

Toilets update November 2015

Our current local resolution, proposed by Crowlas and Ludgvan WI, is all about public toilets. At Spring Countdown, we adopted the motion which says, "This meeting views with growing concern the number of public conveniences being closed. This retrograde step impacts on all and creates public health risks, as well as having an adverse effect on local business and on the tourist industry. We urge all local councils to make funds available to keep these facilities open."

From April 2016 no toilets will be funded by the County Council: the Council's position being that it has to save £196m over 3 years and that is why it felt compelled to make the difficult decision to stop the budget. They don't want any of them close, but they are not footing the bill either.

Amazingly, the provision of public toilets is not a legal requirement on county councils. You might have seen in the local news that Scott Mann MP is taking up the matter with the Prime Minister, calling for consideration for exemption of public toilets from business rates and the introduction of a statutory service. We have contacted him and explained our interest. All the Cornwall MPs are involved. For example, we have just heard from Derek Thomas MP that he is working too to make providing toilets less of a burden on local councils and communities and has written to George Osborne and met with David Cameron MP about the issue. The 6 Cornish MPs have also now joined forces to petition Government to exempt the toilets from business rates. We await the outcome.

There are some particularly good local ideas, where local businesses are allowing members of the public to use their toilets. As you will see, Pengagon WI wrote a fascinating article about the Camborne initiative. Could that work in your area?

The Community Toilet Scheme has so far not been taken up widely. This is where new or existing local businesses were invited to tender to develop toilet sites while retaining toilet facilities. We made various suggestions which the Council agreed to look at. Not a great success, but some toilets at least will remain open as a result and there are still more in the pipeline. Jordan's Café at Marazion Station for example has successfully tendered for the toilet block adjoining the café. They will be developing and extending their business, and keeping, we think, three of the much-used toilets going, which is very good news.

Cllr Joyce Duffin and **Michelle Carter-Foster (County Council and executive leaders on public toilets) tell us that** at least 2/3rds of all the toilet blocks across the county may have found a solution and this number is growing weekly. So that is not bad news, but it still leaves a lot of toilets potentially at risk.

County Council cannot give us a list of them, because there are commercial negotiations underway that are not public. So why not ask locally and find out whether the future of the toilets in your area still under threat? If you don't know, ask your local town or parish council what's happening and put pressure on them to act, if they are not clearly doing so already.

There are a number of different options. In some cases, this will have to involve increase in local precept, but that is not necessarily always the case. For example, local businesses could be asked to sponsor local toilet costs, or the local council could charge for the use of toilets, or let them out etc.

There is no time to loos.