

Planning Committee

01 April 2022

Agenda item number 7.2

BA/2022/0033/FUL The Quay, The Street, Thurne

Report by Planning Officer

Proposal

Change of use of decommissioned telephone box to a mini-visitor information hub

Applicant

Rob Leigh on behalf of Broads Authority

Recommendation

Approve subject to conditions

Reason for referral to committee

Broads Authority development

Application target date

18 March 2022

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1. Description of site and proposals

- 1.1. The site comprises a red telephone box located in the village of Thurne. The telephone box is a K6 kiosk made from cast iron with a timber door situated on a grass verge to the east of The Street, which is the road which runs perpendicular to the Thurne Quay. The phone box is within the grounds of the public toilets and close to Thurne Parish notice board. The Lion Inn public house lies to the north east and a linear grouping of residential properties extend northeast.
- 1.2. This application seeks consent to change the use of the telephone box to a mini visitor hub. The telephone box is currently undergoing restoration. The internal equipment of the phone box would be removed and information displays would be installed including a ‘sound box’, where the public can listen to a range of nature sounds, commentary, and other content relevant to the Broads. Broads National Park branding would be applied to the interior of the phone box. The Broads Authority would remain owners of the box and be responsible for maintenance.

2. Site history

- 2.1. No recent planning history

3. Consultations received

Parish Council

- 3.1. No comment

The Broads Society

- 3.2. Support

Heritage Planning Officer

- 3.3. The application site contains a K6 Red Heritage Telephone Box at Thurne Staithe.
- 3.4. The K6 was one of eight styles of telephone kiosk introduced by The Post Office between 1926 and 1983. The K6 was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of the coronation of King George V in 1935 and now the K6 has come to represent the red Telephone Box of Britain due to its popularity. Due to changing technologies British Telecom (BT) have decided to decommission a number of kiosks, which ultimately results in their removal in many cases. However, BT

are promoting the adoption of redundant kiosks by local communities and organisations, finding new uses for them, and ensuring they can be retained.

- 3.5. The kiosk at Thurne is a particularly nice example, in a well visited area (at the head of the main staithe; in an area containing the public WC, post box and village notice board) and makes a positive contribution to the character of the area. The renovation and re-use of the box as a Broads information sound box is supported and will secure its retention, allowing the history of British communications to be read whilst also offering informative material on the Broads National Park.

4. Representations

- 4.1. No representations have been received.

5. Policies

- 5.1. The adopted development plan policies for the area are set out in the [Local Plan for the Broads](#) (adopted 2019).
- 5.2. The following policies were used in the determination of the application:
 - DM11 – Heritage Assets
 - DM12 – Re-use of Historic Buildings
 - DM21 – Amenity
 - DM44 – Visitor and Community Facilities and Services

6. Assessment

Principle of development

- 6.1. The application represents a change of use of an existing community facility/service and the principle of the development will be considered against Policy DM44 (Visitor and Community Facilities and Services). Firstly, considering the loss of the telephone use, the existing telephone box has been decommissioned and is no longer in use as a telephone box. To decommission it was a commercial decision by BT based on recent levels of use and is not a matter over which the Authority (or any other third party) has any control and its retention as a phone box is not an option. When a telephone box is decommissioned, BT will offer it for adoption by local councils, community groups or third parties for an alternative use. Given that it has been decommissioned and no other party apart from the Broads Authority has come forward with an alternative use it is reasonable to conclude that there is no community aspiration to take it on.
- 6.2. Policy DM44 supports the development of facilities which are educational in nature, or relate to the promotion of the conservation of the Broads environment. The proposed displays within the telephone box would be educational and would promote the conservation of the Broads environment. The restoration of the telephone box is

welcome as this would return the box to its former glory and the provision of a small visitor centre displaying educational content is particularly supported.

- 6.3. Prior to submitting this planning application, the Applicant contacted the Parish Council to make them aware of the intention to convert the phone box into a mini- visitor hub and the Parish Council responded confirming their support for this. This demonstrates consultation with the community regarding the change of use, as required by Policy DM44. The proposed development is in accordance with Policy DM44 and the principle of the development is therefore considered to be acceptable.

Historic Environment

- 6.4. The telephone box is a non-designated heritage asset by virtue of its historic and cultural significance. Policy DM11(Heritage assets) seeks to preserve the significance of historic and cultural heritage assets; and those elements that give the Broads its distinctive character. While the telephone box is not unique to the Broads, the siting of these boxes in rural villages is a quintessentially British image. Through advancements in modern technology, many telephone boxes across the country have become redundant and have typically, like the box at Thurne, fallen into disrepair.
- 6.5. Policy DM12 (Re-use of historic buildings), is relevant as, although instead of relating to historic buildings, in this case the re-use of the heritage asset will be considered. DM12 states when re-using heritage assets, the building or structure should remain in the use for which it was originally designed. Where this is not possible, employment, recreation or tourism uses will be the next preference. The proposed change of use would promote recreation and support tourism in the area.
- 6.6. The change of use would not require any operational development in order to introduce the new use; therefore, a structural survey is not considered to be needed to support the application.
- 6.7. The proposed change of use would be encouraging people to visit the telephone box and generate a new appreciation for the heritage asset. The application is considered to be acceptable in terms of DM11 (Heritage Assets) and DM12 (Re-use of Historic Building).

