

Statement to Cabinet by 'Save Our Larkhall Toilets'

12 June, 2013

Larkhall needs its public toilets. It is not equal to other areas in Bath since there are *more* elderly here. With a rapidly aging population, public toilets are needed to ensure people do not become housebound due to lack of toilet facilities away from home. The council seems to be ignoring the findings of its own Equality Impact Assessment which states "the elderly are frequently quoted as needing access to greater numbers of toilet facilities." An elderly person will tell you this is not just a 'quote'; it is a fact, confirmed by Age UK.¹ The Assessment goes on to list negative impacts on other groups: people with young children; specific illness groups; more women; and states that "some from these groups may feel unable or uncomfortable to go in and use toilet facilities inside pubs, cafes and shops." The report could have listed men with prostate problems, those with weak bladder syndrome, pregnant women and those with irritable bowel syndrome, all of whom have supported this campaign.

With three schools nearby, the needs of young people and mothers with young children are prominent. All these equality requirements will not be met if the toilets closed, nor will the first of the council's stated three aims in its Annual Review: "Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone."²

Street fouling will be the inevitable result, a major public health risk. This would not meet the second stated aim of the council: "Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live."

The third and last of the council's aims is "Building a stronger economy." In an area dependent on a mix of shops including essential services, if one shop goes, the others are at risk, since shoppers go where they can meet the largest number of needs with the least distance. The integrity of the Larkhall shopping district is vital to the viability of the whole area, house prices being only one indicator. People signing the petition have said they could not shop in Larkhall without the toilets.

Bath's economy relies on tourists. To enhance Bath's attractiveness to tourists, as well as to do with health, pollution and congestion, the council is keen to get people out of their cars and make more use of public transport, walking and cycling. But many will not do so without adequate public toilet provision.

For all these reasons, the economy of closing toilets is both penny unwise and pound foolish. The Larkhall toilets in particular are supported by substantial numbers of mobilised voters, as the 534 signatures on the petition demonstrate. B&NES, please rethink this measure.

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¹ *Nowhere to Go: Public Toilet Provision in the UK*, Help the Aged, 2007, found at www.ageuk.org.uk 4/6/13 The Age UK report cites "Solihull Council closed all its public toilets in an effort to save money. Local businesses were unwilling to pick up the slack as the council had recommended, to allow non-customers to use their toilet facilities. This left many people, particularly those who have the greatest need for public toilets, restricted in how often and for how long they are able to leave their homes." When B&NES is counting on older people remaining independent in the community, this is distinctly counter-productive.

² B&NES Annual Review 2012/2013