



COMMUNITY  
OWNERSHIP  
SUPPORT SERVICE

Development Trusts Association Scotland

## Public Toilets – How communities are responding to the closure of public toilets

*The real cost of spending a penny*



The Community Ownership Support Service (COSS), delivered by the Development Trusts Association Scotland, is funded by the Scottish Government to support the sustainable transfer of publicly held assets into community ownership. This advisor-led service provides specialist advice and information on all aspects of asset transfer on a Scotland wide basis.

This publication has been produced in response to the concern about the closure of public toilets across the country and the awareness of the need for good public toilets to promote health, access and inclusion. Increasingly communities are looking at how they can become involved in saving or providing public toilets, so here we present some facts and examples of how other communities have gone about saving this service.

We would like to thank all the communities and organisations including Jo Anne Bichard (Royal College of Art) and Trine Kanter Zerwekh who have shared their stories, pictures and learning with us. Our thanks also to Sandra Macaskill of CaskieCo for researching and writing this publication with the COSS team.

#### **The COSS Team**

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*“A lack of accessible and good public toilets affects not only the quality of our town centres, parks or bus stations, it also reduces the dignity and quality of people’s lives. After all, they are one of the basic facilities that residents and visitors alike depend on. Good quality provision instils confidence in public facilities as a whole, helps to inspire positive impressions, and contributes to many other important aspects of life. Whether it is families with small children or older people, it is important that people have the confidence that the facilities they need are available when they are out and about. People rightly expect accessible, clean, safe and well-maintained toilets.”*

Improving access to better quality toilets- a strategic guide<sup>1</sup>

## Section 1: Background

Monkey closets were the first public toilets and they were invented by George Jennings who installed them in the Retiring Rooms of The Crystal Palace for The Great Exhibition at Hyde Park in 1851. Jennings’ public toilets caused great excitement as during the exhibition, 827,280 visitors paid one penny to use them; for the penny they got a clean seat, a towel, a comb and a shoeshine. “To spend a penny” became a euphemism for going to the toilet.

When the exhibition finished and moved to Sydenham, the toilets were to be closed down. However, Jennings persuaded the organisers to keep them open, and the toilet went on to earn over £1,000 a year. Jennings said that ‘the civilisation of a people can be measured by their domestic and sanitary appliances’ whilst the objectors had stated that ‘visitors are not coming to the Exhibition merely to wash’!



*Thomas Crapper, often mistakenly credited with inventing the flush toilet, was only 14 years old at this point.*



Rothesay - Victorian Public Toilets

Public toilets are still a big topic of debate because there seems to be a decline in public toilet provision – are they really disappearing or is the way public toilets are provided changing?

The Victorian era saw the rapid introduction of toilet facilities for public use in town centres, parks and other public areas. This was in an effort to alleviate appalling health

problems associated with both open sewers and standards of public behaviour.

<sup>1</sup>Communities and local government. [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Jennings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Jennings)



Things have moved on and lifestyles have changed with us now being encouraged to spend more time out and about; cycling, walking, shopping and visiting far flung attractions increasing the need for public toilets. We are also living longer with people surviving into their 80s and 90s in increasing numbers, with or without disabilities, and we expect facilities wherever we go to meet our needs.

Public toilets have existed on UK High Streets for more than 150 years but there is **no legal requirement for local authorities to provide toilets**. With public service budgets under pressure, the closure and rationalisation of public toilets is increasingly been seen across the UK. A BBC Freedom of Information request in 2016 found that nearly 2,000 facilities have closed in the last 10 years across the UK.

Traditionally local authorities have provided public toilets, usually staffing them to ensure they are well maintained and safe but this seems to be changing with different models of provision popping up including community toilets and comfort schemes run in partnership with businesses and other organisations.

In Edinburgh, there are 18 public toilets with a further 60 publicly accessible toilets within Council premises such as libraries and leisure centres. Decisions taken in 2021 have committed to a £5m revamp of its public toilet network and considerable investment in 15 of its current public toilets.

In 2015 a scheme had been introduced where annual payments were made to businesses to make their toilet facilities available to the public. Due to lack of uniform provision and difficulties with advertising the scheme, the business element of the [Community Toilet Scheme](#) will be phased out, and provision will be focussed through the establishment of multi-service hubs.

Edinburgh Council has recognised that there may be a desire for other local communities to have toilets in their local parks. It is proposed that these be assessed on a case-by-case basis and other opportunities explored where possible (for example community ownership) in order to ensure that these facilities can be maintained on a sustained basis.

<sup>3</sup><http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-336405414>

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/a\\_to\\_z/service/940703/public\\_toilets](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/a_to_z/service/940703/public_toilets)



Highland Council has 191 public toilets according to the [Great British Public Toilet Analysis](#) and is the area with the highest number of accessible public toilets in Scotland. Providing this service costs over £1 million a year and they have recently been consulting on how to reduce running costs significantly and still provide a service. Highland Council also runs a “Comfort Scheme” supported by 27 local businesses providing access to facilities. Many other local authorities are faced with a similar dilemma – rising costs and reducing budgets mean that they are considering options such as:

- ◊ the availability of alternative publicly accessible facilities in public and commercial premises
- ◊ harmonisation in the level of provision, operating hours and dates
- ◊ provision of attendants for cash collection
- ◊ identification of options for further “Comfort Schemes”
- ◊ **options for transfer of assets to local groups**
- ◊ opportunities for saving on other operating costs such as energy and water.



The lack of toilet facilities in some island and rural communities is causing concerns for local people with increasing numbers of visitors and lack of facilities leading to complaints of people “going” outdoors, making for some interesting headlines and frustrated visitors.

In the Scottish Borders, the local authority is inviting local people and businesses to get involved in creating a network of community toilet facilities as part of a review which will also see the introduction of a 30p charge at over two thirds of their 41 public toilets. Charging units are being installed and the new Transport Interchange Scottish Borders Council is piloting a **contactless payment system**.

There is a changing picture of public toilet provision across Scotland with different models operating in different areas and communities increasingly stepping in to take on facilities to ensure local people and visitors can still “spend a penny” or 30!

