

South Derbyshire District Council

OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Report on the Investigation into the Options for SDDC Public Toilets

**Submitted to the
Environmental Services Committee
3rd January 2002**

Overview Committee Members

**Cllr. R Bell Chair
Cllr. K Richards Vice-Chair
Cllr. Mrs E Robbins
Cllr. K Harrington
Cllr. W Routledge
Cllr. J Bladen**

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1. Purpose of Investigation

To make recommendations to the Environmental Services Committee on the viability, financing and service levels of public toilets provided by South Derbyshire District Council.

2. Scope

This investigation covers the options for urban and rural public toilets, excluding those in parks or public buildings, the possible means of financing and the required levels of servicing.

3. Introduction

The issues relating to public toilets, outlined in the Scope above, were placed before the Development Services Committee in the form of an officers report on the 8th of November 2001. The Committee referred the matter for scrutiny with a request to report back at the next Committee meeting to be held on 3rd January 2002.

The Chair of Overview determined that because of both community and corporate implications of the toilets issue it should be considered by the Overview Committee.

4. Report

4.1 Meetings

19th November 2001 Special Overview Committee
10th December 2001 Overview Committee

The Chair of the Overview Committee and the Vice-Chair of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee (member of Overview Committee) met separately with the Deputy Chief Executive and the Technical Services Manager to confirm the information likely to be required for the special meeting on the 19th of November.

4.2 Contributors

The following attended and provided oral and/or written reports at the Overview Committee meetings:

Mr I Reid, Deputy Chief Executive
Mr J Hansed, Technical Services Manager
Mr P Evans, DSO Manager

4.3 Documents Reviewed

- Report to Housing and Environment Committee 5th April 2001
- Report to Development Services Committee 8th November 2001

4.4 Current Arrangements

The financial crisis faced by the Council in 2000 necessitated reduction in expenditure across all the Council's services resulting in the decision in the Spring of 2000 to close public toilets outside Swadlincote.

Some Parish Councils wished to retain the toilets in their Parish and subsequently entered into partnership with the District Council. These Parish Councils undertook the responsibility for the day to day operation and cleaning of the toilets whilst the District Council accepted responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the facilities.

The current status of each of the Council's public toilets is shown below:

Swadlincote, Bus Station	Open	Fully Council serviced and maintained.
Swadlincote, East End car park	Open	Fully Council serviced and maintained.
Ticknall	Open	Fully Council serviced and maintained.
[Toilets at Ticknall are part of the Village Hall and are serviced by the Council under a legal agreement.]		
Newhall,	Closed	
Overseal	Closed	
Repton	Closed	
Woodville	Closed	
Willington	Closed	
Etwall	Open	Partnership arrangement
Melbourne	Open	Partnership arrangement

The Committee noted that the closed toilets still incurred costs for the Council due to varying levels of vandalism as well as any ongoing external building maintenance needs.

4.5 Policy on Provision of Public Toilets

The Committee agreed that it was necessary to identify the criteria against which the need for public toilets could be determined.

It was also felt very strongly that where public toilets were provided they should be of a standard, and maintained at a standard, which would not detract from the image of the District.

The Committee considered the following factors in determining whether public toilets should be provided now and in the future:

1. The need for toilets -
 - resulting from visitors to a locality
 - to serve the local community
 - a combination of the above
2. Resources and Financing Arrangements
3. The on-going costs of maintaining the facilities at an acceptable standard.

4.6 Review of Existing Toilets

Swadlincote: Bus Station

This was the main facility within Swadlincote and had recently undergone refurbishment. The committee considered that there was a clear need for this facility (based on the last usage figures obtained) and that the level of daily cleaning was the main issue here. (See section 4.7 on Service Levels.)

Swadlincote: East End Car Park

The Committee noted that suggestions had been made for this facility to close as one toilet could be deemed adequate for a town the size of Swadlincote. Also there is likely to be a need for expenditure of the order of £2000 in the near future for replacement of a discharge pump.

The last available usage survey indicated that although this facility was not used as often as the Bus Station toilets it was well used. In common with the Bus Station Toilet, it incorporates a disabled toilet.

Members reported that the level of cleanliness, particularly in the disabled facility, could be improved.

Members were satisfied of the need for this facility but again the service level was the significant issue.

Ticknall

The options for the Council are very limited due to the legal agreement requiring on-going servicing and maintenance. It was reported that this area was popular with walkers and there had been no instances of vandalism.

Newhall

The toilets in Newhall did not meet the criteria considered by the Committee to determine a need for public toilets. It was reported that, even though closed, repair costs due to vandalism were running at £600 since they were closed in the Spring of 2000.

The Committee concluded that these toilets should be disposed of in the most cost-effective manner.

Overseal

Officers reported that Overseal Parish Council had indicated their willingness to enter into a partnership arrangement with the District Council. The local community need identified by the Parish Council and their willingness to work in partnership to retain this facility led the Committee to conclude that this facility should reopen.

