

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 13 SEPTEMBER 2011  
title: INITIATION OF THE REVIEW OF THE PROVISION AND OPERATION  
OF PUBLIC TOILETS ACROSS THE BOROUGH  
submitted by: JOHN C HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES  
principal author: TERRY LONGDEN

## 1. PURPOSE

### 1.1 The purpose of this report is two fold:

- To propose the arrangements for the review of the provision and operation of the Council's public toilets across the borough, the aim of which is to propose a financially sustainable and acceptable level of service in respect of the provision of public conveniences.
- To advise Members of some of the options to be considered and hence the range of potential outcomes.

### 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – To be a well-managed Council providing efficient services based on identified customer needs.
- Corporate Priorities:

With respect to PEOPLE:

- Promote community cohesion.
- Encourage more involvement in community participation.
- Maintain the sustainability of the rural community across Ribble Valley.

With respect to PLACES:

- Maintain the sustainability of our towns and villages as service centres.

With respect to PROSPERITY:

- Develop the tourism offer in the area.
- Encourage and support social enterprises.
- Other Considerations – Economic – encouraging greater levels of spend through tourism by attracting visitors into the retail premises.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- ### 2.1
- The Council operates 24 sets of long established public conveniences across the borough, 4 of which are in Clitheroe town centre, 3 are in Longridge, with the remainder being spread across the villages or parishes of the borough. The locations of these facilities are as shown by Appendix A.

2.2 This high number of facilities reflects the combination of the predominately rural nature of the borough and its attraction to visitors as a tourism and leisure orientated area.

2.3 The direct cost of the service in the 2010/11 year was approximately £166,000, made up as follows:

Employee costs	£98,000
Building related	£56,850
Services	£3,150
Transport	£8,000

### 3. ISSUES

3.1 Consideration of the continuation of the provision of public toilets across the borough is a relatively complex matter that would benefit from close Member involvement. Hence it is proposed that a small working group of Members be formed to consider officers' proposals in the development of an acceptable and sustainable outcome.

3.2 The outcome of the review range from:

- a) the closure of all the facilities; to
- b) the continued provision under revised arrangements of selected facilities with the closure of others, with or without arrangements to provide alternative facilities.

3.3 If the Council is of a mind to ensure that the facilities should continue to be made available to the public, arrangements mentioned in "b" above can be developed and still deliver cost savings to the Council. It is important to note however a "*one size fits all*" solution to maintain a service and yet reduce costs is not possible. Sustainable tailored options for each locality that draw or take benefit from the local circumstances in order to continue the provision of the service, and still deliver savings would need to be developed. This would be a complex operation.

3.4 A wide range of issues as listed below need to be considered as part of the overall view. Also listed are a range of solutions that can be potentially applied to the various facilities:

- Current Service Levels.
- Building Maintenance and Replacement (Capital Budget Implications).
- Potential Partial Solution: Urban Community Toilet Schemes.
- Potential Partial Solution: Rural Community Toilet Schemes.
- Potential Partial Solution: Local Management and Support of Council facilities.
- Potential Partial Solution: Increased Role of Local Key holder or "Guardian".
- Potential Partial Solution: Opening and Closing Arrangements.
- New Facilities to Cater for new Demands.
- Residual & Disposal Costs.

#### 3.4.1 Current Service Levels

The overall standard of some of the facilities and in particular the servicing of them, is recognised by the users as being high. This is evidenced by the letters of support and comments received by the users of the facilities.

Two full-time employees on fixed term contracts, each equipped with a small van, currently clean and support the Council's public toilet stock. There is

also budgetary provision for two additional seasonal operatives to support the servicing in the summer months. Each of the toilet facilities is included in one of two servicing routines. Whilst the removal for example of just one of the facilities from the cleaning schedules would have a bearing on the workload of the operatives, it would render only minimal cost savings, as the reduction in workloads would be insufficient to reduce overall staffing levels or transportation costs. To achieve substantial savings, a whole route or round of toilets would need to be removed from the schedules.

The current servicing arrangements ensure that each set of toilets is cleaned daily, Monday to Friday. They are also visited at least on either Saturday or Sunday (or both) for “freshening” and to ensure that standards are maintained and that the provision of toilet tissue and soap is adequate.