## Section 2: Public toilet provision – health and usage

[The Great British Toilet Map](#) provides the most comprehensive index of where public toilets can be found across the country. Originally started as a Royal College of Art design project in the early 1990's this map now provides a comprehensive index of the location of public toilets across the UK. The project also funds research into the provision of public toilets, providing an important overview together with good practice in the design and provision of accessible toilets for everyone.

- ◇ Just having access to clean, hygienic toilets, when we need one is a basic human right and it fulfils an important requirement for health and well-being, equality, social inclusion and privacy and public decency.
- ◇ We all need to use the toilet several times each day when we are away from our homes, at work, on holiday or simply commuting from place to place. This becomes even more urgent if you belong to one of the many specialist groups who suffer from medical conditions that require more immediate access to a toilet.
- ◇ The NHS estimates that between 3 and 6 million people in the UK experience a degree of urinary incontinence. People's requirement for public toilets can vary depending on what they need, where they need it and how often they need access, particularly if their continence is affected by a medical condition. A lack of access to public toilets can cause people to avoid using new places, hamper their working lives or stop them from leaving home altogether – leading to isolation, loneliness and reduced quality of life.
- ◇ Not having access to a toilet can result in 'waiting to go' which research suggests can have adverse health results including: stretching the walls of the bladder; enlarging of the bladder in those who have few chances to relieve themselves; if you wait too long to 'go' there is a danger of bladder or kidney infection and if you really can go all day without going to the toilet you're probably dehydrated.

<sup>3</sup>[Publicly Accessible Toilets: An Inclusive Design Guide](#). Septembr 2011.  
Publisher: Royal College of Art. ISBN 978-1-907342-39-4



- ◇ Discussing toilets is often regarded as a distasteful subject and yet using the toilet away from home is a serious barrier to participation in public life according to “Publicly Accessible Toilets” – an inclusive design guide (Knight and Richard<sup>3</sup>):
  - We live in an aging society where we are encouraged to maintain health and well-being into old age meaning we are encouraged to adopt healthier lifestyles which often take place outside of the home.
  - Urinary function reduces with age and can also be affected by health conditions. Continence conditions made many older people limit the amount of time they are away from home, in some cases stopping them from leaving home all together. Age UK research (2008) found that being incontinent is very distressing for older people causing social isolation, embarrassment and discomfort for millions.
  - A report for Help the Aged in 2007 found that 80% of respondents did not find it easy to locate a public toilet, 78% found that public toilets were not open when they needed them and over half (52%) agreed that lack of provision prevented them going out as often as they liked.
  - Toilet provision is such an important issue for the health and well-being of the global aging population that the World Health Organisation has cited it as a major factor in the Age Friendly Cities Guide.
  - In addition to being an issue for older people access to decent public toilets is also a barrier for those with health conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, prostrate issues, pregnancy and families with children e.g. dads taking female children out and only being able to access male urinals.
  - Those with disabilities are also faced with significant challenges when accessing public toilets.

### A novel approach to toilets in remote rural areas

The Cold Water Island Tourism Conference held on Arran last year heard a very innovative approach to the provision of toilets in rural areas of Norway. Trine Kanter Zerwekh described how it is all about place on the 18 National Tourist Routes through beautiful Norwegian countryside where the experience has been enhanced by innovative architecture and thought provoking works of art designed at viewpoints and rest areas. The facilities are becoming destinations in their own right.



Some examples of the toilets along the route

## Section 3: Types of toilet provision

Publicly accessible toilets refer to all toilets that the public can access without having to buy anything. This includes toilets in parks, transport hubs, supermarkets as well as toilets and community schemes provided by local authorities. Within this there are different types of accessible toilet provision:

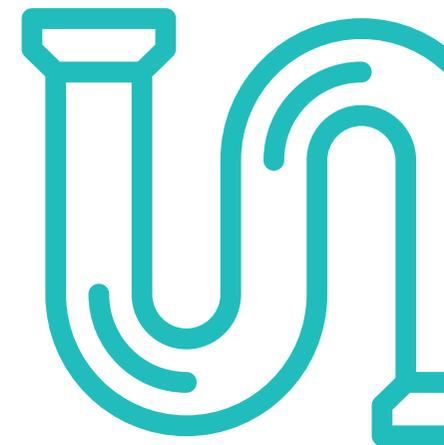
- ◊ **Community Toilet Schemes** – similar to the schemes in The Highland Council mentioned earlier, where the local authority pays an annual fee to a business to cover the costs of allowing the public to use their toilets. These can be cost-effective ways of supplementing existing toilet provision and are popular with Councils and can often include access to toilets in Council buildings.
- ◊ **Automatic Public Toilets** – Automatic Public Toilets (APCs or Superloos) have become popular option with authorities because they have been designed to prevent anti-social behaviour but they are not so popular with the public, especially older women and parents who report children are frightened when using them. Instructions for using them can be complex and they are often in the middle of public places leaving people feeling vulnerable and exposed.
- ◊ **Direct Access Toilets** – these are fitted into custom made buildings or through modification of existing toilets, with each toilet opening directly onto the street with hand washing facilities inside. Some have a coin mechanism so the operator can charge for use. A range of cubicle types can be offered e.g. male, female, unisex, wheelchair accessible, adult changing, baby changing.

- ◊ **Accessible Toilets** – accessible or ‘disabled’ toilets are for people who require extra space, often wheelchair users or those requiring help from a carer.

Most standard cubicles in public toilets can also be inaccessible to other groups such as those with pushchairs or buggies, parents not wanting to leave their children unattended while they use the toilet, users who may need to access a sink in order to observe hygiene rituals in keeping with their faith or cultural practices and stairs that can cause standard cubicles to be inaccessible to many.

Baby changing facilities are often located in the accessible facility.