Repton

The Committee Member from Repton reported that Repton Parish Council felt there should be a public toilet in the village due to tourist interest in the area. However the siting and the standard of the current public toilets were not considered by the Parish Council to be suitable and it did not wish to enter a partnership arrangement.

The Committee considered that the Repton toilets should be disposed of by the most cost-effective method. It was noted that a local resident had indicated a wish to purchase the toilet block for use as a garage should the Council decide it wished to dispose of it.

Woodville

It was reported to the Committee that the closed toilets at Woodville which also included a bus shelter were in a poor state of repair and operating costs, when open, were high (repair and water costs). Also a usage survey undertaken at the time of the Swadlincote toilets' survey indicated a low level of use.

The Woodville Parish Council had considered the possibility of entering a partnership arrangement with the Council but had advised they felt unable to do so because of the costs involved.

The Committee agreed that there was no clear need for toilets at Woodville and that the existing toilets should be disposed of in the most cost-effective manner.

The possibility of a public toilet facility being provided by a commercial business in a neighbourhood in partnership with the District and / or the Parish Council was aired and the Committee supported this approach in principle.

Willington

The closed toilets at Willington were reported to be in good repair and had suffered no vandalism. The Parish Council and the local District Councillor were of the opinion that Willington was a tourist area and, having the railway station, there was a need for public toilets. The Parish Council was also of the opinion that the toilets should be fully serviced by the District Council.

The Committee was not completely convinced of the need for public toilets at Willington and noted that there were several commercial establishments in close proximity providing a toilet facility. The Committee also noted the Parish Council's reluctance to enter into a partnership arrangement and felt that there was no stronger case at Willington than in any other parishes that have entered into partnership with the District Council.

The Committee agreed that Willington Parish Council should be approached for confirmation of their position and if they were now agreeable to partnership working the toilets should be reopened. Failing such agreement the toilets should be disposed of in the most cost-effective manner.

Etwall and Melbourne

Officers reported that the partnership arrangements at Etwall and Melbourne had operated successfully and that no complaints had been received regarding these facilities.

The Committee agreed that the partnerships with these parishes should continue but were of the opinion that the District Council should undertake occasional inspection of such facilities.

4.7 Service Levels

The Committee considered that the state of public toilets does have a significant impact on visitors and the local community and does reflect on the District Council and the district as a whole. It was reported that no complaints had been received regarding the toilets currently operated under partnership arrangements. Complaints that had been received related to the town centre toilets

The Committee considered that occasional monitoring of facilities which are serviced by Parish Councils should be undertaken to ensure standards are being maintained.

Currently the town centre toilets are cleaned once per day early in the morning. It was reported that to undertake an additional clean of the bus station toilets would cost an additional £4000 per annum. It was also reported that the Council had given a commitment to increase the cleaning of these toilets as a condition of receiving SRB funds to refurbish the toilets.

The Committee agreed that additional cleaning of the bus station toilets would meet its desire for standards to be enhanced but also considered that a similar service should be provided at the East End car park toilets. Further discussion led to the consideration of reinstating one of the street cleansing personnel, whose duties had been mainly in cleansing the town centre, and who was made redundant as part of the financial reductions in 2000. This new member of staff would undertake a town centre warden role and assume responsibility for the cleaning of both toilets and for litter picking throughout the town, complementing the improvements stemming from the 'Cleansing the Environment' best value review. It was felt that regular monitoring could also ensure minimum vandalism. An approximate cost for employing a town centre warden was given as £19,000 per annum.

5. Recommendations

Closed Toilets

- Newhall:** Dispose of by most cost effective means. Saving £1000 p.a. (NNDR plus anticipated vandalism and repair costs) plus savings in staff time
Demolition estimated - cost £1700
- Overseal:** Reopen under a partnership arrangement with Overseal Parish Council (Maintenance commitment £750 p.a.)
- Repton:** Dispose of by most cost effective means. Saving £300 p.a. (anticipated repair costs) plus savings in staff time
Demolition estimated - cost £1300.
- Woodville:** Dispose of by most cost effective means. Saving £500 p.a. (anticipated vandalism and repair costs) plus savings in staff time
Demolition – estimated cost £1100 p.a. Cost of replacement bus shelter £1500, Subject to 50% grant from the County Council
- Willington:** Confirm position of Willington Parish Council regarding partnership arrangement.
If no agreement on partnership working dispose of toilets by most cost effective means. Saving £300 p.a. (anticipated repair costs) plus savings in staff time. Demolition - estimated cost £1500.

Swadlincote Toilets

Increase service level at Bus Station and East End car park toilets and enhance town centre cleansing through the introduction of a town centre warden. Estimated cost £19,000 p.a.

Partnership Working

Maintain current partnership arrangements with Melbourne and Etwall Parish Councils and extend the arrangements to Overseal and possibly Willington. The District Council should undertake periodic inspection of these toilets to ensure standards are maintained.