Where possible the Council already utilises the support of local individuals to act as key holders for the facilities within their villages or locality. The individuals open and close the toilets each day at no, or nominal cost, to the Council. Where no local key holder is available and where the risk of vandal damage to the toilet is minimal, the toilets remain open overnight. In other locations, ie where no local key holder is available and where there is risk of vandalism, arrangements are made for Council staff to open and close the facilities each day. This work is undertaken as an additional out of hours role to the substantive duties of the staff member and attracts additional payment. In addition to the 6 or 7 servicing visits per week, some toilets therefore require at least other “ancillary” visits per site per day. The existing opening and closing arrangements for the facilities are also included in Appendix A.

#### 3.4.2 Building Maintenance and Replacement (Capital Budget Implications)

The Council undertakes the routine and maintenance and repair of the facilities and also undertakes the overall refurbishment of the premises as required and as finance permits. In recent years the toilet facilities at Chipping, Sabden, Slaidburn and Whalley have all been either replaced or refurbished at an overall approximate cost to the authority of £270,000. Facilities currently needing or approaching refurbishment are those at Stonebridge, Castle field and Dunsop Bridge. The continued operation of these facilities will therefore have future capital funding implications.

#### 3.4.3 Potential Partial Solution: Urban Community Toilet Schemes

When considering the various options available, Members should be aware of relatively recent initiatives termed “Community Toilet Schemes” which local authorities nationally are increasingly promoting as an alternative to them providing public conveniences. In such schemes retailers and businesses make the toilet facilities which they provide for their customers available to the public without the need for a purchase. These alternative facilities are adequately signposted and promoted so that they can be readily found or located by members of the public. The businesses are in turn paid a contribution to their janitorial expenses by the local authority.

#### 3.4.4 Facilities in Town Centres

When considering the geographical centres of Clitheroe and Longridge it should be noted that since the establishment of the Council conveniences, several new sets of private conveniences have been made available to the customers visiting these town centres. Table 1 below shows the provision of the Council public conveniences and the complimentary private facilities available for customer use in the Clitheroe and Longridge town centres.

**Table 1**

<b>Clitheroe Town Centre</b>		
<b>RVBC Public Facilities</b>		<b>Customer Toilets</b>
Church Walk	1	Booth's
Market	2	Tesco's
Woone Lane	3	Sainsbury's (Moor Lane)
Castlefield	4	Homebase (Waterloo Road)
	5	Maxwell's (King Lane)
	6	Café Nero (Castle Street)
	7	Emporium (Moor Lane)
	8	Piccolino's ( Moor Lane)
	9	Apricot Meringue (King Street)
	10	Museum Café (Castle Grounds)
	11	Bowling Green Café (Castle Grounds)
	12	Exchange Coffee (Wellgate)
	13	Colborne House Café (Wellgate)
	14	Platform Gallery (Station Road)
	15	Transport Interchange (Station Road)
	16	Heathcoat's Bar & Grill (York Street)
	17	The Grand (York Street)
	18	Molly's (Moor Lane)
	19	Library (York Street)
	20	St Michael & St John's
	21	St Marys Church
	22	St Mary's Hall
	23	Mansell's Coffee Shop (Swan Court)
	24	Osteria
	25	Cheesy Tchaikovsky
		A further 20 Licensed premises offer toilet facilities for their customers
<b>Total 4</b>		<b>Total 45</b>
<b>Longridge</b>		
Market Place	1	Sainsbury's
Berry Lane	2	Old Station Café (Off Berry Lane)
Stonebridge	3	Silk (Market Place)
	4	Stonebridge Café (Whittingham Road)
	5	No.65 Deli & Café (Berry Lane)
	6	The Bridge (Derby Road)
	7	Ducci (Berry Lane)
	8	Quench (Berry Lane)
		A further 9 Licensed premises offer toilet facilities for their customers
<b>Total 3</b>		<b>Total 17</b>

Note that the Council's public toilets in Clitheroe town centre are not a significant proportion of the overall number of conveniences provided within the centre. Also, the opening envelope of the privately operated facilities generally exceeds that of the Council facilities.

The incidence of the of privately operated toilets in the Clitheroe and Longridge town centres would support the introduction of Community Toilet Schemes as alternatives to the Council facilities. Informal approaches to retailers and business operators have been made and a number of them, in principal, support the introduction of such initiatives.

