

Agenda Item

Executive Board

January 2008

Mark Reilly



Mid Week Herald – Back to Basics Campaign on Public Conveniences

Summary

In the autumn of 2004 the Council reviewed the provision of public toilets across the District.

A report was presented to the Council which considered each public convenience on the following criteria: -

- A) Condition Survey
- B) Usage
- C) Seasonal usage.
- D) Location in relation to other facilities.
- E) DDA compliance.

The report made recommendations to reduce the number of Public Conveniences that are provided by East Devon but to continue to provide a sustainable service level where a need was identified. The reductions in the conveniences were achieved by offering the those conveniences that were identified for closure to the Parish / Town Councils to maintain; if the Parish / Town Councils did not wish to retain the conveniences, then they were closed.

The report identified further future initiatives to improve service provision and potentially reduce some cost areas when the appropriate opportunity arises. These initiatives would form part of a future service strategy.

Currently, eleven public conveniences are delivered in partnership with Parish and Town Councils and two with the private sector.

It has been the experience of some of these Parish and Town Councils that the aspirations of the public have not always been shown by the usage of some of the facilities.

In September 2007 the Council received correspondence from Archant, Devon who produce the Mid Week Herald. For several weeks the Mid Week Herald ran a campaign called "Back to Basics" which aimed to highlight community concerns about the provision of public conveniences in East Devon.

This report gives details of that campaign; the current level of provision; and possible opportunities for procuring new sites.

Recommendation

That, where there is a need identified or requested by a Town or Parish Council, East Devon District Council will procure public conveniences through the planning process and / or sponsorship.

This is subject to the District not being obliged to meet costs out of its revenue and / or capital finance budgets.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

To provide a mechanism that could facilitate additional public conveniences at no additional cost to the Council.

b) Alternative Options

That the provision of public conveniences is allow to continue on its present course until members request a review.

c) Risk Considerations

Any reduction in facilities or service would have a negative response from the public and would generate bad press.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

Dependant on member's recommendations

e) Date for Review of Decision

N / A

1 Main Body of the Report

The intention of the Mid Week Heralds campaign was not to demand more council run toilets but for the Council to acknowledge that public conveniences are a priority for their readers.

It is asked by their readers that members find more innovative ways of encouraging private enterprises or partnerships to fund facilities.

Attached in appendix one is a copy of the correspondence from the Mid Week Herald.

1.1 Current Provision of public conveniences

The provision of public conveniences is not a statutory service but it is a service that has a high profile with the residents of East Devon DC.

Prior to the Councils review of the provision of Public Conveniences in October 2004, the Council provided and maintained 55 conveniences. Currently there are still 42 conveniences open to the public. There is only one Devon authority that provides more conveniences.

A list of the remaining toilets is set out in the attached Revised Simplified Spreadsheet in Appendix 2 attached and listed on the council's web site. This consists of the following:

- a) Open All Year Round, EDDC Funded and Controlled in green, 24 ½ conveniences.

- b) Open All Year Round, Town/Parish Funded but EDDC Controlled in yellow, 6 ½ conveniences.
- c) Summer Opening Only, Closed Oct – Mar incl. EDDC Funded and Controlled in Purple 5 conveniences.
- d) Summer Opening Only, Closed Oct (Half Term) – Mar incl. EDDC Controlled. Bourne Leisure Sponsored in Light Blue, 1 convenience.
- e) Open All Year Round, Owned and run by Beer Caravan Park. EDDC Annual Contribution in dark blue, 1 convenience.
- f) Town/Parish funded and maintained but still in EDDC ownership in light brown, 3 conveniences.

There are several Town and Parish Councils who have determined that public convenience provision is a high priority in their area and have entered into a partnership with the Council to fund and /or maintain the 9 ½ public convenience (the half of convenience represents funding to open the convenience out of season).

One private company sponsor the summer opening of one convenience and the Council works in partnership with another private company to provide a convenience.

1.2 Result of the “Back to Basics Campaign”

The results of the campaign can be seen in Appendix 3.

The majority, over 56% of the responses came from Branscombe, Honiton and Seaton. Axminster, Colyton, Ottery St Mary and Sidmouth produced a lesser response totalling just over 23%.

Exmouth was the town most affected by the review with two public conveniences closed and four having summer opening only.

Honiton and Axminster each had two public conveniences closed.

Branscombe, Ottery St Mary and Sidmouth each had one public convenience closed

Seaton had one public convenience that had been closed for some years prior to the review. Two public conveniences are now closed out of season.

Colyton was not affected by the review.

1.3 Provision of future facilities.

It is unlikely that East Devon will be in the position to finance new facilities in the foreseeable future. However, it is committed to investing in the current stock subject to finance being available. There have been several methods of providing facilities and these are as follows:

1.3.1 “Paid for toilets”

Research was carried out into “paid for” toilets on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee (22 November 2006) and the findings were as follows:

“Two Councils were approached for their feed back on the subject of ‘paid for’ toilets. The first was Cherwell District Council, North Oxfordshire who has five out of their six unisex or disable facilities as paid for toilets. They currently have a maintenance agreement with a company Danfo who charge £19,000 per year to inspect and repair the five facilities. This includes a visit to each of the five facilities once a week to inspect and repair but does not include cleaning and consumable supplies and the collection of monies.

