



University of the
West of England

Faculty of the Built Environment



RESEARCH AND CONSULTANCY

User and provider perspectives on public toilet provision

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Occasional Paper 13

July 2002

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Published by:

Faculty of the Built Environment
University of the West of England
Coldharbour Lane
Frenchay
Bristol BS16 1QY

© Faculty of the Built Environment 2002
ISBN 1 86043 299 9

Date of publication June 2002

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Acknowledgement: This research was funded by the Nuffield Foundation 2001-2002-05-24

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PLEASE NOTE THAT LOCATION MAPS ARE ON THE CD ROM WHICH ACCOMPANIES THIS OCCASIONAL PAPER

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Research Basis

The purpose of this occasional paper is to give a report of research findings on public toilet issues, illustrated by details of interviews with user and provider groups and to put forward recommendations to improve the situation. The report is based upon a recent Nuffield funded project (from June 2001) which investigated the mismatch between statutory criteria and policy perspectives held by providers, and the practical needs of users, based on undertaking an illustrative case study of one local authority area (Footnote 1). We were specifically concerned with 'public toilets' especially traditional on-street municipal toilets but also those off-street ones for the use of the public as found in shopping centres, car parks etc. We did not extend the study to hospital, school, hotel and pub toilets, although many of our respondents naturally progressed into these topics too. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives of 6 provider groups (spanning public/private and on-street/off-street facilities), and 6 representative user groups plus additional material was gathered to provide background.

In this process key issues were identified as a basis for better developing design and policy guidance. The study contributes towards policy on social wellbeing whilst stressing the importance of developing a spatial toilet strategy that is appropriate for the geographical context of public toilet provision in urban and rural areas. The account of the research, especially the respondents comments, presented here may also serve as an example of 'the story of undertaking research' in what is a rather sensitive topic culturally, frequently the subject of sniggering among the unaware, but potentially a pivotal strategic factor in developing accessible, sustainable, socially inclusive human settlements. The research was undertaken by Clara Greed, with Isobel Daniels as research assistant and we include our first names in account to show which aspects Clara and Isobel were responsible for especially in respect of meetings and interviews. The style of the research is qualitative and interactive.

1.2 Geographical Location

The research was based upon an illustrative study, focused upon the small seaside and commuter town of Portishead. To capture the wider geographical situation, we found it more useful to set this town within the context of a sector emanating out from the centre of Bristol out to Weston super Mare, thus covering the administrative district of North Somerset Council, and reflecting the main vector of transport links with the city. Within this sector a representative range of potentially 'sensitive toilet location areas' are to be found. Starting at the centre of Bristol, the sector covers a range of urban areas, including main public transport termini, part of inner city Bristol, the surrounding suburbs, outer commuter settlements, and tourist hotspots such as Weston Super Mare. Portishead itself is both a small-scale tourist destination, a commuter town and an area undergoing development because of its strategic location near to Junction 19 of the M5 motorway. The sector also envelops a range of rural, and semi-rural locations where toilet issues are likely to be critical, including small villages, and out of town development and desolate stretches of main road cutting through the surrounding agricultural areas, punctuated by occasional bus stops and lay by toilets popular with both goods vehicle drivers and private car users. The geographical sector identified is shown diagrammatically in Figure 1.

The nature of North Somerset is such that outside the major urban area of Bristol City, and the seaside resort of Weston super Mare, much of the area is rural and fairly isolated, despite proximity to the M5 motorway network. Bristol has a complex travel relationship with the wider sub-region and the journey to work for Bristol encompasses much of the adjacent three local authorities (South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset, and North Somerset) which also generate substantial travel into Bristol for shopping and personal business. The North Somerset area extends from the edge of Bristol and the River Avon in the north, to the River Axe and the Mendip Hills in the South. To the west the Bristol Channel and a coastline is made up of cliffs and beaches, while inland it encompasses wooded hills, open moorland, reed beds and pasture land: thus attracting a range of types of tourists, ramblers and holidaymakers. There are four main towns across the district, Weston Super Mare is one of the largest seaside resorts in the West Country. Other local towns comprise Clevedon a small Victorian resort, Nailsea a new town built around an original village, as well as Portishead itself. The rural villages of Congresbury, Yatton, Banwell and Backwell have also experienced population growth since the 1980s. There are 36 rural parishes in the North Somerset area with the district covering a total of 373 square kilometres and with a population of around 190,000 with approximately 509 persons here square kilometre. Weston also caters 3 million visitors a year, including staying tourists, 'day trippers' from Bristol, conference delegates and boat passengers off the Campbell steamers in the summer.

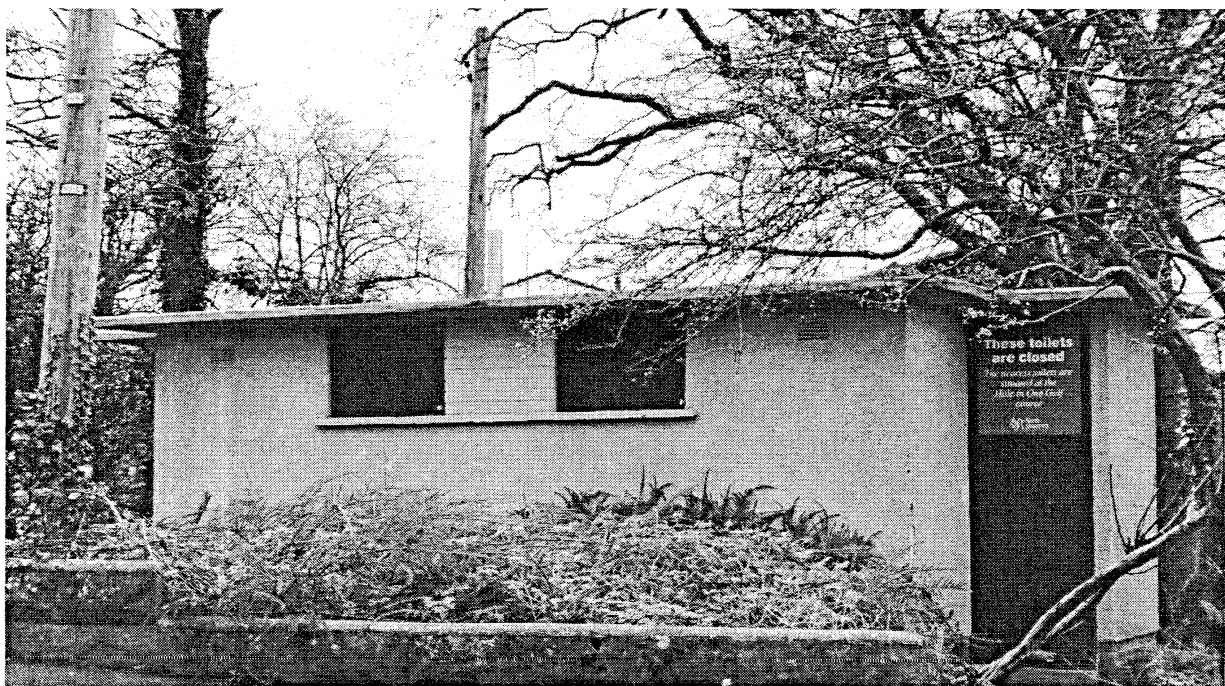


Figure 1: Toilets at the Bus Terminus at Nore Road, Portishead, closed Summer 2001, and demolished Autumn 2001 not soon after the research had started.