Disability UK operates the [RADAR Key](#) system provides access to 9,000 locked public toilets around the country by issuing keys to those with a health condition or disability. Keys cost £3.50 per region at the time of writing. Changing Places toilets provide facilities for people with profound and multiple learning difficulties who require the support of family or carers when using the toilet. (See page 10)



## Section 4: Policy, standards and regulations

Public toilet – *a toilet open to the public which is usually maintained and upheld by a local authority or other corporate body*<sup>6</sup>

### British Standards

Regulations on the provision of public toilets are governed by a number of British Standards developed by the British Standards Institution (BSI). The key standards which apply to the provision of public toilets are BS 6465 parts 1-4 and BS 8300, these are quite lengthy technical documents which are held in the National Library of Scotland. Here we provide a brief summary of some of the key considerations if you or your group is thinking about taking on a public toilet. If taking on existing public toilets then advice may be available from your local authority. Copies of the standards can be purchased [here](#).

### BS 6465 Part 1

The provision of public toilets should be determined according to local need where people are likely to congregate. WC provision should also be considered for people in transit e.g. on trunk roads, cycle paths and through busy thoroughfares in towns and cities. Where toilets are intended for use by motorists, nearby parking facilities should be available. Where need for a public toilet has been identified, but heavy usage is not anticipated, provision of an automatic toilet (APT) may be acceptable. Where use of an area is occasional, portable toilets may be provided.<sup>7</sup> Generally, people need to use the WC about every two hours and more when eating and drinking, although the need can vary considerably.

The design of public toilets should keep in mind the following:

- a) Siting toilets in a busy and visible position to deter anti-social behaviour.
- b) Entrances should have a level threshold or be accessible by ramp.
- c) Toilet should include facilities for cleaning.
- d) Security should be taken into account with an attendant's room strongly recommended as the best protection against antisocial behaviour. CCTV coverage can also be used but it should also be ensured that the privacy of users is not compromised.
- e) All construction and fittings should be secure, robust and vandal and graffiti resistant.
- f) Turnstiles that impede access should be avoided.
- g) The provision of showers should be considered in some locations e.g. close to a beach.
- h) All public toilets should be clearly signed with adequate direction signage in the surrounding area.
- i) Remote sites, such as fishing lakes, picnic sites and camp grounds where it is not practical to use plumbed sanitary appliances, should be provided with waterless toilets or portable toilets and washing facilities.
- j) Sanitary facilities for disabled people should be wheelchair accessible and be unisex. Where there are four or more WC cubicles (in addition to the unisex facility) one larger WC cubicle 1200 mm wide, for people who need extra space, should be provided in both male and female separate sex toilets.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Code of Practice and Building (Scotland) Regulation 2004: Technical Handbook Non Domestic (see section 3) can also be helpful if you wish to explore this in more detail. The latter is also useful if you require technical details on mains water supply and drainage.

<sup>6</sup>BS 6465: Part 1 :1984 BSI

<sup>7</sup>BS 6465 1:2006 +A1:2009 NLS



## BS 6465 – 2:2017 Sanitary Installation

### Baby changing facilities

Facilities for baby changing should be included in all premises where babies are normally expected to be present. Any doors leading to baby changing facilities should have a clear opening of 825 mm to allow for double pushchairs. A baby changing unit should be set at a height of 700 mm to 800 mm with a weight restriction notice clearly displayed.

### Hand drying facilities

Should be selected to take account of the advantages and disadvantages, ideally with more than one option available to safeguard against power cuts, product failure and laundry failure.<sup>8</sup>

### Female sanitary protection

A sanitary disposal unit should be provided in every female WC cubicle with sufficient space to ensure it doesn't encroach into the area around the pan and come into contact with the seated user.<sup>9</sup>

### Baby nappies

Every baby changing facility should be provided with a sanitary disposal unit.

### Cleaning

Cleaning equipment and consumable products should be stored in a designated lockable place with chemicals stored safely and securely.<sup>10</sup>

Consideration will also need to be given to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 2002 (as amended) which apply to the way that you work with these substances. The Health and Safety Executive HSE website provides an excellent source of information.

<sup>8</sup>BS 6465 – 3:2006 Sanitary installation – code of practice for the selection, installation and maintenance of sanitary and associated appliances

<sup>9</sup>BS 6465 – 3:2006

<sup>10</sup>BS 6465 – 4:2010



## Other

Toilet providers should consider participating in award schemes for the facilities and for attendants as this provides the opportunity for recognition and reward for high standards.<sup>11</sup>

There should be a telephone number, an email or a website/postal address displayed so that users can report any problems, particularly if there is no attendant.<sup>12</sup>

The full text of all the relevant British Standards is available at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh.



<sup>11</sup>BS 6465 – 4:2010

<sup>12</sup>BS 6465 – 4:2010

## Why women often have to queue for the loo?

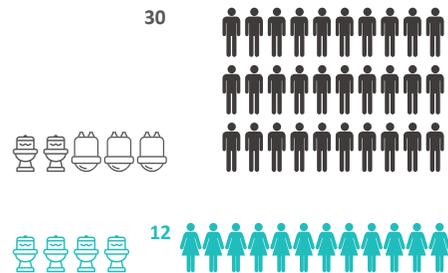
Have you ever wondered why it is that when you are at the cinema, theatre or large scale event women queueing for the loo is an accepted part of the experience, well there are two contributing factors:

- ◊ **Men often have more facilities for urination than women** – although toilets may have the same floor space women have cubicles and men urinals which take up less space to there are often more of them
- ◊ **It takes a woman longer to use the toilet than a man** – around 90 seconds to use a cubicle and around 45 seconds for a man using a urinal<sup>13</sup>

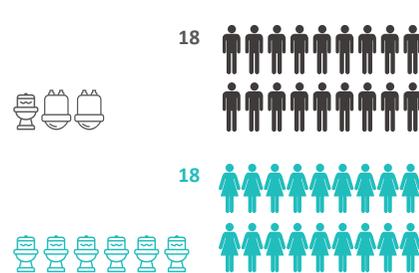
There are a variety of cultural and biological reasons why women take longer including anatomy, dress, menstruation, concern of infection, continence and overall mobility.

Only when women are provided with twice as many places to pee is equal provision approached assuming everyone takes the average time!

