - resilience to adverse weather/climate events through power outages and extreme weather events
 - heritage and landscape.
 - Many of the BT payphone kiosks are Listed Buildings and some of the BT payphone kiosks are within the setting of a Listed Building. BT have advised that should they make the decision to continue to remove a payphone that:
 - For those Listed building kiosks where the community do not wish to adopt the payphone for another use, the telephony will be removed and the kiosk will be locked. Maintenance of the kiosk remains with BT.
 - For those Listed Building kiosks where the community wish to adopt, the telephony is removed and the kiosk will remain as a feature in the landscape with its new use.
 - Some of the BT payphones are traditional red kiosks, but are not Listed Buildings. For these kiosks, the contribution of that payphone kiosk to the landscape is considered in terms of the setting of a Listed Building or a conservation area.

11.2 It is recognised in the initial climate change impact assessment that should BT consider that the evidence and response from North Yorkshire Council is not sufficient to retain the payphones in use that there could be:

1. a slight increase in waste due to the recycling / disposal of material from those payphones and kiosks that BT will remove entirely and from the removal of telephony from those kiosks where the kiosk is to be adopted for an alternative use by the community or for those kiosks that are a Listed Building.
2. A decrease in resilience of the community to adverse weather/climate events through power outages and extreme weather events.
3. A decrease in the heritage and landscape with the potential removal of red non-Listed Building kiosks from the landscape.

12.0 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 Sufficient staffing and resources to undertake this work are in place.

13.0 ICT IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The consultation and response to BT is reliant on software to support public consultation, to draft responses, to respond to queries, to use GIS for the mapping and a range of service specific monitoring systems for the provision of evidence necessary.

14.0 CONCLUSIONS

14.1 The North Yorkshire Council response to BT regarding the “last at site” payphones (April 2026) is an important opportunity to support the Council's place making and sustainable growth ambitions and to seek to meet the needs of our communities. However, the final decision to retain or remove the payphone and kiosk based on the evidence provided by the community and North Yorkshire Council remains with BT.

15.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

15.1 To ensure that North Yorkshire Council and its communities provide a timely response to BT for their decision.

16.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

16.1 That the Corporate Director Community Development in consultation with the Executive Member for Open to Business, approve the North Yorkshire Council response on BT payphones April 2026 (attached at Appendix 3) subject to any modifications as discussed in the meeting.

APPENDICES:

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| Appendix 1 | Information supplied by BT |
| Appendix 2 | Plan showing the parishes containing “last at site” payphones identified by BT for removal |
| Appendix 3 | North Yorkshire Council response to BT |
| Appendix 4 | Equality Impact Screening Assessment |
| Appendix 5 | Climate Change Screening Assessment |

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

- North Yorkshire Council (2024) Statement of Community Involvement
- Ofcom (8 June 2022) Review of the Telephony Universal Service Obligation
- Report of Corporate Director of Community Development in consultation with Executive Member for Open to Business 4 June 2025 BT Payphone Removals
- Report of Corporate Director of Community Development in consultation with Executive Member for Open to Business 12 August 2025 BT Payphone Removals

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.