The study was centred around Portishead which has a population of 18,000, it contains only 3 toilets Esplanade (on the sea front), Wyndham Way (by the main supermarket and car park), and Hole in One (by the pub and putting green on the main coast road). Until recently toilets were also available at Nore Road (bus terminus) Figure 1, West Hill (local centre), and a second set at the other end of the Esplanade (by the 1930s outdoor swimming pool). 20 years ago there were at least two other

toilets to serve dockworkers at the harbour-end of the High Street. Due to proposed expansion of prestige housing schemes around the Marina (formerly the Docks) a further 8,000 population is expected. Toilet provision is being provided by the Marina but this may be only open to boat users. So in spite of population growth toilet provision is being reduced. **(Location maps of toilets are on the companion CD)**

Interviews were undertaken with a range of user and provider groups in particular locations in the settlements of Portishead, Wrington, Yatton, Nailsea, Banwell, Backwell, Clevedon, and Weston super Mare all within North Somerset, as well as in Bristol. Wrington is a small village with a population of 2,540 and has one toilet only which is located in Broad Street. Yatton a larger village with a population of 6,826 has one toilet in the High Street. Nailsea with a population of 17,230, and a mainline railway station, has two toilet blocks which are no longer maintained by North Somerset council, but have been taken over by the town council. Clevedon is an important seaside town with population of 21,670 and it contains 6 toilets (including one male only facility). These comprise one relatively new one beside the Safeway supermarket in the centre at Station Road; a large block on the seafront near to the tennis courts called The Chalet; and a block at the other end of the seafront by the pier used by people coming off the Campbell steamers. Until recently there were also several toilets available, for example at the district shopping centre (at Six Ways beside the post office); and great concern has been expressed in the press at their closure. So there was a very good coverage of originally which is now in decline. But they do have one quite good set of toilets by the Safeway supermarket in the town centre which apparently was provided through planning gain. These have an attendant but have recently have had their opening hours cut back closing at around 6pm when the supermarket itself is open to beyond 8 pm.



Figure 2 The New Toilets at Clevedon by Safeway supermarket in the town centre. These are purpose built and modern, but watch out for skateboarders in the surrounding square if you try to use them during the school holidays.

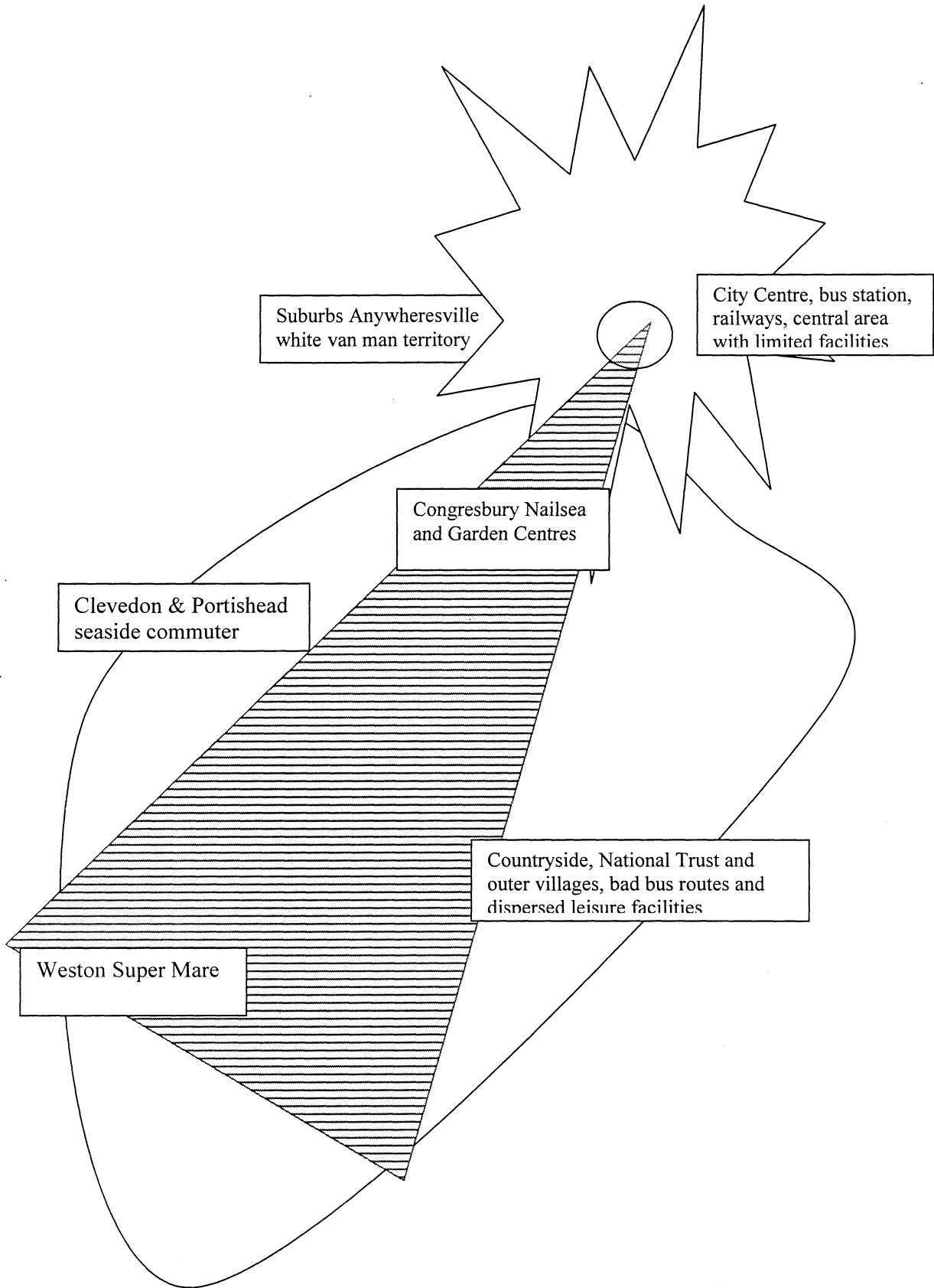


Diagram 1: SHOWING A SECTOR THROUGH FROM THE CENTRE OF BRISTOL OUT THROUGH THE SUBURBS AND NORTH SOMERSET DISTRICT TO WESTON SUPER MARE COVERING URBAN, RURAL AND SEASIDE AREAS