Number of men and women that can use a facility of equal male/female floor space, in a 5 minute period:



Number of men and women that can use a facility with 1:2 male/female 'places to pee', in a 5 minute period:



Source: Publically Accessible Toilets, Gail Knight and Jo-Anne Bichard

<sup>13</sup>Hanson, J. and Greed, C. (2003) WC provision: Accessible public toilets in city centres. Access by Design, 95. pp. 24-26. ISSN 0959-1591 Available from: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/9054> (Prof Clara Greed)



## Section 5: Special toilet provision

### Radars NKS Scheme

The National Key Scheme (NKS) offers disabled people independent access to locked public toilets around the country. Toilets fitted with National Key Scheme (NKS) locks can now be found in shopping centres, pubs, cafés, department stores, bus and train stations and many other locations in most parts of the country. When you order a key you will also be able to order a list of toilets in your local area which are part of the scheme.

Take a look at their [leaflet](#) to find out more.

### Changing Places



Over 250,000 people need Changing Places toilets to enable them to get out and about to enjoy the day to day things many of us take for granted. The Changing Places Charter Group is developing provision throughout the country. They have also produced a map so that the facilities and what they provide, specifically designed for the thousands of individuals across the UK who are suffering from PMLD (Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties), can be located.

Football Clubs and theme parks like Alton Towers are installing Changing Places toilets and the Portal in Irvine has included three in its new complex. Find out more at [www.changing-places.org](http://www.changing-places.org)

## Section 6: How to develop toilet facilities in your community

According to Gerry Brophy<sup>14</sup>...

*“For too long, public toilets have been considered in isolation, rather than being seen as a constituent part of all locations where the public congregates or passes through. If public toilets are considered within the design context of their location, they can be built to complement and enhance the area rather than contribute to its decline.”*

### Determining a public toilet strategy

#### Identifying need

Before embarking on taking on public toilets, it would be helpful to undertake a survey to find out the extent and adequacy of the existing provision. Data collected on footfall and toilet use can then help determine provision. It can be very useful to know:

- A) Number of existing facilities
- B) Accessibility (opening hours, location, physical factors, parking for people with disabilities)
- C) Features - positive and negative e.g. vandalism, disrepair, privacy, safety, facilities for tying up dogs and parking bikes
- D) Who is likely to use the facilities
- E) Length of queues
- F) View of male and female users, including disabled people, people of ethnic minorities and different ages groups

#### Funding

As can be seen from the communities highlighted in the case studies, there are many different ways to bring together the funding package for your public toilets. When considering funding there are different stages:

- ◊ Acquiring your public toilets
- ◊ Renovating/preparing your public toilets
- ◊ Operating your public toilets

A business plan for the operation of your public toilets is essential as it explains to you, your Board, your community, your local businesses and your funders what things will cost, how it will run and what any investment they make will be used for.

The [COSS website](#) provides a template which guides you through the business planning process, helping ensure that your plans are realistic and robust.

<sup>14</sup>Publicly Available Toilets – Problem Reduction Guide

### Acquiring your public toilets

Some local authorities are now offering up public toilets for sale on the open market or contacting communities to establish whether there is an interest in taking on the service and facilities through community asset transfer.

**Part 5 – Asset Transfer of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015** gives communities of place and interest the right to request the transfer of public assets into community management, lease or ownership. Communities can state how much they are prepared to pay for the asset. Where this is at below market value or for a nominal sum, the discount has to be justified against the likely improvement to economic development, regeneration, public health, social wellbeing or environmental wellbeing. The presumption is in favour of communities unless there are very good grounds for refusal. Communities can request a review of a local authority decision and can ultimately appeal the decision to Scottish Ministers.

It is therefore an option, where the toilets are operated by a public body to **acquire the building for a nominal sum** with the main funding requirement being any redevelopment and operational costs.

Where service delivery is involved, consideration should be given to using **Part 3 – Participation Requests** in the **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015**. This section of the Act enables communities to start a dialogue with a public service authority on something that matters to them in their community through to participating in the design, delivery, monitoring or review of service provision.

As highlighted in the [Asset Transfer Guidance for Communities](#) – Section 3.5 – Assets and Services

‘Sometimes a community transfer body may wish to take over a building or land and the services which are delivered by the relevant authority from those premises. This could be addressed by an asset transfer request, or a participation request in relation to improving the outcome of the services. We do not recommend using both types of request together.

- ◊ If you want to run a service which is tied to the particular premises, and do not want to use the premises for any other purpose, this should be addressed through a participation request. A lease or other arrangement in relation to the premises can be negotiated if the transfer of the service is agreed.

- ◊ If you want to take control of the asset in order to develop the service on your own terms or use the property for other purposes, this should normally be addressed through an asset transfer request.
- ◊ As asset transfer request can be accompanied by negotiations for the public authority to contract with the community body to continue to provide a service, as a source of income.'

Consideration should therefore be given to the basis on which your community group are prepared to take on the ownership and operation of the public toilets. It may well be the case that the local authority continues to have a role in supporting some of the ongoing costs associated with delivering the service.

Contact the [Community Ownership Support Service](https://www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk) on 0131 225 2080 [coss@dtascot.org.uk](mailto:coss@dtascot.org.uk) to discuss your options

### Renovating / preparing your public toilets

Once you have reached agreement on the terms of handover from your local authority (or other public body) you may need to upgrade or improve your public toilets so capital funding might be required. There are no obvious sources of public grant funding to fully renovate public toilets. As highlighted by the Kyle of Lochalsh Development Trust, the toilets and showers were part of a much larger development project involving the pontoons.

Locally based funding is likely to form the bulk of the overall funding required. In Biggar, a cocktail of funds was raised to renovation the facility – ranging from fund raising/donations to a contribution from the community benefit funds associated with the local windfarm. In the longer term they plan to install automated door locking systems and a coin operated barrier.



### Operating your toilets

Much like the capital for renovating your toilets you will need revenue funding for the day to day operations – staff, toilet roll, soap, hand towels (if used), water rates, electricity, cleaning costs, security and insurance.

