



**AGENDA ITEM:**

**DATE OF MEETING**  
**13<sup>th</sup> January 2009**

**Toilet Provision within Middlesbrough Town Centre**



**1. INTRODUCTION**

A number of presentations were given to the Older Person's Partnership Board entitled Toilet Provision and Continence.

Following the presentations Middlesbrough Senior Citizens Forum expressed concerns about the current quality and quantity of public toilet provision in Middlesbrough, and the associated problems this causes for older people and those who are disabled or have health issues.

A small task force from Middlesbrough Senior Citizens Forum and the Older Persons Partnership Manager conducted a survey of current provision within Middlesbrough Town Centre. The Forum defined the town centre as the central area between A66 on the North side and Borough Road on the South Albert Road on the East and Hartington Road on the West.

The results of the survey are included within this report.

The Forum found that a major barrier preventing people from using public toilets is that they are often not located in places where older people need them. Toilets are needed in Parks and Cemeteries and more are needed in the Town Centre and Bus Station. Opening hours are another concern. In many areas of the town public toilets close at 5:30 pm, the same time as shops, leaving the town centre with very little provision. In addition, opening hours need to be publicised. Regular opening hours, and very clear sign posting with opening times advertised are therefore essential. For many older people it is vital to know exactly where the toilets are in the areas they frequent. For many it is the first consideration when planning an activity and can be a deciding factor in choosing where to go. Being afraid to go out because of inadequate public toilets is a travesty for older people who want to stay active and independent.

The lack of accessible and good public toilets affects not only the quality of the town centre and bus station, it also reduces the dignity and quality of people's lives. Whether it is families with small children or older people, it is important that people have the confidence that the facilities they need are available when they are out and about.

## **2. EVIDENCE/DISCUSSION**

We live in an ageing society : the 2001 census shows that the 65+age group has increased by 31per cent (to 9.7 million) whereas those aged 16 and under has fallen by 19 per cent (to 11.5 million). Help the Aged's report Nowhere to go: Public toilet provision in the UK (May 2007) showed that more than half of older people found that a lack of local public toilets prevented them from going out as often as they would like.

The Middlesbrough Physical Disability Reference Group some of whom are wheelchair users with mobility problems have voiced their concerns and frustrations about inconsistent standards of accessible provision which can make journeys out difficult for them and their families.

Customer expectations of council services continue to rise and the increasing population of older citizens will mean that even more people will require toilet facilities that are accessible, clean and safe.

Middlesbrough Senior Citizens Forum believe more should be done to improve current toilet provision. However the Forum are aware that there is no statutory duty for local authorities to provide public toilets and the Government looks unlikely to introduce such a duty. The provision and maintenance of toilets in public places is at the discretion of local authorities who have, under section 87 of the Public Health Act 1936, a power to provide public conveniences but no duty to do so. With the service viewed as "discretionary", it is little wonder that in times of budget cutting and efficiency saving, public toilets are finding themselves well down the order when priorities for spending are set. This does not mean local authorities have to be the only providers, the Forum are less concerned about who owns or operates these toilets as long as there are the right incentives and controls to ensure there is an adequate level of provision.

Hard data on public toilet provision is patchy: figures have not been compiled on a consistent basis, and they do not cover the full range of toilets that people can use in any area. The two main sources of information are figures for local authority toilets compiled by the Audit Commission until 2000, and figures released by the Valuation Office Agency show a 9.1% reduction of public toilets in the North East of England.

The decline in public toilet provision has had a disproportionate impact on some people across the country. Women make up slightly more than half of the UK population, and a higher proportion of older people. Yet the balance of toilet provision for men and women is at best 60:40 in favour of men, because cubicles take up more room than urinals. In terms of recommended toilet provision, the British Toilet Association suggests twice as many facilities for women as for men, 1 cubicle per 550 females and 1cubicle or urinal per 1,100 males.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS**

Middlesbrough Senior Citizens Forum consider the attributes of a good loo to be:

Open - if it is not open it is no use to anybody;.

Clean - especially clean porcelain and dry floors

Safe - this means good lighting, a location that feels safe and no visible signs of anti-social behaviour.

Well Stoked - with toilet paper, soap, water towels and disposable bins

Good signage and convenient opening times

Facilities for the Disabled - wide cubicles to accommodate wider wheelchairs, unisex toilets that will accommodate wheel chair users whose assistant or carer may be of the opposite sex.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Forum recommend that the local authority consults with the local community when considering changes to local authority toilet provision in areas within Middlesbrough.

The council should signpost the availability of toilets that are accessible to the public.

There is a need to increase women's provision in all new developments or major refurbishment schemes, that the council have control or influence over.

Places – where we live, shop, work, take recreation – are more accessible and attractive when public toilets are well planned, designed, maintained, clearly signposted, and available when people need to use them (including late at night). They are one of a range of amenities that help to attract a more diverse range of visitors, encouraging them to spend longer in towns and city centres, and to visit again.

On a more positive note Middlesbrough Social Care Department and Middlesbrough Senior Citizens Forum have been campaigning for a Changing Places Toilet and the campaign has picked up speed. A site has been found for one Changing Places facility and funding obtained. A further two facilities will be installed at the Lansdowne Centre in due course to cater for the needs of people with complex disabilities. The facilities will be owned and maintained by the Council.

Changing Places toilets cater for the needs of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, who cannot use standard accessible toilets. And this issue impacts on other

people – for example, some people who have had a severe stroke, some people with acquired head injuries and frail and elderly people. These people are some of the most isolated in our society. They - and their families and carers - need Changing Places toilets to be able to take part in their communities.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Help the Aged: Nowhere to Go Document  
Valuation Office Agency

## **AUTHORS**

Janet Burgess Older Persons Partnership Manager  
Middlesbrough Senior Citizens Forum