One of their sites is in the town centre of Bicester (next to the MacDonald's) where the public are charged 10p. The takings for all five units are between £30 to £45 per week which equates to approximately £2,340 per year. This site is comparable with Sidmouth Market toilets whose operating cost for 2005/06 was £9,774. There would also be an additional cost incurred for the collection and banking of the money. One problem experienced at this site is that one person uses the toilet then leaves the door off the latch so people after them can use it for free.

Another site is at Kidlington, a large village, where they have four units which take on average £27 per week. This works out at £1,404 per year for this site which is comparable in size with Branscombe Beach Car Park whose operating cost for 2005/06 was £8,671. The units are emptied once or twice a week but the revenue collected will not cover the utility charges. The units do suffer from vandalism, mainly in the disable facilities.

The second council approached was Exeter City who currently has two blocks of paid for toilets. The first is in Princesshay, in the heart of the city centre. This is managed by the developer working on the new Princesshay development and they carry out all the cleaning and maintenance. There is an attendant on site when they are open and the charge is 20p. There has been mixed reaction to the changes. On the one hand people welcome the clean toilet and like the idea of the attendant. On the other hand some people are reluctant to pay and relieve themselves in nearby doorways etc.

The second is a 'Super Loo' located at Matford Park which they rent from a company for £12,000 per year with a charge to the public of 10p. This covers utilities costs, materials and cleaning however other costs such as rates are not included. The rental agreement runs out in the near future and Exeter City Council will be converting these units back to free toilets. There is a question regarding charging for the use of urinals but this will require further investigation."

Evidence indicates that providing facilities through charging would not be cost neutral, nor provide a surplus income.

1.3.2 Sponsoring of Toilets by Town and Parish Councils and or the Private Sector

As stated earlier in this report it can be seen that there is a high level of sponsorship and partnership working with some of the Town and Parish Councils, and in some instances with the private sector, to provide facilities.

The District Council views favourably any offer to facilitate additional conveniences where a third party would defray the building and / or maintenance costs.

1.3.2 Delivery of new facilities through new developments.

There is the opportunity for facilities to be provided through Section 106 agreements when there are new major developments. These developments could be commercial and or residential but consideration is given where there is a need identified to the provision of a new public convenience.

Currently, the continued maintenance of such a facility would not be borne by the District but be part of the planning consent.

Should a Town or Parish Council identify the need for a facility and is prepared to meet the maintenance costs, the District may be able to deliver this through the planning process.

Legal Implications

There are no legal issues requiring comment on this report.

Financial Implications

The intention of the recommendation is that there are no financial implications.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

None

Background Papers

- ❑ Environmental Overview Committee 7 October 2004 and Executive Board 27 October 2007 – Review of the Provision of Public Conveniences.
- ❑ Scrutiny Committee, 22 November 2006 - Public Convenience Provision
- ❑ Appendix 1 - copy of the correspondence from the Mid Week Herald.
- ❑ Appendix 2 - Revised Simplified Spreadsheet detailing the remaining toilets.

M Williams
Chief Executive

Executive Board

K Hassan
Corporate Director

30 January 2008

M Reilly
Head of Street Scene

Appendix 3 Results of the Back to Basic Campaign

| TOWN/VILLAGE | SLIP | PETITION | TOTAL |
|---------------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Awliscombe | 8 | - | 8 |
| Axminster | 57 | - | 57 |
| Beer | 14 | 1 | 15 |
| Branscombe | 27 | 79 | 106 |
| Broadhembury | 3 | - | 3 |
| Budleigh Salterton | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Chardstock | 2 | - | 2 |
| Colyton | 33 | - | 33 |
| Dalwood | 2 | - | 2 |
| Dunkeswell | 10 | - | 10 |
| Exmouth | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Feniton | 10 | - | 10 |
| Gittisham | 2 | - | 2 |
| Hawkchurch | 1 | - | 1 |
| Honiton | 120 | 10 | 130 |
| Kilmington | 1 | - | 1 |
| Luppitt | 2 | - | 2 |
| Membury & Musbury | 8 | - | 8 |
| Monkton | 2 | - | 2 |
| Newton Poppleford | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Offwell | 1 | - | 1 |
| Ottery St Mary | 30 | - | 30 |
| Payhembury | 1 | - | 1 |
| Seaton | 121 | - | 121 |
| Sidmouth | 22 | 6 | 28 |
| Smallridge | 1 | - | 1 |
| Stockland | 5 | - | 5 |
| Whimple | 5 | - | 5 |
| Whitford | 1 | - | 1 |
| Yarcombe | 1 | - | 1 |
| | | | |
| Not East Devon | 27 | 12 | 39 |
| | | | |
| TOTAL | 520 | 113 | 633 |

Most of the responses were on individual slips although one petition was received. It is unknown where the petition originated so the petition has been listed according to the signatories address.