

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

22 JANUARY 2013

JOINT REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOODS AND THE HEAD OF CENTRAL SERVICES

PARK LANE PUBLIC CONVENIENCE SERVICES- OPTIONS

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 For members to approve an option on agreeing on the appropriate level of service provision for its public convenience service in Melton Mowbray Town Centre and identify the optimum service level for the town, taking into account how the service fits within the Council's priorities.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Members select one of the preferred options outlined in Section 3.6 of this report taking into account the estimated revenue and capital implications for each option.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

3.1 Existing levels of provision for public conveniences in Melton Mowbray Town Centre

Currently Wilton Road and St Mary's are open Monday to Saturday 9am to 5pm (with an earlier start on Tuesdays and Saturdays of 8am). Signage is placed outside the toilets 15 minutes before closing for final cleaning.

St Mary's toilets are open between 10am and 4pm on Sundays.

Park Lane facilities are currently closed except on certain Public occasions.

3.2 National Guidance on Level of Provision of Toilets

Recommendations for toilets spatial strategy are included in British Standard BS8465 Part 4. The British Toilets Association were Panel members for the creation of this standard and support and advocate its recommendations. Section 8 - Public toilet spatial strategy - is intended to ensure that there are adequate toilet facilities throughout the whole area, rather than just at a few major locations. It includes reference to city centres and tourist areas, "toilets should be within a short walking distance, and should ideally be at 300m centres in the busiest areas, and at 500m centres generally in town centres". The above guidance suggests that Melton Mowbray Town Centre, when operating all three of its toilets, is providing standards equivalent to city centres rather than the less demanding town centres standard.

3.3 Local consultation results and why the provision of public conveniences is important for Melton Mowbray Town Centre

Melton Borough Council is committed to providing a high quality public convenience service to local residents, tourists and local businesses. The provision of public toilets is not a statutory duty, but the service is one that the public has come to expect, and there is evidence from the British Toilets Association and a report by the Communities and Local Government, "The Provision of Public Toilets" October 2008, of growing concern at the

increasing scarcity of public toilet provision. This national concern has been reflected locally in the results from our recent customer and stakeholder consultation. The provision of a quality public convenience service contributes to the Council's priority of town centre improvement and also caters for the elderly and very young and helps to look after those who are most vulnerable in our society.

3.4 Previously the Council widely consulted customers, local stakeholder groups and other organisations on the provision of public conveniences to gain customer insight into this service, what is important to our customers and stakeholders? What are their ideas on how we can improve our service in an environment where resources are scarce? The consultation has taken place at local group meetings, through questionnaires, e-mail consultation to targeted groups and also through a 'Visitor's Comments Book' at each of the public conveniences. We have also consulted front line staff and managers to gain a better understanding of what the issues are in managing our toilets and what is important to our customers. In addition to local consultation officers have looked at National guidance on levels of provision for cities and towns to help Members put our levels of service provision into a national context, research has also been undertaken into service level provision by local authorities in similarly sized English towns. Please refer to the English Towns comparison table attached at Appendix 4.

3.5 The feedback from 186 completed questionnaires demonstrates that customer expectations and priorities are varied; customers were asked to rank the toilets in terms of importance and the results are (most important first):

- Wilton Road – 39%
- St Marys Way – 38%
- Park Lane – 18%

This customer prioritisation of toilets differs from the amount of usage figures that were analysed for fee paying customers in 2008 where usage was as follows (most usage first):

- St Marys Way – 40%
- Park Lane – 36.2%
- Wilton Road – 23.8%

The questionnaires showed that the majority of customers would expect Melton Mowbray Town Centre to have 3 public conveniences available to the public.

3.6

Option 1 Carry out the necessary works to Park Lane public conveniences based on standard opening hours.

Supporting evidence

- This option would give customers the best choice and service level provision
- Melton Mowbray Chamber of Trade previously stated their preference for all 3 town toilets to remain open 'in an ideal world'

Issues associated with this option

- This is the most expensive option put forward for consideration. Additional ongoing revenue costs would be incurred over and above the funded base budget of approximately £35k for public conveniences.
- In the current economic climate and in light of the recent comprehensive spending review, all councils are facing significant pressure to find budget savings. Discretionary areas of spending, such as public conveniences, will be subject to review up and down the country at the present time. This option will place significant additional pressure on the Council.
- Melton Mowbray town centre would have a generous provision of toilets compared with other towns.

Option 2 – Keep St Marys Way and Wilton Road public conveniences and declare Park Lane public conveniences surplus to requirements.