Amenity of residential properties

- 6.8. Considering amenity, the proposed change of use would be likely to attract more people to the telephone box thus increasing the intensity of the use; the public space on which the box sits is also used as a parish notice board and public toilets. The proposed change of use is not considered to have a detrimental impact on the amenity of the occupiers of the nearby properties. The proposed change of use is considered to be acceptable in terms of DM21 (Amenity).

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. The change of use would provide a new community asset displaying educational information about the Broads; while maintaining and preserving the K6 telephone box

kiosk, a local heritage asset. The principle of the change of use is considered to be acceptable and the impact the change of use would have on the historic environment (heritage asset) is acceptable. It is not considered there would be any adverse impacts on neighbouring amenity as a result of the change of use. The scheme has been appraised against the Local Plan for the Broads 2019 and is found to be in accordance with the relevant policies.

8. Recommendation

8.1. That planning permission be approved subject to conditions.

9. Reason for recommendation

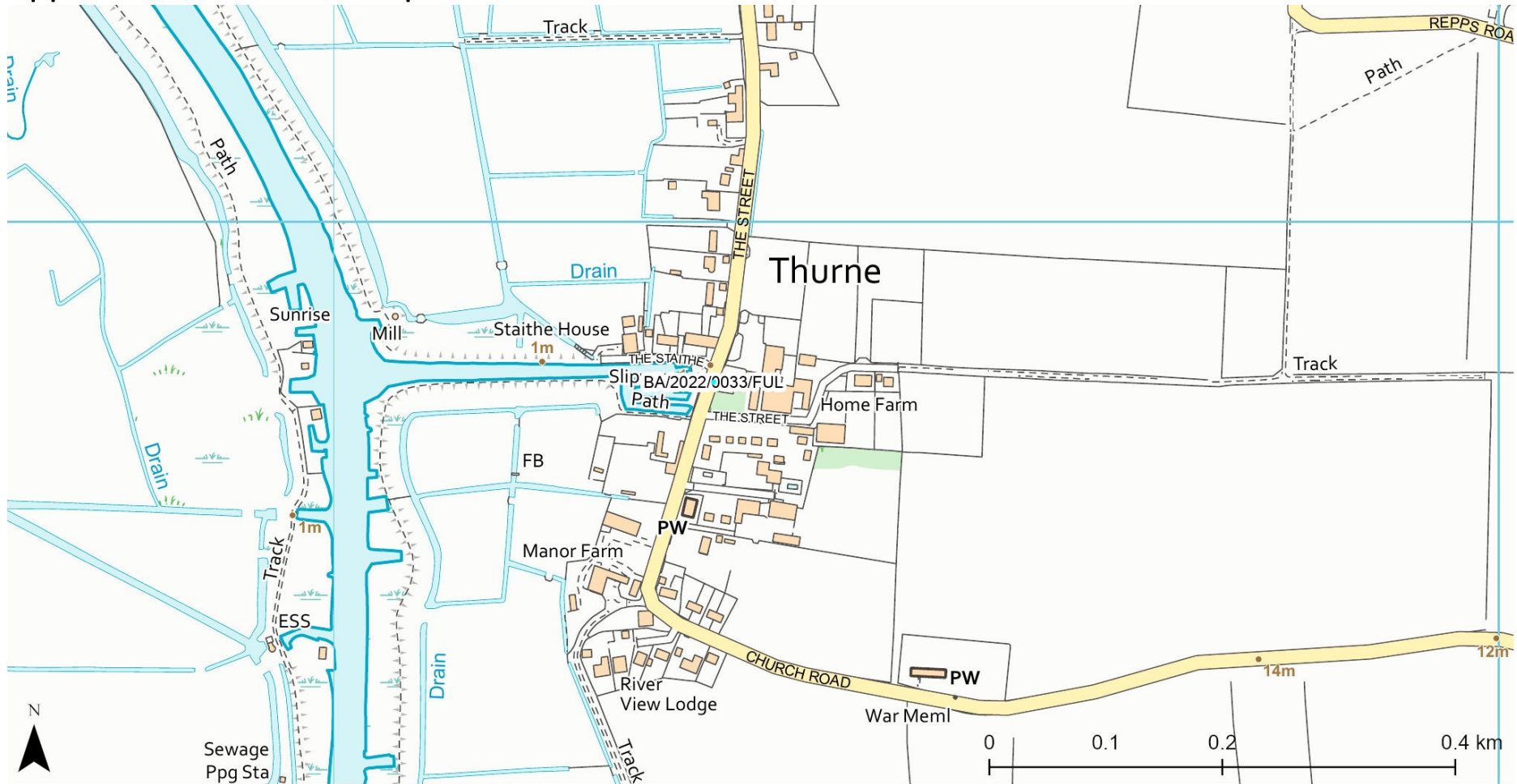
9.1. The proposed change of use is in accordance with Policies DM44, DM11, DM12, and DM21 of the Local Plan for the Broads 2019 and is considered to be a sustainable form of development.

Author: Calum Pollock

Date of report: 21 March 2022

Appendix 1 – Location map

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