Weston super Mare is a major seaside resort of population of 64,935. The main public toilets are along the seafront, with additional facilities in Dolphin Square in the main shopping centre. There is also a range of outlying public toilets mainly located in parks or along main roads within district centres, giving a total of 21. The town has regularly received 'Loo of the Year' awards particularly for its famous attended toilets on the sea front (cf BTA,2000a). Currently a closure strategy is in operation which is based on closing outlying ones and focusing on seaside and central locations. The ones marked to be closed include Links Road, Uphill on the outskirts of the town, and Clarence Park East and Clarence Park West, as well as other outlying ones, at cemeteries and along main roads. The facilities, for example, at Kewstoke Toll Road have been acquired by a local kiosk retailer, who keeps them open both for his shop staff and tourists, and no longer come under the control of North Somerset Council. The study touched on the city of Bristol, especially the centre and southern suburbs.

Bristol is the largest urban area in the South West of England, with 372,088 inhabitants, an area of 109 km² and a population density of roughly 3413 inhabitants per km². As the regional capital of the South West, Bristol and its neighbouring district authorities form the largest and economically most important urban centre in what is essentially a rural, agricultural and tourist region. So we drew the sector out from the centre with particular reference to commuting patterns between North Somerset area and the city. Bristol has a total of around 55 toilets which are open 12 hours a day or less. 6 other blocks were closed in 2001, and a possible 20 more are being targeted for closure in the future. Of the remaining toilets 10 have separate disabled facilities, and 14 offer baby care facilities. 11 of the 55 sites are attended on a full time basis. 2 male only urinals remain, whereas in 1900 there were 90 male urinals. Of the 55 only around a tenth have attendants. Only a few (perhaps 3 on a good evening) are open 24 hours including the ones on the Centre. But this 'openness' should not be relied upon! Locationally, many public sites are spread across the city centre, and along main roads leading out of the centre, as well as historic locations in parks. However distribution is haphazard with some facilities in very close proximity, and some outlying residential areas having very patchy provision. Bristol received one Loo of the Year Award in 2000, and the quality of individual blocks varies right across the spectrum from very good to poor. In addition there are some off-street public toilets provided at bus stations, railway stations, in the Galleries shopping centre in Bristol, and two sets in the Shopping Mall at Cribbs Causeway, the latter being both extremely well designed and spacious. But the central bus station toilets are difficult to use having been relocated down steps with turnstiles installed which is not satisfactory.

1.3 Summary of Contents

In the first section 'the problem', of lack of adequate public toilet provision is explained further. a brief summary of existing research and key texts in the field is then provided. Next the scope and nature of the Nuffield project is described along with the methodology used. The case studies are then presented and comprise the main body of the text. Key findings and themes arising are summarised. Research of this nature begs the question, 'what can be done?' Therefore in the concluding sections priorities identified for change are identified and recommendations for improved provision are given. Emphasis is put up developing a strategic spatial policy towards

toilet provision, rather than 'just' looking at individual toilet blocks in isolation. However, the specific purpose of this occasional paper is to focus upon the findings of the Nuffield project, rather than to cover 'all' toilet issues. A wider treatment of the whole topic of public toilets, including prescriptive policy and design guidance, is provided in Public Toilets: Inclusive Design (Greed,2002,a) which was under preparation prior to the research project and takes a nation-wide perspective on the topic covering a wider range of generic toilet issues.



Figure 3: Toilets at the Horsefair, underpass beside the bus station in Bristol some of the most used toilets in Bristol (unable to photograph the bus station ones because of security)

Footnote 1:

The occasional paper is based on Nuffield Foundation funded research undertaken by C.Greed and I.Daniels and entitled, 'User and Provider perspectives in public toilet provision', undertaken 2001-2002.

2. THE PROBLEM

2.1 The Essential Weakness

In this section the main problems affecting all public toilets nationally are presented. The particular problems affecting the ones in the local area will be revealed in the account of the case studies in Section 5. One of the main reasons that there public toilet provision is given a low priority is that in an age of government cutbacks is because there is no legal requirement that local authorities 'must' provide public toilets, only that they 'may' that is they have the powers to do so - if they so choose. Therefore public toilets are an easy target for cutbacks in public expenditure. The situation is not helped by the fact that - quite apart from normal costs and maintenance - there is also a very high level of toilet vandalism, wanton destruction and criminal activity taking place within public toilets, particularly within men's toilets. Therefore the solution adopted by some municipalities is to limit the opening hours of public toilets to daylight hours or to close them altogether. In contrast, many women and other user groups need public toilets to remain open because they are the ones who are more likely not to have a car and therefore to walk or use public transport. If someone has a car they can always drive to find a toilet and use one at the motorway service station. Women are also more likely to be out and about doing the shopping, taking children to school and are the ones generally responsible for caring for small children who are more likely to need a toilet. Likewise the elderly, the disabled and public transport users all need toilets too. Currently there is a growing movement for better 'access' for the disabled, but the abled are also fighting for better provision, especially since their expectations have been raised by seeing what is possible under the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA,1995; Greed,2002b).

Researchers and campaign groups have already identified many of these problems, but little change has resulted (BTA,1999,2001). There appears to be a gulf, in perception, between the needs of the users of public toilets and the priorities of the providers. The two groups seem to be 'talking past each other' and often appear invisible to each other (Hillier,1999). The purpose of this piece of toilet research was to see how the situation is working out at the human and local level, by means of undertaking an illustrative study of one small, but indicative, geographical location.

One of the objectives the research was to stress the spatial dimensions of the problem and to map the location, distribution and density of toilet provision as part of the wider inclusive environments and access agenda (cf Imrie and Kumar,1996) - but not 'just' for the disabled but for everyone of all sorts. Such factors are as important in providing accessible toilets as all internal design details and the plumbing technicalities that so occupy toilet specialists. Practical outputs and recommendations are included including policy guidance principles arising from the research findings. Conceptually the proposed research may be placed within the ongoing urban social geography debate about the processes of the 'reproduction of social relations over space' in this case the imprint of discriminatory attitudes on the built environment (Massey, 1984). Therefore the research may be seen as a continuation of the work undertaken on social town planning, the professional subcultures of construction, and urban design issues.