Supporting evidence

- Park Lane toilets if sold could realise a further capital receipt for the Council
- Currently Park Lane toilets are only open on special event in the region of 7-8 days.
- The provision of St Mary's Way toilets within 500 metres of the town centre would also meet the British Standards guidelines on level of provision for public conveniences.
- Four towns of a comparable size to Melton Mowbray have only 1 public convenience to serve the town
- The reduction in service level and disposal would generate estimated annual savings of £5,000 over the funded base budget (excluding the ongoing repair obligation) and the potential for capital receipts of in the region of £35 to £40k. If the building is not demolished or sold there will be an ongoing cost of approx £3,500 pa (NDR) and a wind and watertight repair cost
- Reducing this discretionary service to two town centre toilets would help the Council achieve some of the budgetary savings that must be made.

Issues associated with this option

- 19% considered Park Lane toilets to be the most important
- The Chamber of Trade recognised in the current economic climate that a reduction in provision of public conveniences may be necessary and identified Wilton Road and St Mary's Way toilets as being most important
- Reducing the service to two toilets would be unpopular.

In conjunction with this option the council would progress the Community Toilet Scheme.

The Community Toilet Scheme enables local businesses like pubs, restaurants and shops, to work together with the Council to make more clean, safe and accessible toilets available to the public. Members of the public can use toilet facilities during the premises opening hours and without the need to make a purchase. Businesses have the right to refuse entry in exceptional circumstances. Street signage indicates the name and direction of the participating businesses.

Option 3 Social Enterprise to manage and operate Park Lane toilets

One idea coming from the consultation was for the Council to investigate the opportunity to run one or more of the Council-owned toilets as a social enterprise trading for social and environmental purposes and driven by social objectives. This type of initiative has the potential to reduce running costs for the Council and also develop the 'Big Society' theme for Melton Mowbray

If members approved this option then Officers would seek opportunities to improve the provision of public conveniences in the town centre by investigating opportunities to work with the private and voluntary sector for new ways of delivering the service including working with a social enterprise.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The provision of public conveniences is linked to the priority objectives of town centre development and enhancement. Access to good quality toilet provision is an important element for welcoming visitors and locals into the town centre. However, members are asked to note that in regards to economic vitality in the town centre for the period 2008 and 2009:

- A higher number of market traders in the town compared to the East Midlands comparator
- A higher and largely sustained proportion of business owners reporting on increased profitability compared to the East Midlands comparator.
- Vacant units below the East Midlands comparator
- Average footfall counts higher than the East Midlands comparator.
- Increased footfall on typical 'Tuesday' from 2008 to 2009
- Same proportion of visitors to the town as the East Midlands comparator.
- Lower % of tourists in 2008 than the East Midlands comparator, but the same in 2009.

4.2 Should Members decide that the social enterprise option is investigated this would link to a theme of 'Big Society' and local partnership working.

4.3 The Council is facing the prospect of having to find significant savings against the existing base budget as a result of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review announced on 20th October 2010.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Members are asked to note the following financial implications for each option:

Option 1 – The costs of running the Park Lane Toilets on a fully attended basis with improvements/upgrade including an allowance for repairs have been estimated at £35.

Option 2 – Revenue savings of £5k, however, NNDR cost remains if building remains on site. Potential capital receipts in the region of £35k to £40k if sold.

Option 3 – This is dependent on the nature of the Social Enterprise and the operating agreement agreed, however, officers would seek a nil impact on the current budget position.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

6.1 The provision of public toilets is a discretionary service and as such Melton Borough Council can determine the appropriate service levels.

6.2 The Council has the power to provide public toilets and charge for the service under Section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 None as a consequence of this report. However, all of the public conveniences have suffered from incidents of anti-social behaviour in the past. There is a perception that unattended toilets are "seen as threatening places" (and less safe and less clean than fully attended toilets, the consultation feedback has also shown that people feel safer when they are using toilets with an attendant).

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 Public conveniences are an essential part of the Council infrastructure. All conveniences have disabled use and also baby changing rooms. Stakeholders were previously consulted on the balance of male and female toilets provision.

8.2 A comprehensive EIA was completed as part of the Public Conveniences review presented to members in October 2010, which showed no significant Equalities issues

9.0 RISKS

9.1 Probability

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Very High A				
High B				
Significant C		1		
Low D				
Very Low E				
Almost Impossible F				
	IV Neg- ligible	III Marg- inal	II Critical	I Catast- rophic

→
Impact

Risk No.	Description
1	Closure of more one or more public convenience will result in complaints from the public

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 The Carbon Trust Report made several recommendations to reduce carbon emissions and the boilers were replaced in 2008 at Park Lane and St Mary's as part of the improvements to the retained public conveniences.

11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 Consultation will be undertaken as part of the progression of an option.

12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 Wilton Road conveniences are located within the Egerton Ward, St Mary's Way are within Craven Ward and Park Lane conveniences are within Warwick Ward.

Contact Officer Jane Galilee

Date: 9 January 2013

Appendices : none

Background Papers: The Provision of Public Toilets – House of Commons, Communities and Local Government 2008
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/publicacesstoilets

CSA report Review of Melton Mowbray Town Centre Public Conveniences Services- 27
October 2010

Reference : X drive/CSA/2012-13/HR.DG Park lane toilets