

Melton Borough Council

Public Conveniences Evaluation of Engagement Report

March 2016

ABSTRACT

Between January and March 2016 the Council has been working to engage the views of residents, community and access groups, local businesses, tourists, Council staff and Members on the options presented in regards to Public Conveniences within Melton Mowbray town centre. Over 200 people have directly engaged in the survey or have actively participated in the consultation process by providing user/ stakeholder feedback. This report presents an analysis of the survey, interviews and stakeholder sessions that have been undertaken.

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1 Introduction: Context and Background

Melton Borough Council has 3 public conveniences located around the town one of which is only opened for special events. All of them need to be completely refurbished to bring them up to modern day standards and the estimated costs of refurbishment for the 2 that are open full time is £160k. The running costs for toilets are high and the income generated meets only a small proportion of these costs resulting in a net annual cost of approximately £78k per annum. It is estimated that the annual running costs for 2 sets of semi-automatic toilets is approximately £20k per annum resulting in an annual saving of between £50k and £60k per annum. The toilets at Park Lane are only used six days in the year and will be shut as a consequence with provision being made to accommodate special events by event organisers.

Location	Total Estimated Use 2014/15	Disabled Access Y/N	Estimated cost per use from April 2016	Proximity to Changing Places Toilet Scheme	Alternative Publicly Accessible Toilets within 200 metres
St Marys Way Car park	56,100	Y	99p	Mencap/Museum	Y
Wilton Road Car park	24,200	Y	£2.30	Mencap/ Museum	Y
Park Lane toilets	730	Y	£10	Mencap/Museum	Y

As part of the engagement process it was important that consideration was given to the local context of each public toilet including proximity to other publicly accessible toilets, understanding and establishing their condition and looking at the extent to which the public-toilet buildings comply with specific building regulations as well as compliancy with DDA/Equalities Act.

2 Methodology

Following on from the public consultation undertaken in April 2015 Melton Borough Council has undertaken to involve the local community including service users and businesses, in its decision making process to ensure that their views are taken into account at the process moves forward. The primary focus of this phase of engagement and consultation has been to gather feedback on the way public-toilets could be provided in the future with a view of moving forward positively.

The consultation has focused primarily on:

- The options presented covering semi-automatic and pay to use schemes, proposed locations and opening hours;
- The criteria for decision making that are the most important to people when thinking about public needs and public toilet provision;

- A chance to comment, engage and provide ideas on public toilet provision in Melton Mowbray town centre.

The engagement programme has been designed to adopt a qualitative and quantitative approach, using a variety of techniques and methods to ensure that people can give their views and feedback via a method appropriate to them and to raise awareness of the opportunity to get involved, such as:

- Dedicated webpage on MBC's website, where people can access all the public toilet consultation materials, an opportunity to complete an online questionnaire. Alternatively visitors could download a printer friendly version of the questionnaire and return this to the Council's address.
- Melton Mail: distributed to every household promoting the consultation, raising awareness and signposting residents to the dedicated webpage and online questionnaire.
- Press coverage in the Melton Times with two articles promoting the consultation, a BBC Radio Leicester interview and use of social media /MBC's Facebook Page and Twitter account to promote engagement.
- Two events in the Market Place to make the most of our busy market days on Tuesday and Saturday, and also to coincide with the February half term
- Stakeholder briefings and telephone interviews were conducted where possible with Melton Promotions, Melton BID and Melton Community Partnership (MCP) and sub-groups such as Family Voices, Seniors Forum and other equality and diversity groups including Melton Access group where direct contact was made encouraging people to have their say and to understand what's important to them.*
- Information on the online survey and hard copies of surveys were available at Parkside, Wilton Road toilets and St. Mary's Way location at Shop Mobility providing an opportunity to engage with consultation process **(An analysis of survey responses gathered through the online method is provided in the following section).***

*The survey responses are published on Melton Borough Council's website and can be found at:

http://www.melton.gov.uk/info/200339/consultations/897/public_toilet_consultation . Please note that the different collection methods of survey responses were

*disaggregated for analysis to account for any bias that may be attributed to users and stakeholders completing the survey form without access to images and maps, for example showing location options of toilets. A combined evaluation of **all** surveys returned survey comments, letters and emails received was also undertaken and provided by way of the overview of findings presented in section 4 below.*

3 The approach to engagement: Quality over Quantity

The people who have kindly taken the time to engage with the Council, feeding back and sharing their views, represent a small sample of the total population of Melton residents and businesses. As such it is not possible to be 100% certain that the findings obtained are exactly those that would have been reached if every resident and visitor to the Borough had taken part in the engagement activities (i.e. the true values). In consideration of this engagement has utilised qualitative methodologies, such as stakeholder interviews alongside more quantitative methods i.e. resident surveys, to give a high degree of confidence (95%) to the feedback obtain in support of appraising options put forward. In addition participants that have taken part in the various engagement activities are representative of the known demographic profile for the Borough (see section 3 for further details) – this was enhanced by undertaking engagement events at key times such as February half term to consult with families and young people.

It is important to note that information and findings from the engagement activities (explicitly stakeholder briefings and telephone interviews) have been aggregated and presented in a way to protect the identity of individuals that participated in these sessions.

3 Participant Profile

In order to set the results and analysis in context the first section provides an overview of the gender and age structure of participants that have taken part in the engagement programme, which is broadly in line with the census demographic profile for the Borough. Postcodes of survey respondents were also gathered, this can be converted to ward level data and mapped however it should be noted that the sample size does not permit a robust level of analysis at this level of detail.