2.2 A History of Decline

Over half of all public lavatories have been closed in England and Wales since 1997 mainly because of local toilet authorities' (lts) desire to save money (Greed, 1996). At the same time the government has been stressing the importance of creating sustainable and healthy cities, and exhorting people to use public transport, to cycle and walk more, all of which are likely to involve people needing more public toilet provision. But demands for greater mobility and accessibility of disabled groups require the provision are not supported by providing better back-up facilities such as public toilets to meet people's needs whilst travelling away from home (BTA,2001). Lack of toilet provision particularly affects women because they are more likely to be the ones who are out more in the daytime in the city, doing the shopping and travelling around on public transport, on essential food gathering, home making, and caring related trips. But they lack access to their own central area 'base' in an office which has facilities, and many are not in a position to 'use a pub' indeed such facilities may not be open when needed (Greed,1999a). Likewise the elderly require accessible and frequent toilet provision, especially as they are one of the groups most likely to walk to the local shops and to use public transport. Whilst people with disabilities in theory at least have more 'disabled toilets' nowadays, in reality provision is patchy and often difficult to use because of a range of access and design problems.

2.3 Inaccessible Facilities

Many public toilets were built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Public toilets were seen as a symbol of scientific progress, hygiene and civic pride (Edwards and Mc.Kie,1995). But there were major problems with the nature of provision from the beginning, which still limit their availability today. Many on-street public toilets were built underground, because of ease of connection to the sewer system. This resulted in built-in inaccessibility as such toilets could only be accessed down flights of steps, and this made them particularly inconvenient for those with luggage, pushchairs, and for the elderly and disabled as a whole. Some such toilets still exist in Bristol, although they are far more common in London. During the first half of the twentieth century to complement these a range of 'overground' toilets were built at bus and train termini, in parks, near market places and off shopping streets, and were plentiful in large provincial towns and cities. In the past one would find several within a mile of each other within the town centre. But fixed distribution and location standards as to their location were rare, the decision being based on common sense, and provided on an ad hoc basis according to demand. For example new toilets in the 1940s and 1950s in Bristol were located in relation to heavily used bus routes and football venues before the growth of the motorcar ownership.

These problems have been particularly great for those with disabilities and those who find travel stressful at the best of times such as those with young children, the elderly, those incapacitated by illness or accident. But everyone feels the strain when lack of toilet provision is accompanied by poor public transport, badly designed, inaccessible streets and the fear and threat of crime. Thus the public toilet situation is part of a whole set of problem issues that makes it very difficult for many people to get about easily in our towns, cities and countryside.

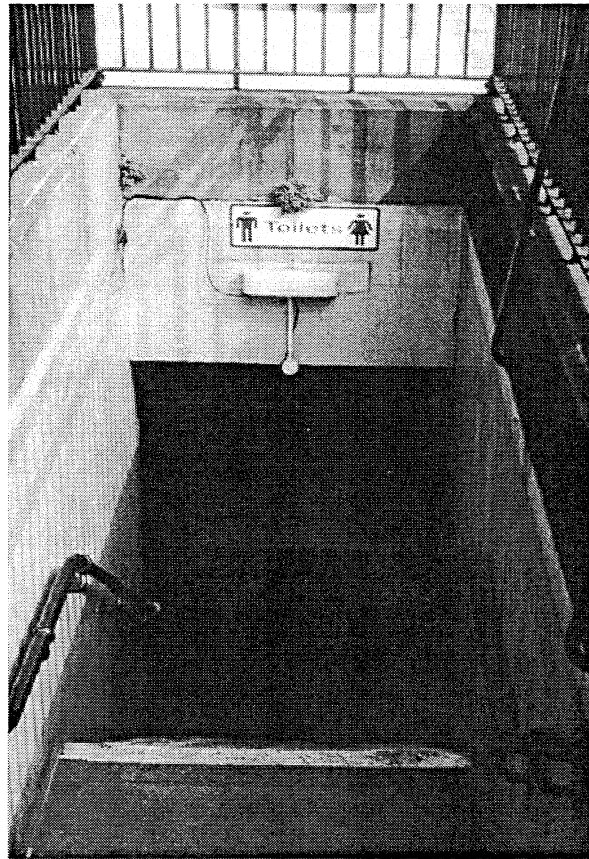


Figure 4: Toilets in the Centre of Bristol built underground, at Princes Street for the previous bus and tram depot. Ironically these toilets are very well maintained with a dedicated attendant and well located in relation to new Dockside Regeneration development but are very inaccessible and poorly signposted.

2.4 Unequal Provision

Some pre-war public toilets included purpose-built children's toilets, and drinking fountains outside, perhaps to encourage family use, especially in parks. Baby changing facilities were unheard of and disabled provision was not invented yet. Whilst there were facilities for women, many more Gents-only toilets were built, such as on traffic islands along busy thoroughfares, or in highly industrialised areas to meet the needs of the 'breadwinner' on 'his' journey to work. Overall there was, and still is, around twice as much provision as women, because there are more toilet blocks for men than women. British Standard BS6465 (Part I), and the Linked Approved Document G of the Building Regulations have provided the national guideline standards for toilet provision since 1985 for on-street and off-street public toilets since 1984 (see www.bsi.org.uk and www.bsi-global.com). These regulations, until the 1996 revision, made it a legal requirement for men to be provided with approximately a third more provision per set of toilets than women, because men are given about the same number of cubicles as in the 'Ladies' plus urinal provision. The 1996 revision has only marginally improved the situation for women. No wonder there are always queues for the Ladies!

2.5 Expensive to Run

The 1936 Public Health Act, Section 87, sub section 3 gave local authorities the right to build and run on street 'public conveniences' and to charge such fees as they think fit 'other than for urinals'. This is the act upon which all British toilet provision is still based. (The 1848 Public Health Act was the first act to deal with the topic, giving more general powers.) This meant that women could be charged and men not, and condoned a lower level of provision for women which was often viewed as an additional expense or after thought. Payment was made either by penny in the slot or by controlled turnstile entry at the entrance to the Ladies. Turnstiles blocked the entrance of pushchairs, prams, and small children without the money, height or the strength to work the turnstile. After a heated campaign they were outlawed under the 1963 Public Lavatories (Turnstiles) Act. The rules outlawing turnstiles never did apply to 'private' conveniences, only 'public' ones, and they never applied to railway stations, hence the installation of turnstiles at most central London railway termini stations, much to the inconvenience of travellers. Turnstiles are everywhere nowadays, and they are used on men's as well as women's toilets. Likewise most APCs (Automatic Public Toilets) are not free, but users have to pay to gain access. APCs have often been introduced in areas where traditional toilets have been heavily vandalised, as a safer alternative. Many are designed like mini-fortresses to withstand vandalism in unsupervised locations (Greed,2001,a). On-street provision is increasingly limited.

