

From: David Beaman

Sent: 11 September 2021 06:40

Subject: Re: Guildford Access Group - Public Toilets Provision Review [UNC]

For the attention of Stuart Riddle, Project Lead - Public Toilet Provision, Guildford Borough Council

My attention has been drawn by Sophie Butcher (GBC Democratic Services Officer) as a member of Guildford Access Group on which I represent South West Surrey Disability Empowerment Network (which I Chair and represents the interests of the less able community in Guildford and Waverley) to the current review of public toilet provision in Guildford for which you are the designated Project Lead.

In addition to my position as Chair of South West Surrey Disability Empowerment Network I am also an elected Farnham Resident councillor representing Farnham Castle ward on both Waverley Borough and Farnham Town Councils so I am more than well aware of the financial impact on local authorities of continued reductions in Central Government financial support for the provision of public services which has been exacerbated by the financial impact of COVID. As you are aware this has resulted in Guildford and Waverley Borough Councils seeking to investigate various ways to work closer together to reduce costs without affecting overall provision of public services.

Whilst it is appreciated that Guildford Borough Council (GBC) is, like Waverley Borough Council, having to review all its costs I am very concerned that consideration is even being given to "investigate which small number of public toilets could be viable to close in a way which minimises impact to our residents while delivering much needed cost savings". To start with use of the phrase "viable to close" is, apart from being an interesting definition of the word viable, implies that some public toilets will have to close. This is the wrong way to even start approaching this matter.

The provision of public toilets is an essential service that is valued not just by those with medical conditions which may require them to have a need to use toilets at short notice but by all members of the community especially the elderly and those with babies and young children requiring changing facilities. It is, therefore, suggested that GBC should before considering any closures investigate the following courses of action to see whether that the level of public toilet provision could be maintained and could even be enhanced viz :-

- **Seek Financial Contributions From Parish Councils :** In Waverley the provision of public toilets has been mainly taken over by Parish and Town Councils who have greater freedom to take on the responsibility and cost of public toilet provision since to date these costs can, if Parish and Town Councils wish, be passed onto local residents through increases in Parish and Town precept over which unlike Borough and District Council charges there has, to date, been no limits over level of precept increase that can be applied by Parish and Town Councils. Outside Guildford Town Area there are 24 parishes in GBC of which 23 have Parish Councils. According to GBC's website all public toilets outside Guildford Town Area only the public toilet in Ripley is maintained by GBC although there are public toilets in Shere and Ash that are not provided and maintained by GBC (are the provision and cost of maintaining public toilets in Shere and Ash the responsibility of the respective Parish Councils?). Since the public toilets although mainly located in the Guildford Town Area, benefit ALL residents of Guildford I think it would be appropriate to seek some financial contribution from all Parish Councils for the cost of maintaining public toilet provision in Guildford Town Centre. At the very least Ripley Parish Council should be requested to take on the financial responsibility for maintaining the public toilets on Ripley High Street.

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- **Seek Alternative Ways of Funding Public Toilet Provision** : Whilst every effort should be made to reduce costs of public toilet provision care needs to be taken to ensure that an overall level of public toilet provision is maintained at all times particularly in the evenings and on Sundays and Public Holidays. Other alternative methods of funding public toilet provision need to be investigated.
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- - **Charging** could be considered at some (but not all) public toilets where enhanced facilities are provided (or where improvements require to be funded) although care would need to be taken that any revenue earned was significantly greater than costs that would be incurred in collecting any revenue earned. It should, however, be noted that National Rail no longer charges at public toilets at their stations which includes Guildford
- - **Sponsorship** should be considered for public toilets particularly for those public toilets that are located close to commercial organisations that are likely to directly benefit from their provision such as G Live and Tunsgate Centre
- - **Increase Other Charges** : Consideration needs to be given to increasing car park charges where public toilets are provided as part of car parking provision (Bedford Road, Farnham Road and York Road) and recreation ground charges where public toilets are provided (Stoke Park, Shalford Park and Onslow Recreation Ground).
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- **Seek Permission for Public to Use Other Provided Toilets** : Some public toilets are provided "commercially" as part of their overall provision to the public - the public toilets in The Friary Centre on the Food Court floor being a good example in Guildford. There are, however, many other public toilets provided particularly in restaurants, public houses, sport and fitness centres (some of which I assume are under the control of GBC), supermarkets and petrol stations which are generally only for use by those using those facilities to purchase something. Farnham Town Council has been successful in managing to reach agreement with a number of owners of these toilets in Farnham to allow people to use these facilities without requiring any need to purchase anything. Similar agreements should be investigated in Guildford which could enhance the overall level of public toilet provision.

It is, therefore, our opinion that instead of investigating which public toilets are no longer "viable" and should be closed the emphasis should be on means of different ways of funding public toilet provision in Guildford and the possibility that could exist to enhance the level of public toilet provision by reaching agreements with other providers of toilets in the town to allow people to use their facilities without any obligation to purchase any of their goods or services.

When your report is finalised I would appreciate receiving a copy and, if possible, I would also like to have the opportunity to address any Committee or Council meeting at which recommendations are made and decisions taken.

I hope that these comments are helpful and I look forward to hearing from you in due course although in the meantime if there is any further information that I can provide please do not hesitate to let me know.

David Beaman

Chair - South West Surrey Disability Empowerment Network

(Also Waverley Borough and Farnham Town Councillor - Farnham Castle Ward and Chair of WBC's Western Area Planning Committee)