Age Structure and Gender (%)

Census 2011 Profile		Participant Profile		
Age	%	Female	Male	Engagement Overall Combined Result%
0-17	20.7%	11%	6%	17%
18-64	61%	31%	27%	58%
65 +	18.4%	15%	9%	24%
Prefer not to Say				1%
TOTAL	100%	57%	42%	100%

4 Overview of Findings

Many of the positive findings reported in the previous Toilet Survey undertaken by the Council in 2015 were reinforced in the 2016 engagement activity. In broad terms, one of the most encouraging conclusions identified is that the majority of participants strongly agreed that semi-automatic toilets and pay-to-use schemes are a good way for the council to reduce costs whilst helping to provide facilities and amenities expected of a historic market town at the center of a vibrant economy that aims to provide an exceptional tourist and shopping experience.

4.1 Provision of Semi-Automatic and Pay to Use Scheme

Most notably over 58% of the respondents to the main online survey agreed that the provision of semi-automatic toilets at St. Mary's Way and Wilton Road at a cost of £130,000, making an annual saving to the council of £50,000 at year on running costs, was an acceptable approach. The majority of respondents and stakeholders (52%) agreed that semi-automatic toilets would meet their needs.

Belief that the Council provides a good level of service was also tested in the last consultation undertaken in 2015, and charges or pay to use schemes remained acceptable. As part of this consultation phase a question was included (Question 7 on the survey) to ascertain whether the public, following the improvements to the toilets, should possibly make a voluntary contribution to use them instead. The majority of respondents disagreed with this approach (51%) with many commenting that there is a general expectation that tourists to the town should be asked for a fixed amount rather than seeking a voluntary contribution. There was a strong link to the responses and comments provided in terms of town centre events and asking organisers to provide additional toilets at times of higher demand with over 79% endorsing this approach. In addition to the tourist experience there was very little support for progressing themed toilets (e.g. Victoriana, futuristic etc) with however less than 14% of returned responses agreeing with this approach.

4.2 Location and Alternative Publicly Available Toilets

In terms of the locations proposed for semi-automatic toilets (including alternative sites proposed at the top of Windsor Street instead of St. Mary's Way), nearly two thirds of respondents (67%) indicating that the St. Mary's Way Car Park location was the preferred location. Comments to the proposed Windsor Street location conveyed that there would be issues for Shop Mobility users, which is located in St. Mary's away and also concern for security as the site is in a relatively restricted corner with limited CCTV coverage.

Overall respondents and stakeholders (57%) felt that public toilets in the Town Centre were complemented by toilets available in local cafes, public houses and other local businesses. There was a general willingness among those in the younger age group and particularly families to engage with community toilet schemes, which are often provided in cities or similar towns of size by businesses such as Costa, Café Nero etc. The Melton BID has also formally conveyed their support in progressing a business incentive scheme.

4.3 Opening Times

Opening hours can be extended with semi-automatic toilets, for example they can be open in the evening until 8pm and on Sundays from 10am until 3.45pm. These extended times were welcomed by many respondents and stakeholders, however comments were received on behalf of Melton BID and the towns intention to apply for Purple Flag status that late opening toilets were needed, particularly at the St. Mary's Way location to satisfy the criteria of the Purple Flag award and to support the development of the evening economy.

4.4 Design Standards and Access

There was a strong focus towards physical access and design standards, which was highlighted through the representative responses from Melton Access Group, Shop Mobility and Melton BID. Looking at key groups who participated it was consistently older residents (age 55+) who reported higher levels of usage and benefit of the services MBC provides. The majority of residents surveyed who reported that they had a disability were satisfied that the semi-automatic option of toilets (over 71%) would meet their needs. A number of respondents and stakeholders with a disability indicated that by combining male and female toilets with the provision of disabled access would overcome some of the barriers and stigma that can be associated with carers accompanying individuals in need of support.

As indicated by one local resident:

"I'm a father and the primary carer of two girls one has a learning disability both are school age but not old enough to go into public loos by themselves...where there are unisex toilets public male/female this helps us and stops my daughters and me from feeling embarrassed. I don't like taking them into the male toilets when a unisex disabled toilet isn't available".

4.5 Comments and Letters of Representation

A total of 641 comments were received from respondents from the online and hard copy survey returns as well as 4 letters of representation from The Melton BID, Melton Promotions, Shopmobility and Melton Access Group. In addition there were also 2 letters and 2 emails received from members of the public. With regard to the survey form, respondents had the opportunity to provide a comment on all the questions in the survey.

It appears that in the majority of cases, where respondents were not in favour of automatic toilets multiple comments were submitted. From some initial analysis of the results, there is some learning from the views and comments shared, which provides useful feedback to support of the decision-making process and could also be used to directly inform the design stage as well as provide further insight to support service operation. The main issues raised were around

- Safety, cleanliness, assistance, vandalism when there is no attendant
- Support for current arrangements to stay as they are and waste of money to alter this position in any way
- Suggestion for Park Lane toilets to be opened as closer to the Town Centre and provide alternative toilet venue to the two existing
- Queries as to what semi automatic toilets are, would they be maintained, would they be cleaned regularly, how would they be managed, would people be locked in, lack of privacy, how would those in a wheelchair get in and out without help, how to enter when got no change, could they cope with a busload of visitors, concern at mixed sex toilets