# Oxford’s red telephone boxes find new life as community hubs amid sharp usage decline



An investigation has unveiled the diminishing state of Oxford's iconic red telephone boxes, once integral to public communication. Renowned for their distinct K2 and K6 designs by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, these kiosks have become cherished, if increasingly neglected, landmarks. A notable example is a K6 box located on St Giles’ East, which is missing several glass panes and, alarmingly, its entire door. This decline is underscored by British Telecommunications (BT) data indicating that usage of public telephones has plummeted by approximately 90% over the last decade.

Despite the gloom surrounding many of these kiosks, innovative adaptations are emerging. One standout is the K6 box on Pembroke Street, repurposed by the Oxford Story Museum as an engaging display. Known colloquially as The Story Mouseum, this transformed space has hosted a variety of themed exhibitions since its acquisition in 2011. Shona Blake, an exhibitions assistant at the museum, noted the positive response from the public. “There’s often someone photographing it as they pass by, and it always raises smiles from children and grown-ups,” she shared. Regular maintenance is required to ensure it remains in good condition, as the museum updates the display frequently.

The community spirit surrounding these kiosks extends beyond Oxford, with creative uses popping up across the country. For instance, in the village of Stanton St John, the local pub, The Talkhouse, derived its name from the adjacent phone box. Owner Nick Duval recounted how the pub took ownership of the kiosk, which now houses a defibrillator, enhancing its utility and community value. The transformation was initiated when BT announced plans to remove the booth, prompting Duval’s proactive engagement with the company.

According to multiple reports, there is a growing trend towards repurposing these historic phone boxes for various community functions. Initiatives led by the Community Heartbeat Trust have further popularised the conversion of these booths into emergency defibrillator stations, book-swap points, and even small business outlets. For example, some areas have embraced the idea of micro-libraries, transforming the boxes into spaces where residents can borrow and exchange books. Locations like Marton cum Grafton in North Yorkshire and several boroughs in London have successfully implemented these adaptations, fostering a sense of community interaction and utility.

The resurgence of these telephone boxes as multifunctional assets underscores a broader cultural shift. Beyond their initial purpose of facilitating communication, they now serve vital roles in community wellness and engagement, representing an interesting blend of heritage and modern needs. As local authorities and communities continue to embrace the ‘Adopt a Kiosk’ scheme, these once-cherished icons are reclaiming relevance, adapting to the demands of contemporary society while preserving their nostalgic charm.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25218594.oxford-putting-citys-iconic-phone-boxes-new-use/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/england-iconic-red-phone-booths-get-a-second-life/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25218594.oxford-putting-citys-iconic-phone-boxes-new-use/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/aug/27/ringing-the-changes-how-britains-red-phone-boxes-are-being-given-new-life), [[5]](https://www.forbesindia.com/article/lifes/britains-iconic-red-phone-boxes-get-a-new-lease-of-lifes/89315/1)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/britain-red-telephone-box-reinvented/index.html), [[6]](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-17/britains-redundant-red-telephone-boxes-get-makeover/8168034)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/aug/27/ringing-the-changes-how-britains-red-phone-boxes-are-being-given-new-life), [[7]](https://www.defibmachines.co.uk/5-alternative-uses-for-a-red-phone-box/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/25218594.oxford-putting-citys-iconic-phone-boxes-new-use/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/aug/27/ringing-the-changes-how-britains-red-phone-boxes-are-being-given-new-life> - This article discusses the transformation of Britain's iconic red telephone boxes into various community assets. Many have been repurposed as defibrillator stations, with the Community Heartbeat Trust leading the initiative by advising local authorities on conversions. Additionally, some boxes have been converted into book-swap points, serving as miniature libraries. The village of Marton cum Grafton in North Yorkshire pioneered this in 2010, followed by another in the London borough of Lewisham in 2013. These adaptations have revitalised the phone boxes, making them valuable community resources.
3. <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/britain-red-telephone-box-reinvented/index.html> - This piece highlights the innovative repurposing of Britain's red telephone boxes. In Lewisham, London, a phone box was transformed into a micro-library, fostering community interaction as locals use it simultaneously, leading to conversations among strangers. Other conversions include ATMs, tourist information centres, and nature hubs providing information on local flora and fauna. These adaptations have breathed new life into the traditional phone boxes, integrating them into modern community life.
4. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/england-iconic-red-phone-booths-get-a-second-life/> - This report covers the resurgence of England's red telephone boxes, which have been refurbished and repurposed for various uses. Local libraries have utilised them for book exchanges, and some have been converted into defibrillator stations. Other creative uses include coffee shops, hat stalls, florists, salad bars, and even anti-social discos. These transformations have given the historic phone booths a new lease of life, serving diverse community needs.
5. <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/lifes/britains-iconic-red-phone-boxes-get-a-new-lease-of-lifes/89315/1> - This article discusses the revival of Britain's red telephone boxes, which have been adopted by local communities and converted into facilities such as mini libraries, visitor information stands, and defibrillators. Some have even been rented out by small businesses, like a tiramisu shop called 'Walkmisu' in central London. These adaptations have preserved the cultural significance of the phone boxes while serving modern community needs.
6. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-17/britains-redundant-red-telephone-boxes-get-makeover/8168034> - This report covers the transformation of Britain's redundant red telephone boxes into various community assets. Some have been converted into micro-coffee shops, while others have been transformed into micro-libraries, providing a space for book exchanges. These adaptations have revitalised the phone boxes, making them valuable community resources and tourist attractions.
7. <https://www.defibmachines.co.uk/5-alternative-uses-for-a-red-phone-box/> - This article explores five alternative uses for red telephone boxes, including converting them into public access defibrillators, miniature coffee shops, and other community facilities. The 'Adopt a Kiosk' scheme by BT allows communities to repurpose these iconic structures for various purposes, ensuring their continued presence and utility in modern society.