Approaches adopted by communities include:

- ◊ Charging for use of the toilet facilities and other services such as showers and laundry
- ◊ Commercial Sponsorship e.g. local business levy to maintain the facilities; provision of consumables free or at cost; free commercial cleaning services
- ◊ Donations – some of which are paid directly by direct debit – local fundraising events
- ◊ Grants – local area grant funds, community benefit funds from windfarms and hydro schemes, comfort scheme funds, common good funds
- ◊ Involve volunteers - rather than employing staff to clean and maintain the facilities, consider getting local people involved. Not only does this help reduce staff costs it also increases the sense of community ownership of the facility.

### Adding Value

Community ownership of the facilities can enable communities to add something new to the provision, tackle other local problems or add new services that increase financial viability and/or better tailor services to meet local need.

#### ◊ Campervan Services

There has been a rise in campervan use, especially in rural areas over recent years. With this comes an increase in demand for certain services and facilities e.g. emptying loos, filling water tanks and charging batteries. Most campsites provide these services but many campervan users enjoy 'wild camping' i.e. parking up in a scenic layby with no facilities. They do however still eventually need to access facilities roughly every two to three days.

A number of public toilet providers are reporting an increase in the use of their facilities for emptying portable toilets from campervans. Tipping the contents of a portable toilet down a WC is an acceptable method of disposing of this type of waste and is recommended by caravanning organisations as a reasonable option where Chemical Disposal Points are not available.

However public toilet providers are finding the practice is putting pressure on their facilities, particularly in rural areas. It is therefore an issue rural community groups should take into account when considering whether to take on the provision of toilet facilities in their communities.

The two main issues seem to be -

- Chemicals in the portable toilets. Many portable toilets use formaldehyde based chemicals which are very toxic to wildlife and the environment and therefore bad news for septic tanks. Regular campervan users are usually aware of this issue but the rise in the use of hire vans means there is an increasing proportion of newbies around who lack this experience and awareness.
- Splashes and spillages. Emptying portable loos down a WC can be a messy business, so extra cleaning may be required in areas that attract campervans.

### Options to consider

Increasingly public toilet providers are banning the emptying of portable toilets in their WCs by putting up notices, however this is difficult to enforce in unmanned facilities and can give out an unfriendly and unwelcoming message.

A more positive approach could be to signpost people to the nearest Chemical Disposal Point, working with local campsites for example to promote their services in mutually beneficial partnerships. It may also be worth considering the installation of a Chemical Disposal Point to address the issue and add value to the service available.

### ◊ Shower/wet room facilities

Shower facilities can be popular, particularly in areas that attract campers, walkers, cyclists and sailors, all of whom will happily pay for the opportunity to freshen up. Wet room facilities can be incorporated into disabled toilets without much additional space required.

### ◊ Laundry facilities

For toilet facilities that already have electricity and plumbing a self- service, coin operated commercial washing machine and dryer can make a useful addition to the facilities, particularly in areas that attract campers and sailors. They can also be useful for the cleaner to use for laundering hand towels and cleaning cloths on site while attending to the toilets.



### ◊ Vending machines

In areas with high footfall, vending machines can help generate some additional income at low cost. Options include renting or purchasing the machines outright or a service agreement where the vending machine supplier offers a profit share or rental for the space.

Almost anything can be sold via a vending machine these days, not just the obvious sanitary products and condoms. Creative thinking about the environment you operate in, the customers you will attract and the level of footfall will help you choose the best vending option for you.

For example – in isolated areas with no other services bean to cup coffee vending machines could offer a welcome refreshment to travellers along with snacks and other drinks; if shower facilities are provided then toiletries can be sold, coin operated hair dryers and straighteners installed; and what about selling your local community newspaper or visitor guide via a vending machine if there are no shops in the area?

### ◊ Use of outdoor space around the building for amenity value

The outdoor space around the facilities can be used to make the premises look attractive, safe and welcoming. It's this space that gives the first impression to customers. For local residents it can turn the facility from a public eye sore and embarrassment to a real community asset. Linking up with local community growing initiatives can increase local buy in and create that important sense of local ownership.

As well as attractive amenity planting, outdoor seating can be installed to provide a waiting area and a social spot – potentially encouraging sales from that coffee vending machine.

### ◊ Campervan Package

In some areas the provision of a Chemical Disposal Point for emptying of campervan toilets can be beneficial. To encourage campervan users to value and seek out the facility rather than just using a WC to empty their loos in, an attractive package could be put together for them to purchase. Depending on the facilities available at your location, a Campervan Package could include a shower for all the occupants, a water tank fill up, battery charge, toilet emptying and a coffee while you wait.

### ◊ Car parking

If your public toilets are located next to a car park you may want to consider taking on the ownership of the car park too. In urban areas car parks can generate significant funds from parking fees. Car parking charges are increasingly being introduced in rural areas now, especially in areas of high traffic, near beauty spots or visitor attractions.

With an increase in the use and promotion of electric vehicles there is growing demand for electric charge points. Providing a charging facility in your carpark might be worth considering. Full grant funding is currently available from the Energy Saving Trust for installation of electric charge points in some areas.

### ◊ Advertising

The space on the back of a toilet door can be valuable advertising space as it communicates to a captive audience with time on their hands to read whatever is put in front of them. Local businesses may be interested in paying for the use of this space, or your own community groups might use it to promote forthcoming events and activities. The amount you can charge will depend on what value the advertiser places on the space, so it will be important to have a realistic idea of footfall to indicate the likely size of the audience.

Wall space elsewhere inside and outside the building can be used for similar purposes. External walls are useful places for public notices and in rural areas with few other facilities they can become the information hub for the community. A map showing the next nearest public toilet or Chemical Disposal Point is always a helpful addition too.

### ◊ Renewable Energy

To reduce running costs it is worth considering installing solar thermal panels to provide the hot water requirements of the facilities. This is especially beneficial if shower and/or laundry facilities are also provided creating additional demand for hot water.

Photovoltaic panels can also be considered to provide electricity to the site, especially useful if the facilities are off grid. For those that are on the grid, excess energy generated can be sold to the grid providing additional income. Where PV panels really come into their own is if there is high volume use or an electric charge point for cars or campervans.