Even toilets for people with disabilities are often locked, ostensibly to protect them from vandalism or use by the non-disabled. Access can only be gained by the use of a RADAR key, or by asking some supervisor in a distant office for a key, thus reinforcing the barriers to public toilet use. But dividing people into disabled/abled, worthy and unworthy, does not reflect the reality that for practical purposes many people, including women with pushchairs, the pregnant, those impaired by illness, accidents or age but without RADAR keys, and people with luggage are effectively disabled, if not disabled, by the design and location of many public conveniences. Rather than solving these problems by improving provision, some ltas (local toilet authorities) appear to take the view that 'the only good public loo, is one that is closed', thus 'reducing' crime, vandalism, and maintenance costs, but severely restricting many people's chances of travelling, going shopping, or holiday in such areas, thus reducing the quality of life and social well-being, as well as reducing the attractiveness and therefore the competitive edge of many a struggling town centre and tourist resort. The agenda has become one of 'fortress' rather than 'access' in many a lta in the UK (Greed, 2001a).

3. REVIEW OF TOILET LITERATURE, MAPS AND PEOPLE

3.1 Review of Previous Studies

Researching public toilets has involved an extensive literature review across a range of academic and professional realms, looking at both contemporary and historical material. There is a great deal of literature on the medical, historical, prurient and curiosity aspects of toilets. Serious academic studies of public toilet provision and their design include work by Kira (1976,1996), Goldsmith (2001) on universal access and design. A range of design guides incorporate toilet layouts, and some such as Adler (2000) are sensitive to women's and men's differing needs. The British Standard 6465 (1995) governs toilet design and is currently under revision, being seen by many users as part of the problem. BS5810 (BSI,1992) originally provided standards for 'disabled toilets' but has recently been superseded by BS8300 on design of buildings to meet the needs of disabled people (BSI,2001). The Women's Design Service (Sue Cavanagh and Vron Ware) produced a book on the design of women's toilets that still has not yet been bettered (WDS,1991 and the issue has still not been resolved (Cavanagh,1998).

There is very little on strategic toilet policy making in relation to urban policy and user need. Examples exist in other countries. For example, The Toyama Development Plan in Northern Japan fully integrates toilet provision and its location into its spatial plan (Miyanishi, 1996). Major investment in public toilet provision is occurring in many Far East countries, to meet the needs of both tourists and residents (Singapore, 2001; Onn,1996; Greed,2001b and see www.worldtoilet.org). In the UK the Association of Town Centre Managers argue that toilet provision should be an integral part of any town centre revitalisation programme, and they are also a vital component of any urban regeneration programme (Lockwood,2001). In respect of rural areas the National Trust (2001) has produced an excellent manual for providers of visitor lavatories which was of particular relevance for North Somerset.

Toilet policy seldom seems to be linked to other related issues. Julia Edwards argues that much local government policy making, that is meant to be serving the needs of the citizen, is in fact misdirected and unsatisfactory. She describes policy-making, in respect of public toilet provision, as 'organised irresponsibility' (Edwards,1998a), because of the division between health authorities and ltas there is no connection made between the growth of urinary diseases and incontinence, and the reduction in public toilet provision. When toilets are discussed outside the world of plumbing, it is often in relation to other 'single issues' with little evidence of strategic-level joined up thinking, or integrated local level urban design. For example, one of the biggest problems affecting British toilets is criminal damage. The solution is often seen to be one of guidance on materials, and on creating defensive designs, rather than changing the ethos of the area in which they are located. Renewed interest in 'broken window theory' which emanates from the world of American crime prevention theory (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Greene et al, 1991; Pain,2000) has moved the toilet debate into reconsidering the importance of the neighbourhood local level.

The importance of the 'image' of the 'state' of local facilities, such as public toilets, is seen as a 'metaphor', as an outward symbol of the internal state of society itself. In summary the argument goes that if it as repair broken windows immediately this will give the impression that someone is watching and someone cares for the neighbourhood, thus deterring future vandalism and improving civic pride and a sense of community in the area. Whilst one has to take a critical stance on the validity of this theory, nevertheless it does make the crucial link between 'toilets' and the quality of the rest of the built environment and urban society, which can only be to the good, as so often public toilet issues remain on the edges of policy makers' minds.

For the purposes of the Nuffield study we sought examples of other empirical studies of provision and user need. Other toilet studies (few though they be) have mainly used interviewing and open-ended questioning. For example, Llewelyn in his study of Welsh public toilets (Llewelyn, 1996) undertook 100 street interviews and visited all the toilets in 18 town in conjunction with the Welsh Consumer Council. There have been a range of studies by the various interest groups, usually undertaken by volunteers and local activists. AMC and BTA have undertaken studies of different issues but and have kept a weather eye on what is going. The British Toilet Association (BTA) and its predecessor All Mod Cons (AMC) have undertaken a range of studies over the years. The information gathered by BTA members from visits and 'undercover' work for the Loo of the Year Award is a source of useful toilet information to build up a national picture, as published in reports such as 50 of the Best Loos in Britain (BTA,2000a). The BTA have produced a range of publications recently which have focused upon the qualitative aspects of public toilet provision, not least to balance the emphasis by the Audit Commission and the Best Value culture upon quantitative factors with little attention to vital qualitative questions such as opening hours, levels of male/female provision, nature of facilities, condition and location (Fowler,1999; BTA,2000b). It is argued by many that the process of 'counting toilets', appears [falsely] to create more toilets, whilst diverting attention and resources away from the problem by giving the impression something is being done (Edwards,1998b).

3.2 Review of Toilet Mapping

We were particularly interested in any studies that included a spatial, mapping element as to the distribution and location of public toilets. As mentioned studies have been undertaken by transport user groups focused on station and termini provision (Midwinter, 1994: Transport for London,2001). Various disability groups have produced maps and guides of the location of toilet facilities (such as RADAR). ITAAL (Is There An Accessible Toilet) a group concerned with more and better toilets for people with disabilities, has been undertaking an Atlas Guide Project of the whole of Britain showing where disabled toilets of all sorts and locations might be found (ITAAL,2001). We have been in contact with ITAAL including the Bristol lady who runs the ShopMobility scheme locally and who is very involved. However ITAAL is clearly in the process of adding to an amending their work as not all disabled toilets are shown, but rather those that have come to their attention as useable. Some national mapping companies include toilets on their maps but often they are just the disabled ones as has been the case with A-Z, although their more recent maps show abled toilets too in some editions. Individual local authorities have

undertaken survey such as Cheshire a renown hotspot of toilet activism and WI (Women's Institute) involvement. Some local authorities have produced their own toilet maps (such as excellent map produced by the Corporation of London) but to our surprise some did not have any map of the location of their toilets, or any written policies at all. But presumably the main supervisor knew where they all were in his head! Likewise AA street maps, Ordnance Survey street maps (not grid maps) are showing conveniences at last. But there are numerous tourist guides of seaside resorts, historic towns, visitor attractions that still do not show toilet provision. Weston super Mare, to its credit, does show the main toilets in the tourist map. Just beyond the Southern edge of our study area, a comprehensive guide has been produced of accessible toilets for people visiting Exmoor (Pitman,2001). On the companion CD the PowerPoint 'nuffpower' shows maps of the areas referred to in this paper

