

Statement to Full Council Meeting 12th September, 2013, by the Save Our Bath Public Toilets campaign

Keeping our toilets open comes down to recognising a basic human need and seeing that our local, representative democracy works.

Money

I acknowledge the council is under terrific pressure from a misguided national programme of cuts. But although the council's first priority is to "protect services to the public", the main focus has been on cost, on how much would be saved by closures, although £120,000 savings is not a large amount relative to the B&NES budget. Now with the council's success in finding other organisations to take on the running of several of the threatened toilets, the annual outlay is significantly less, almost vanishingly small in terms of B&NES budget. Why, then, should the remaining toilets have to close, especially when they meet a basic human need?

As to the question, "where else could savings be made", there may be avoidable wastage to correct or 'best practice' innovations to plan, like your own award winning conversion to LED street lighting saving up to £250,000 per year, and many other green savings that could be made in order to meet a basic human need.

Of course cost is an issue, but have all the long term costs of *closure* been taken into consideration? Not to mention the loss in rates when local businesses start folding, or damage to the tourist trade, look at the safety implications. Other closed toilets have been left boarded up. And although I know that is not your plan, it may yet be the result. You may be familiar with the "Broken Windows Thesis." If you aren't, your police officers are. Research shows that if an area begins to look neglected, it attracts offenders because of the perception that the area is vulnerable to crime, with residents perceived as being fearful to stop crime, triggering a downward cascade, into a real lack of safety. I can tell you that Twerton residents living opposite the public toilets are very anxious about this, as they already suffer fouling of their property when toilets are closed at night. Basic human need.

Does our local representative democracy work?

Consultation was inadequate. It was part of the whole B&NES budget consultation from Nov to Jan, but information on which looses were due to

close was not announced until December 6th.¹ There was no time to inform or mobilise the community. You know this is not fair. Unlike with the libraries, there was no separate consultation on providing for this basic human need.

The Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was inadequate. EIAs identify the impact on vulnerable groups. But the EIA failed to assess each area's toilet individually. Some areas such as Twerton and Larkhall and probably others, have no adequate alternative facilities, and doubly so for disabled people or wheelchair users. However, the EIA did list the many groups of vulnerable people who would be adversely affected. This seems to have been ignored, but you must know that is not right, now that people are bringing to your attention that they understand this is a basic human need. I understand you may now be starting to address this.

Does our representative democracy work? What does it mean when you say, regarding toilets due for closure last month, that you are now "working through options for alternative provision?" Hopefully this means, as allowed for Weston, the toilets will stay open until adequate alternative provision is found. Does it? And what happens to Larkhall in April if alternative provision has sadly not been found?

Are the views of the 536 Larkhall residents who signed a petition, the 66 residents who wrote considered comments over just two hours in the Larkhall Square, the over 2000 signatories from all over Bath and the 400 Twerton residents who signed in just 3 days, are their views going to be heard, respected and acted upon? Is this a place where democracy works?

I believe in democracy, or I wouldn't be here. I trust that this council will support the overwhelming wish of the taxpaying public to retain their public toilets.

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¹ Bath Chronicle, Dec 6th <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-33964894.html>