### ◊ Rainwater Harvesting

Using rainwater instead of mains water within toilet facilities can help organisations deliver some of their environmental outcomes and reduce their carbon footprint. It is also a useful consideration for toilet facilities that are situated far from the mains water supply.

Rainwater can be collected from the roof of the toilet building, filtered and stored. It can then be used within the building in toilets and washing machines as well as for watering plants and outdoor amenity areas. It is not however suitable for hand washing or drinking, unless a UV filter is installed.

The main environmental benefit is the reduced use of mains water. Mains water is environmentally costly to produce in terms of the energy and chemicals used in its treatment and distribution. The resulting water is of drinking quality which is an unnecessarily high standard for use in toilet flushing.

Rainwater harvesting can also reduce pressure on drainage systems which can contribute to the reduction of urban flooding and pollution and erosion related to heavy run off. This can be an important consideration if seeking planning permission for construction or renovation of toilet facilities.



## Section 7: Where to get advice and information

This section has a list of links to useful organisations and publications which will provide more information about topics covered.

### Where are Existing Public Toilets?

The Great British Toilet Map <https://greatbritishpublictoiletmap.rca.ac.uk/>

### Asset Transfer or Acquisition

The Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) is a Scottish Government funded programme, set up to help community-based groups in Scotland to take on land or building assets for their community. <http://www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk/>

**The Development Trusts Association Scotland** is the national body for development trusts in Scotland, supporting community- led organisations to unlock the potential within their community <http://www.dtascot.org.uk/>

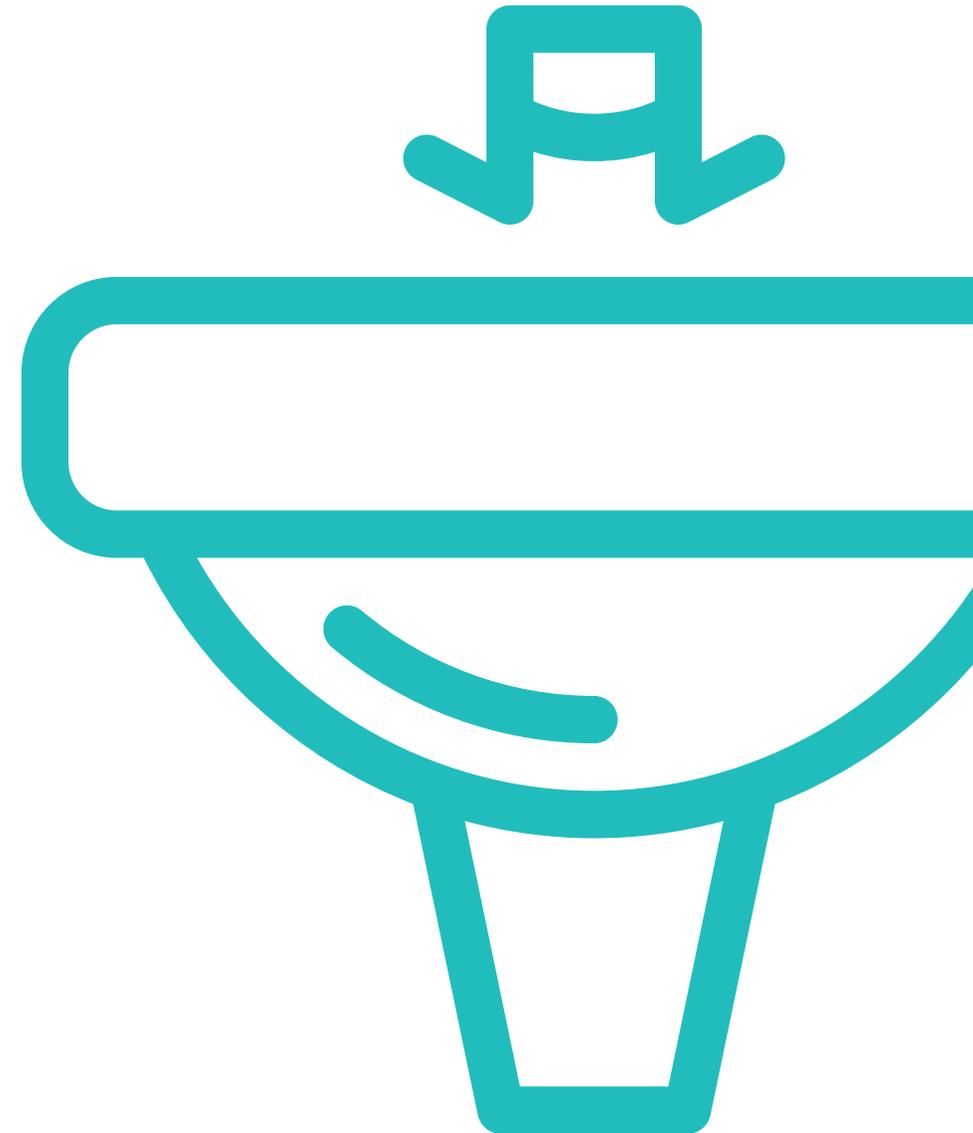
### Design and Provision of Public Toilet Facilities

**The British Toilet Association** – works to provide the highest possible standards of hygiene and provision in all “away from home” toilet facilities  
<http://www.btalooos.co.uk>

**Publicly Accessible Toilets:** a design guide. Gail Knight and Jo-Anne Bichard.  
[https://www.academia.edu/1351895/  
Publicly\\_Accessible\\_Toilets\\_An\\_Inclusive\\_Design\\_Guide](https://www.academia.edu/1351895/Publicly_Accessible_Toilets_An_Inclusive_Design_Guide)

### Renewable Energy

**Local Energy Scotland** – Provide advice and support to develop renewable energy schemes or to secure and manage income from renewables <http://localenergy.scot>



## Section 8: Case Studies

### Biggar Community Toilets

South Lanarkshire Council (SLC) decided to close all its public toilets in 2015 and indicated that it may be interested in proposals which would enable any premises to remain open. In response, the Biggar Business Group, Friends of the Burn Braes, Biggar Gala Committee, Biggar Rotary Club and Biggar Theatre Workshop got together and formed a Working Group (WG) to see what could be done.