It was intended to start the research by producing a map of facilities in the area and in relation to commuter destinations, along with a description of each public convenience. Some of this material is already public domain, as the Audit Commission undertook a generic quantitative study of all public conveniences to comply with service provision requirements of the Citizen's Charter, albeit not disaggregated in terms of gender or other social aspects of provision. However this was to prove much more difficult than imagined and we spent many hours going through existing source maps and records (many of which were either vague, inaccurate or out of date), and travelling around the area looking for toilets, and then sticking different coloured spots on a large map, according to whether the toilets were male only, male and female, and whether they had disabled facilities, babychanging, and were free or pay etc. We are still adding detail and to take this further we may need to liase with other mapping groups such as ITAAL, who also have 'part of the jigsaw' in order to take this further in the future. But at least this project showed us where the main gaps and concentrations were and the overall toilet-picture for the area. Our efforts were not helped by the fact that a programme of major closure is underway in some areas, leading to much opposition, which, depending on the area, has finally resulted in either total demolition or sudden reprieve and refurbishment. Everybody wants more toilets but no-one wants them near to their property (except for keen toilet campaigners that is).

3.3 Review of Toilet Groups

Because many toilet problems that manifest themselves at the local level are 'governed' by higher level bodies and regulation, it was important to tap into the national network of toilet groups. Two types of groups are active in the toilet world, bottom up groups which are generally voluntary campaign groups made up of user and top down groups which comprise a range of providers including local authorities, manufacturers, and toilet installers and managers such including APC companies. Also central government level bodies, especially the British Standards Institute, which set minimum national standards for toilet design needed to be contacted. Therefore it was important to tap into existing social contacts and networks in the world of public toilets in order to contextualise the study and to identify national trends that are likely to affect the locality studied.

User groups have been in a state of evolution and growing influence over the last 15 years. 'All Mod Cons' (AMC) a key pressure group was founded in 1985 by Susan Cunningham in Cardiff with the initial objective of increasing provision locally, gradually achieved a high profile and went nationwide. AMC received support from the Continence Foundation a pressure group working on behalf of the incontinent. By early 1999 AMC had merged with LYO to form the British Toilet Association under the Directorship of Richard Chisnell. Subsequently links were also forged with Incontact which is the 'other' major incontinence group (www.incontact.org). BTA has three categories of membership individual, commercial and local authority. LYO was linked commercial sector provider groups, especially to manufacturers of toilet equipment and buildings. AMC was drew its membership more from user groups, who continue to be represented under the umbrella of BTA. Links have also been established with the Japan Toilet Association and with other Far East toilet organisations. The BTA funded Clara Greed to attend the Singapore Toilet Summit in November 2001 for one week and valuable comparisons and contacts were made (Greed,2001,a and b). At Singapore the World Toilet Organisation (WTO) was established to bring together and provide support for all the various national toilet associations in different countries, and to develop world-level standards, strategy and policy development. Thus BTA may be seen as a 'crossroads' where all toilet groups and issues meet and their valuable help in putting us in contact with a range of useful people in the course of this research is fully acknowledged. However, in that BTA is made up of an alliance of user and provider groups, each with their own agendas, we sought to retain an objective perspective.

In addition there is a range of other voluntary and community groups concerned with different aspects of disability which were of interest, some of whom very quickly got wind of our research and phoned us up enthusiastically. The problem of going to the toilet has always been 'the bottom line' for all sorts of people with disabilities. The Joint Mobility Unit has produced many excellent toilet designs and related access policies (JMU,2000). Many of these groups are linked with BTA and to the Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE) too. The CAE includes architects and town planners, as well as medical people, who want to improve the design of the built environment to facilitate greater access and mobility. Not all user pressure groups necessarily agree with each others' approach; for example, the question of 'to lock or not to lock' causes great discussion. For example, RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) is responsible for providing the National Key Scheme for Toilets for Disabled People (NKS), that is the RADAR key scheme for lockable disabled toilets, although this is one small part of all its work. Some other groups favour an open-door policy and these tensions were to be felt in local pressure groups as well as at national level. Likewise some disability groups want integrated, universalist approach to public toilet provision that breaks down the division between disabled and abled (and in some cases between male and female), whereas others want distinct separate provision for people with disabilities and do not want either unisex or unabled facilities. In fact there are a range of other huge controversies being discussed in the world of toilets, not least the 'sit or squat' debate, and the 'flush or recycle' issue and the 'mixed or unisex' question.

We needed to be cognisant of all these issues. When interviewing respondents someone was bound to bring up one of these issues (usually as if they were the first

person on earth who had ever personally experienced the problem in question) and we needed to be sympathetic and let them tell us their story without giving away the fact we had heard this 'confidential revelation' many times before in the course of our research. What was an individual problem for the respondent was in fact often part of a wider national problem probably shared by millions.

Public toilets are not 'just' needed by the incontinent but that all the travelling public, and ordinary citizens, are likely to need toilets if they are out all day, 'away from home'. A range of travel and tourism organisations are supportive of BTA, such as Women's Transport Network; National Trust; British Tourist Association (the 'other' BTA); various transport users groups, and some coach and train operators (in other parts of the country). Indeed we argued from the research that public toilets were vital to the local economy (Greed, 2002c). In the wake of the foot and mouth locally, and the WTC 911 event internationally the provision of public toilets, it is argued, can provide a critical 'edge' for local resort towns over their competitors. Britain as an international tourist destination. Sir William Lawrence, Chairman of the British Toilet Association is also a Chairman of one of the British Tourist Association's main committees.

A wide range of other groups are supportive of the campaign for more public toilets. These include women's groups (including the WI, Townswomen's Guild, Women's Design Service); environmental groups such as Women's Environmental Network, Surfers Against Sewage (based in the South West), and Local Agenda 21 groups and Keep Britain Tidy. Ethnic minority groups, especially Moslems are concerned about UK public toilet design, whilst a range of community groups have launched campaigns to save 'their' toilets. In the case study tourist issues were of particular relevance and it was valuable to be aware of national perspectives to inform our discussion with local respondents. We were able to distribute information and requests for feedback about our research to a range of users and provider groups, including the BTA, inviting people to contact us. Indeed various individuals contacted us of their own accord, particularly after the research was featured in local newspapers and all this provided interesting information.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Purpose

To recap, the research sought to investigate the differences between provider priorities and user needs, with particular reference to the criteria and perceptions used by local and private suppliers, as against the needs of the community and minorities therein. A small illustrative area was chosen. The study sought to investigate the differences between user and provider expectations as to public toilets in order to understand better the reasons why the scope and nature of current provision seems to be so out of touch with user demands, and, thus, to contribute to the development of better policies. Throughout an emphasis upon strategic spatial location issues, as well as the more familiar design details, was attempted.