If the Council were to promote such a scheme it would, because of financial pressures, support only a relatively small number of businesses. This would potentially exclude a larger number of businesses that may wish to offer their facilities to the public. An alternative is therefore to provide funds not to the individual businesses but, in the case of Clitheroe, for example, the “Clitheroe Chamber of Commerce and Trade”. The funds would not be passed to the individuals but would be expended by the Chamber for the benefit of the centre as a whole, and the individual participating retailers would benefit through the increased footfall to their premises. In this way the overall number of facilities that are accessible by the public would actually increase. A proposal to promote a Community Toilet Scheme (CTS) in Longridge is similarly achievable.

The members of a CTS should predominately be non-licensed premises. It should be noted however that the nature of licensed premises or pubs has changed over years. Whilst some licensed establishments were strictly “drinking” places, with predominately male dominated environments, licensed premises are now more family focused, which hence potentially opens the way for selected licensed premises to be key members of a CTS.

#### 3.4.4 Potential Partial Solution: Rural Community Toilet Schemes

The provision of alternative toilets by the development of Community Toilet Schemes need not be confined to the urban locations or centres. The usage and locations of some outlying facilities mean that they can be readily covered by facilities already provided by local retailers or in suitable family orientated licensed premises. Depending upon the usage and characteristics of an area the Council operated facilities could be replaced by a single set of alternative toilets. A number of potential partners have already been informally approached and they have signalled their support for such an initiative.

#### 3.4.5 Potential Partial Solution: Local Management and Support of Council Facilities

The replacement of the Council operated facilities with alternative private facilities cannot however be universally adopted across the borough without there being some localised reduction in the overall level of service. The demand for public conveniences in the certain outlying villages can be considerable and the nature of demand can far exceed the capacity of potential alternative facilities provided through a CTS. This is particularly true for example where the Council toilets are located on car parks that have specific coach bays. The arrival of a coach party can easily overwhelm the facilities of a small café or public house. Hence the Council facility in such locations needs to be retained if the service is to be continued. It is conceivable however that the support and management of the actual Council facility is undertaken by a local organisation or business who themselves have a vested interest in continuing the provision of public toilets.

In such cases the Council could continue to provide and maintain the fabric of the building whilst the regular cleaning and support of the facility would be out sourced to local organisations or businesses. This arrangement would reduce the high element of travelling currently undertaken by the toilet cleaning crews. Local cafes for example, may benefit from such an arrangement.

#### 3.4.6 Potential Partial Solution: Increased Role of Local Key Holder or “Guardian”

In the course of the review, situations may occur where it is considered that conveniences need to be provided, but because of the rural nature of the location, no alternative to the Council facilities are available. Furthermore, no

local arrangements for the management and operation of the Council facilities can be made as there are simply no organisations or businesses willing to undertake this role. In such cases it may still be possible to engage a local person to act as “guardian” for the toilets. The usage of the facility may enable the frequency of the servicing visits to be reduced as long as the toilets are checked for condition and levels of tissue and soap on a daily basis by the guardian, who would hold a stock of the requisites. The reduction in the frequency of the visits would render cost savings.

### 3.4.7 Potential Partial Solution: Opening and Closing Arrangements

Where Council employees currently either open or close (or both) the toilets, it may be possible as an alternative to install time controlled automatic locks. A trial of such equipment is currently been undertaken. If successful this would be an alternative to using existing Council staff to secure the facilities and would hence lead to overall cost savings. The wider application and suitability of the equipment would be a measure for consideration as part of the overall review.

### 3.4.8 New Facilities to Cater for New Demands

There is no proposal to increase the number of toilets to cater for new or developing demands. Where such a demand for a facility exists as a result of the development or introduction of a new attraction, the facilities are to be provided by the operator of the “attraction”. To illustrate this point listed below are relatively recent “out of town” developments or attractions that incorporate toilet facilities for their visitors.