The group recognised early on that linking their plans to a charity could be beneficial so they agreed with the Trustees of Biggar Theatre Workshop (BTW) that they would operate as a sub-committee of BTW Ltd. The WG approached SLC which agreed in August 2015 that the BTW /WG operate the toilets for one year on a nominal lease of £1. As BTW already had a track record of managing change, making appropriate use of funds and running a volunteer organisation it was considered that they had the necessary competence to manage the toilets.

The WG carried out an options appraisal and prepared a plan for how the toilets would operate on a viable basis as a social enterprise. They use automated door locking which is adjustable so opening and closing times can be varied and cleaning is carried out twice daily on a contractual basis. Capital costs of £15,000 were envisaged at the outset with annual running costs estimated at £15,000 making a budget for year 1 £30,000.

Donations were invited and grant applications made to the Biggar Common Good Fund and Clyde Wind Farm raising £18,400. The toilets re-opened in May 2016 and after a few teething problems with technology, things are running smoothly. Two locally based cleaning firms share the daily cleaning duties. Volunteers manage the accounting, empty the slot machine which collects 40p for each visit; make daily checks and provide flowers/plants inside and outside the toilets.

The WG arrangement was reviewed after the first year and as things had gone well it was agreed to continue with the arrangement. The income from the slot machine door contributes to the running costs, businesses and individuals continue to make regular donations by standing order, there are collection boxes around the town and the entry charge has recently been increased from 20p to 40p. Volunteers make regular checks on consumables, tidiness and security and circulate regular updates to supporters, through social media and email. CCTV has been installed in the entrance way to enhance security.

Mike Chad of the Working Group advises other groups to go ahead and “Do it too”, adding “you need a small group who will actually deliver to make it happen and keeping the community involved ensures their support.”

Biggar Community Toilet /Contact: [info@biggarcornexchange.org.uk](mailto:info@biggarcornexchange.org.uk) 01899 221555



## Arisaig Public Toilets

Local outrage at The Highland Council's decision to close the public conveniences in Arisaig village at the height of the 2011 summer season resulted in Arisaig Community Trust (ACT) taking on the responsibility, from July 1st 2011 for keeping them open.

Chair of ACT, Ann Martin, said at the time 'Although we will be in receipt of an annual sum of over £3000 Highland Comfort Scheme grant, we have done our sums and the running costs will be well over £6000 a year. We need to do a lot of local fundraising but we're sure Arisaig residents will support us in keeping this essential service open. This is absolutely what the Trust was set up to do – to save a local service from closure. Although it's been a difficult couple of months with a lot of hard work put in by the directors, we never had any doubt about taking them on. They are the first public toilets travellers come across after leaving Fort William and are very well used by bus parties, lorry drivers and boat users as well as car passengers – and locals. To close them would have been madness'.

Negotiations with The Highland Council took almost two years, with Arisaig Community Trust finally taking legal ownership of the public toilets on 28 May 2013. They put together a funding package to maintain and, hopefully, upgrade them - local fundraising and lunches at the annual Arisaig Craft Fair went specifically to the Toilet Fund. They also installed wall-fitted donation boxes in the toilet vestibules, together with a 'story' of the community road to ownership. This was important to both raise awareness of the fact that Arisaig public toilets are community-run NOT council-run, and raise some funds towards refurbishment.

An eco-refurbishment of the whole toilet block was agreed. Plans included installing a solar-powered hot water supply, water-efficient cisterns, high quality energy efficient lighting and hand driers, and easily cleaned wall and floor coverings. The Trust is still working towards this, but is yet to achieve the full plan. A major upgrade of the accessible (disabled) facility has been carried out, as have other minor improvements. At the outset, the Trust received offers of support from the business community, including the provision of new dispensers, an ongoing supply of paper consumables, a free deep clean of the premises, and the supply of renovation materials – some at cost, and some donated.

The toilets are cleaned 364 days a year and a salary above the living wage is paid. Currently someone unlocks every night and opens again in the morning, but electronic opening is being considered.

Arisaig's advice to other groups is absolutely yes, you should go ahead and take on toilets but speak to the local authority first about their Comfort Scheme as they may be able to support you, also, if you can, find a friendly local lawyer to do your conveyancing and finally see what other support can be gleaned from other businesses, both locally and further afield. Arisaig's experience is that as time has passed, the Trust has been 'left to get on with it' and little local financial support is forthcoming, with what support there is, continuing to come from an Edinburgh-based businessman with a love for Arisaig.

Arisaig Community Trust website [www.arisaigcommunitytrust.org.uk](http://www.arisaigcommunitytrust.org.uk)



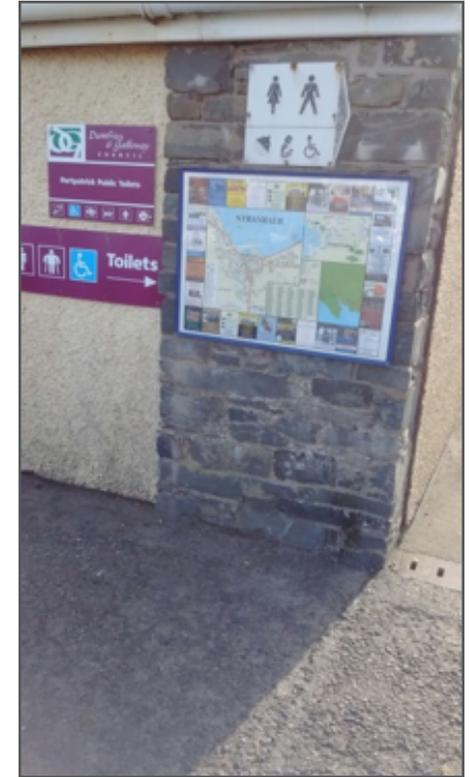
### Portpatrick Harbour Community Benefit Society<sup>15</sup>

In 2016, the community in Portpatrick (Dumfries and Galloway) launched a community share offer to raise funds to support their bid to buy the local harbour and breathe new life into it. Having successfully bought the harbour, the group has gone on to acquire by asset transfer from the local authority, an area of grassland behind the harbour for the nominal sum of £1. This will enable greater scope when it comes to developing future harbour plans.