4.2 Components and Programme

1. Mapping the area
2. Collecting background information
3. Tapping into toilet group networks
4. Undertaking interviews
5. Organising and analysing findings
6. Beginning to present findings at conferences
7. Writing up the material

It was envisaged in the original proposal that the above list of activities would be sequential but for reasons explained in the course of this paper we found it better to start wheresoever the opportunity arose. Setting up the interviews took more time than anticipated even when we were already in contact with the groups in question, but once this was sorted out, Isobel primarily was able to carry out the predetermined set of 12 interviews. Meanwhile Clara carried on with the background contextualisation, and we both sought to make progress on the mapping elements. As the work progressed we were able to begin to categorise, analyse and write up the material. On returning from Singapore where she presented a paper at the World Toilet Summit in Singapore in November 2001 before the project was completed, there was considerable press interest in the study from both national papers (Guardian, Telegraph) and local papers (Bristol Evening Post, North Somerset Times) (referenced at the end of bibliography) and thus the research gained a much higher profile. But we requested that we should remain invisible and that no photos should be shown of us as this would have 'blown our cover' in terms of undertaking local toilet block research. Clara had also been writing a (much broader) book on public toilets that pre-dates this research project. Therefore illustrations and initial findings helped to inform these early outputs, combined with other pre-existing research material of a more national or international nature.

In preparation, from June 2001, direct approaches were made to potential contacts by both letter and telephone targeting a range of organisations within the study area. This

stage was completed by early September providing the groundwork for the interviews to be undertaken. In the case of user groups the aim was interview a broadly representative sample ranging from a women's' group, access and carers organisations, disability groups, mother and toddler groups, playgroups, elderly and infirm users, as well as able-bodied users including tourist and commuter representatives. This cascade approach was reasonably successful, although in one or two cases certain organisations were unwilling to release personal details and offered instead to place more general requests for help in their newsletters. As a result in some instances we held one-to-one interviews with people who expressed a particular interest in the topic due to their personal experiences from one of the above categories. It was also apparent that the case study interview for users tended to be dominated by female respondents, although in many cases they had good knowledge of male toilet provision too in their role as carers, parents and wives. In total 27 people participated in the user group interviews and discussions, with 8 representatives from a range of provider groups including the two local authorities, members and officers, represented. The majority of these specific interviews were undertaken by Isobel Daniels the researcher on the project. Clara Greed also networked and made contacts with a wider range of toilet interest groups, through participation in the activities of the British Toilet Association (BTA and the WTO) thus adding new insights and a comparative perspective on the national situation.

4.3 Interviewees

A range of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with around 6 user and 6 provider groups as set out in the original Nuffield proposal:

4.3.1 Providers

Originally these were specified as:

- Local parish council
- A private public toilet provider operator
- Local district authority
- Bus company (responsible for terminus and bus station toilets)
- Private providers in large public amenities (Garden Centre)
- Local publicans tourist organisation
- Leisure and sports centre

As it turned out we interviewed the following:

- Local parish authority
- A private public toilet provider
- Local District Council
- Local Tourism and Leisure Officers
- Bristol City Council

- An international commercial public toilet provider
- A local commercial public toilet and temporary toilet provider

We started locally with the providers, by interviewed parish councillors from Portishead, and another nearby village as well as maintaining ongoing e-mail contact with several other parish councillors concerned about their local toilets. The owner of one of the largest Garden Centres in Britain was interviewed, because the centre happens to be located near to Portishead, and it has won national acclaim, being featured in Which Magazine, not least for its high quality toilets, and because it is an interesting example of public toilets privately provided. The main public toilet provider is North Somerset District Council, which is based in Weston Super Mare and covers most of the area studied, including Portishead itself. Thus we interviewed their senior toilet officials as well as tourist and leisure services officials at Weston as they too have a say in toilet policy. We met with Bristol City toilet officers and in the discussion found out more about the area covered by our sector and also gained insights into the issues determining the level of public toilet provision in the city as a whole. Both a local and an international-level (Swedish) manager of one of the main APC (Automatic Public Conveniences) providers who is making inroads in the area were interviewed at their London office, and in this process both local, national and Europe-wide toilet issues were discussed. A provider of both temporary and permanent toilets for events in the South West was interviewed.

Thus we contacted a range of providers, but included two different types of APC and toilet installers, and did not include a transport provider - although transport remained a significant issue. Although we approached local public transport providers, in respect of the problems of under provision (or non provision) in bus and rail stations, we did not make much progress and no interviews resulted. However we were cognisant of previous research on the problems of public transport stations and termini. The need within multi-storey and other large car parks was also prominent within the local press, and Clara was able to discuss the matter with a security official responsible for the management of one of the largest Multi-storey car parks in Bristol, and also with maintenance staff at another car park (albeit not in a context conducive to note-taking!).

4.3.2 Users

Originally these were specified as:

- Women groups
- Local access group
- Social Services Carers
- Disabled Groups
- Baby and Child Care groups
- Elderly groups
- Leisure and Tourist groups

As it turned out we interviewed:

- A representative of larger users
 - A community playgroup
 - Women's Institute group
 - Age Concern Care group
 - MS sufferer contacted through Somerset Carers Group
 - Mother of Disabled 10 year old boy
 - Woman bricklayer
-
- In addition several people gave me their views and/or sought to interview me including:
 - A woman academic and toileteer in nearby Wales
 - An American man concerned with Shy Bladder Syndrome
 - Several individuals who contacted us on the e-mail or by letter

User groups were generally 'easier' to contact than providers, and we covered the range specified in our original application, albeit through a range of slightly different organisations. Users contacted included carers groups, local Women's institute, disability groups, the elderly, mothers and toddlers groups, and local village hall groups. The interviews were mainly with small groups. As will be explained in the empirical section, we were also avidly approached by individuals and groups with 'special' needs who wanted us to take note of their particular problems with public toilets. As a result we were also in contact with a diversity of other users (and to a lesser extent providers), some of whom were actually interviewed, including larger sized people, carers of adult dependents with severe incontinence, gay people, police and security personnel, elderly bus passengers, media people, sanitary engineering specialists, toilet maintenance staff, and people out shopping who I met in a queue for the Ladies (inter alia). All these people were welcomed and gave us interesting new insights. Clearly groups which encounter 'problems' composed our respondents, and, significantly many of these were women, but as will be explained this is symptomatic of 'the problem' about public toilet provision. The research was also informed by investigating current literature in this field, and by making contact with national toilet organisations and campaign groups which are active in the local area, as mentioned in the people review section above.