Out of Town Developments with Toilet Facilities:

Bashall Barn (Twitter Lane, Waddington)  
Backridge Farm Complex (Twitter Lane, Waddington)  
A59 Service Area (Barrow Brook) 2 sets of facilities  
Shackletons (Chatburn)  
Brownlow Hall Barn (Bashall Eaves)  
Strawberry Fields (A59 Gisburn)  
Carr Hall (Langho)  
Littlemoor Service Station & Convenience Store (Clitheroe)  
Stocks Reservoir visitor centre (Stocks Res)  
Littletown Diary (Littletown, Thornley)  
Wild Boar Park (Cow Ark)  
Fishing Lakes (Barrow)  
Hampsons Garden Centre (Barrow)  
Garden Makers (Wigglesworth)  
Beacon Fell Visitor Centre  
Silverwood’s Auctioneers (Clitheroe)  
Clitheroe Auction Mart  
Pendle Ski Slope (Sabden)

There are in addition numerous new or relatively recently established non-licensed cafés and tea rooms scattered across the borough that offer toilet facilities for their customers.

No expansion in the provision of conveniences as provided by the Council is therefore proposed.

### 3.4.9 Residual & Disposal Costs

If a toilet facility is simply closed or “mothballed” the Council would still be liable for payment of the NNDR and sewage disposal charge (where levied) for the facility. The level of these charges are shown by Appendix A. Charges are shown as zero if the set of toilets is not independently rated, ie it is included in the rating assessment for the car park or playing field in which the facility is located. The demolition of the building would be a solution to avoid these charges. The actual plot of the facility may, depending upon its size and location, have a considerable capital value.

## 4. RISK ASSESSMENT

### 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The aim of the review is to achieve real cost savings to the Council. Any savings subsequently achieved are likely to have staffing implications and hence end of contract payments may be incurred.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None.
- Political – There are no specific political issues arising out of this report, although a subsequent decision on the provision of the service could be seen to have an impact on relationships with the Council’s partners.
- Reputation – There is a risk to the reputation of the Council that any variance of the service may be perceived as a reduction in the level of this valued service. Careful introduction of any variation to the service and extensive communications would reduce this risk.

## 5. **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

5.1 Note this report and the range of potential options available when considering the provision of Council operated public conveniences across the borough.

5.2 Agree that a small working group of Members be formed to consider officers’ proposals in the development of an acceptable and sustainable solution for the provision of the conveniences across the borough that are accessible to the public.

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

For further information please contact Terry Longden on 01200 414523.

There are no background papers to disclose.

## APPENDIX A

Area	Location	Open	Key holder	Approx Date of Refurb	Condition	Residual Building costs ( £ p/a NNDR & sewage)
Bolton by Bowland	Bolton-by-Bowland car park	24/7	n/a	1995	Good	1,300
Chatburn	Sawley Road	24/7	n/a	1980	Good / Fair	1,100
Chipping	Chipping Car park	Day only	local	2006	Good	1,090
Clitheroe	Cemetery	Day only	RVBC	-	Fair / Poor	-
Clitheroe	Edisford Bridge	Day only	RVBC	-	Fair	-
Clitheroe	Brungerley Park	24/7	n/a	1900s	Poor	-
Clitheroe centre	Castle field	Day only	RVBC	1998	Fair / Poor	-
Clitheroe centre	Church Walk	Day only	RVBC	-	Good / Fair	1,750
Clitheroe centre	Clitheroe Market	Day only	RVBC	-	Good / Fair	-
Clitheroe centre	Woone Lane	24/7	n/a	1900s	Poor	460
Downham	Downham car park	Day only	Local	1998	Good	990
Dunsop	Dunsop car park	24/7	n/a	-	Fair / Poor	580
Gisburn	Mill Lane	24/7	n/a	-	Fair	810
Hurst Green	Avenue Road	24/7	n/a	-	Good	490
Longridge	Berry Lane	Day only	RVBC	-	Poor	830
Longridge	Market Place	Day only	RVBC	-	Fair / Poor	1,240
Longridge	Stonebridge	Day only	RVBC	-	Poor	780
Mellor	Mellor Lane	Day only	Local	1998	Good	2,050
Newton	Newton	24/7	n/a	-	Fair	590
Ribchester	Ribchester car park	Day only	Local	-	Good	2,780
Sabden	Sabden car park	Day only	Local /RVBC	2006	Good	1,460
Slaidburn	Slaidburn car park	24/7	n/a	2006	Good	1,780
Waddington	Slaidburn Rd	24/7	n/a	-	Fair	550
Whalley	King Street bus station	Day only	local/RVBC	2009	Good	3,650
Total						24,280