Portpatrick's public toilets became an unstaffed facility in the summer of 2016 with the loss of three local jobs and reduced opening hours when the local authority (Dumfries and Galloway Council) withdrew their support. [Portpatrick Harbour Community Benefit Society](#) (CBS) has agreed to take on the toilets from the Council and adapt the building to provide much needed harbour facilities including toilets and showers. They have secured an initial fee of £25K from the Council to take them on and are working with their [local Third Sector Interface](#) to identify sources of funding which will help them to realise this next phase of development.

Calum Currie of Portpatrick Harbour CBS said "Purchasing the harbour, for the benefit of the community, has enabled us to go on and provide a wider range of services as part of the redevelopment. The know how has enabled us to turn an uncertain situation, the future of the public toilets, into a win for everyone, the community, visitors and the local authority."

Portpatrick website - <http://www.portpatrickharbour.org/>  
Contact: – info@portpatrickharbour.org



<sup>15</sup>Portpatrick Harbour Community Benefits Society (OSCR SC035754, FCA 7185)



## Kyle and Lochalsh Development Trust - Public Toilets



Local people and visitors can now take advantage of a new laundrette service in Kyle thanks to Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust.

The modern, self-service laundry room is open daily from 8am to 5pm within the Kyle Community Facilities building, which is located next to the main central car park in the village. The laundrette contains two large washing machines and tumble dryers, which are coin operated. A washing machine cycle costs £4 and the dryers are £1 minimum for 28 minutes.

The Kyle Community Facilities building, which is owned and managed by the Trust on behalf of the local community, also provides public toilets and four shower rooms – entry into toilet and shower block (20p) shower use £1 for 5 minutes. The Trust took ownership of the public conveniences in 2014 from The Highland Council, and last year the building underwent a major refurbishment as part of a wider programme which included extending the community pontoon in Kyle Harbour.

The toilet building was run-down and in urgent need of modernisation and the Trust was responding to a clear need by taking it over. Having modern, clean toilets, shower rooms and a laundry in the heart of the village benefits local people as well as the many visitors to the area such as sailors, backpackers, public transport users, lorry drivers and campers. The improved facilities support the needs of the growing market for sailing tourism on the west coast of Scotland.

Kyle and Lochalsh Development Trust website: <http://www.kyleandlochalsh.org.uk/public-toilets.asp>



## Composting Toilets – Arran

For locations off the mains waste water supply dry toilet facilities can offer a low cost solution. Composting toilets are cheap to install and have very low running costs. They are ideal for a land based setting such as a community woodland, allotments or growing project where the toilet users have bought into the idea and have a degree of interest and ‘ownership’ in the end compost product. People who will be using the resulting compost are more likely to take care in how they use the facility and what gets put down the loo.

Compost toilets should however be treated with caution in heavy use, public locations as most members of the public will be unfamiliar with this type of facility. There is a degree of public education required in how to use a composting toilet. For passing users just wanting a place to relieve themselves there isn’t always an interest in learning how to make the best compost!

The Community Land Initiative secured Climate Challenge Fund and Postcode Lottery funding to set up their community garden and allotments which also included putting an ECO toilet on the site as there are no other facilities. They are very proud of their “dry separating toilet” which requires no plumbing or special facilities – just a gravel base to site the toilet and a hot bin to compost the solid waste. Urine is soaked away and solids can be composted down and used on the allotments.

It cost around £4,500 to install the Eco Toilet building, toilet and hot bin (like a big polystyrene wheelie bin) with consumables such as paper, hand sanitiser and bin liner bags all that is required to keep it going. Cleaning and maintenance is currently carried out by staff on the project. “It is an excellent unit” said Pippa Downing the Project Manager “the company came and installed it all, solar panels runs a small fan which dries things out and there is no smell.” To find out more contact Pippa on [development@arranland.org](mailto:development@arranland.org)



## Menter Bro Aled - Llansannan, North Wales

In 2009 the community council in the Welsh village of Llansannan held a community-wide appraisal to understand the needs, wants and aspirations of residents. It transpired that the issue many people were concerned about was the threatened closure of the village's public toilets

To try to stop this action, the village began negotiations with Conwy County Borough Council, which was very welcoming to their request to take over the ownership of the toilet facilities. However, there were a number of overheads that the community council would have to take on – chiefly raising the monies to pay the annual rates (£800). So the village decided to register as a limited company with charitable status, 'Menter Bro Aled', which would make them eligible for grants and for discounts on the rates.

They successfully applied for a 100% rate rebate and negotiated £4000 from the local authority towards restoring the provision to a working standard, a sign of Conwy Council's support for this local initiative.

The village faced some problems in restoring the toilets. Weather damage meant that new roof tiles were needed, plumbing had to be repaired and windows replaced. However, they found that the damage was mostly superficial, as the building itself was only about 25 years old.

Village activists who were involved in the building trade provided many of the necessary skills for the restoration of the building and work was carried out on a voluntary basis. Cleaning of the toilets is also voluntary by the landlady of the local pub.

The toilets have been in local ownership for a year now and there have not been any problems with anti-social behaviour, despite concerns about graffiti. They find the toilets are used extensively, especially by delivery and service drivers, as well as walkers and other tourists passing through.

Word has spread of the toilets to other areas and it has become a 'toilet to be seen'. It is considered an important element in attracting visitors to the village's shops and services.

In light of this experience of taking over the toilets, Menter Bro Aled are now looking at other community-based initiatives. Said one member of the community council, "As it happens for us, there was no choice – we either did it ourselves or have no toilets. And once you go down that lane of having these facilities close, the village will deteriorate".



\*Case study originally featured in Publicly Accessible Toilets - An Inclusive Design Guide





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