

Statement to Cabinet Delivering Petition to Save the Larkhall Public Toilets

13/02/13

I am delivering a petition with nearly 500 signatures demanding the Larkhall toilets stay open. For at least 125 years there have been public toilets in Larkhall Square, and possibly even earlier than 1888¹. Why? Because they are needed.

The need for this facility has only increased over time with the population increase, particularly in the elderly range. Statistics show Lambridge ward with around 25% over the age of 60 and growing.² However, the toilets serve the whole population: young people, disabled people, mothers, shoppers, visitors, delivery drivers, cab drivers and workmen. This is a basic, essential provision. Chances are, the reason it has not been a statutory requirement to provide toilets is that in any previous age it would have been unthinkable to dispense with them.

The impact on the integrity of the village would be incalculable and severe. Shops would see reductions in trade since shoppers who need a toilet quickly would stay away. There is no viable alternative to these toilets. The community hall is accessible only until 3pm on weekdays. Many, including women and children, would not go into the Larkhall Inn. The small Cafe is totally unsuitable as the single cubicle is on the far side, requiring crossing all the crowded tables. People are reluctant to use commercial premises where they make no purchase, which is another reason why we have public toilets.

It has been said, "There are difficult choices to be made. Supporting bus services or providing loos for instance."³ Yes, the council has been under intense pressure from the national government to make cuts. But these cuts to essential services should be resisted when the argument for making them springs from priorities and values that are not in the interest of the majority and when we see almost daily reports of society becoming more unequal⁴, with only weak efforts to counteract this.

The people of Larkhall have risen up to say clearly and overwhelmingly to the council to drop this mistaken measure.

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¹ Bath Map surveyed 1883, printed 1888

² <http://openlylocal.com/wards/4699-Lambridge> accessed 7/02/2013

³ Cllr David Dixon, private email to Lin Patterson 6/02/13

⁴ Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2012, by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, <http://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/comm124.pdf> accessed 7/02/13