Opportunities arose for developing links with national level user groups and toilet manufacturers who were active in the area. It soon proved that many local toilet issues were in fact governed by regional and national level considerations and therefore it was important to pursue these leads too in order to fulfil our research objectives. This involved some additional trips to London headquarters of provider groups as well as our local visits. We were also invited to attend three national level toilet conferences during the course of the research, at Ely, London, and Stoke on Trent in association with the Gladstone Pottery Museum, where the new 'Flushed with Pride' history of the

public lavatory exhibition has recently been established. Although not part of the original research specification we welcomed these opportunities which enriched the research process. We were also fortunate in persuading several national-level key toileteers to visit us at UWE, including officers from other Itas where leading good practice was developing. It was important to retain a comparative perspective in order to appreciate 'how things might be' in the local area. Also we sought to retain an objective perspective when discussing toilet issues with manufacturers and commercial providers who tended to plug their product, and see the world from the perspective of users needing their products.

Although many of 'the problems' are widespread and national in character, we were to find that specific local circumstances that gave an added local twist to familiar issues. Although all Itas are faced with the public toilet problem, and some we were to find individual examples of good practice locally. We also had opportunity to discuss shared issues with other Itas, including Westminster and the City of London, as well as the comparable rural areas of Ely, South Cambridgeshire, Ceredigion (2001), and Gloucester. It seems that some Itas are more adept at solving their toilet problems than others albeit with the same level of resources, but with different levels of commitment, negotiating powers, and lateral thinking. Clearly this is an aspect, that needs to be pursued nationally in future research.

4.4 Structuring the Interviews

A series of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with both providers and users in relation to the public toilet situation in the area. Criteria and factors of concern already identified by user groups (from lit' rev) formed the basis of the questions with additional time for 'open' discussion of 'anything else you think is important'. The main bulk of the interviews were undertaken in the field by Isobel Daniels, research associate, and the project was managed overall by Clara Greed. But discussions with both Clara and Isobel participating were held with some respondents, whereas Clara tackled commercial toilet providers in London herself, and also met a range of other toileteers of interest in her travels and at conferences. The interview write-ups reflect the diversity of questions and approaches, as sometimes it was possible to ask direct questions, at other times we covered the topics as and when respondents got to them, and this all provided a rich source of informative data.

Both users and providers were asked open-ended questions which may broadly be seen to fall into the following categories:

- (i) Location distribution, provision - which ties in with the geographical, mapping element
- (ii) Design access, appearance, size, layout etc.
- (iii) Maintenance, finance, cleaning, attendance
- (iv) Cultural issues such as crime, sex, vandalism, social divisions, future

In other words we were investigating the Golden Triangle of Good Toilet Provision, namely (i) internal design factors and (ii) external location factors and (iii) standards of maintenance and management (Triangle originally coined by Onn,1996).

4.5 Talking Toilets

The toilet problem arises in part from the fact that most of the providers come from a professional built environment and sanitary engineering background, and are concerned with 'physical provision' and quantitative standards. In contrast most of the users concerns are framed in terms of 'social needs' and qualitative considerations, not least matters of related to health, access, childcare, availability and hygiene. Thus providers (who were significantly mainly men) generally felt happier talking about abstract and technical issues first, and then gradually worked their way to the more personal aspects, whereas users (mainly women) often wanted to start with their pet concern about public toilets, which were often quite 'earthy' in nature and then we gradually moved the conversation to wider policy matters. We found it useful, particularly with users, when it came to design matters, to show them various photos and plans of typical toilet cubicles and blocks (Diagrams 2 and 3). For example a drawing of the narrow gap between toilet door and the lavatory seat immediately produced a cry of recognition among many female respondents. Providers welcomed our diagrams of the 'Sector' and also ones related to the location and siting of public toilets (Diagrams 4 and 5).

We found it was not wise to produce precise technical drawings for discussions with providers, firstly because we might be 'outsmarted', and show our plumbing ignorance of esoteric aspects of sanitary engineering in front of men who were likely to have 20 years of experience in 'municipal sanitation'. Secondly there is an intense rivalry among private manufacturers and a desire to see what other firms have produced, therefore we needed to make our diagrams and examples somewhat generalised, or we might get the response, 'I know what that is, it's one of Blogg's new designs, isn't it' (when it was really just a mock-up to demonstrate some salient problems with toilet design). But by the end of the project Clara had become quite adept at 'bog spotting' identifying the difference between say a 'Decaux' and a 'Danfo' APC (Automatic Public Convenience) from some distance down a street. She developed quite a 'trainspotting' mentality about different toilet designs, their dates, and specifications. Significantly in one instance diagrams produced by Clara to demonstrate 'the problem' were incredibly taken as a 'good examples' by a couple of respondents being interviewed, so we always maintained some caution as to quite what we would show to whom. Photos and plans of examples from abroad were also used in some cases to stimulate discussion in seeking 'to make the familiar strange'. It would seem that in many cases people remember their toilet experiences in visual terms and quite graphically at that. Throughout the research it was important to adopt an ethnographic sensibility to the different subcultural attitudes and perceptions of 'reality' manifest by representatives of the various user and provider groups (Atkinson et al (eds) 2001). Likewise we purposely included ourselves, Clara and Isobel, in the narrative for 'in this process I too am subject' as users and to some extent as influencer of providers. Indeed, this toilet study may be seen as an illustrative, qualitative sociological cameo study in its own right, as reflected in the inclusion in conversations and responses with our respondents in the second part of this report and reflects Clara's long term interest

in ethnography as a valid town planning research method (Greed,1994). Because of the length of the accounts and the need to convey the immediacy of the comments, we have retained the original abbreviated comments where appropriate.

During the course of an interview we sought to cover the following range of indicative factors not necessarily in the order shown, for it is a feature of 'talking toilets' that it takes a while for people to feel comfortable and get into the mood. If the discussion was going well we waited for the various factors to arise naturally in conversation on the part of the respondent, but if the going was more difficult we would revert to asking actual topic questions. Interviews could last anything from around one hour to four hours (in the case of a particularly enthusiastic toilet provider). In the case of group meetings, this time might also include coffee and biscuits, introductory socialising, and visits to the toilets in question. Although both the researchers are female, when a toilet visit was involved, we were generally invited to view the Gents as well as the Ladies, and the Disabled toilets (the third sex).

4.6 Indicative Factors Raised in the Interviews with Providers and Users

- Overall level of provision
- Location and distribution
- Opening hours
- Accessibility, steps, ramps
- Lighting, Signage
- Cleanliness, 'hygiene'
- Functional Equipment and needs issues
- 'Special' needs, such as disposal of incontinence pads, baby and child facilities, elder needs, and wider RADAR and disability aspects
- Management and supervision: attendants?
- Maintenance, security,
- Crime, sex, drugs and vandalism issues
- Disposal of sanitary, incontinence and surgical waste
- Image, appearance and design
- 'Anything else that you the interviewee think is significant'

In each case the respondents were asked to comment on how they perceive the level and character of provision, whether it is adequate, whether there are problems, omissions, duplications, new or different requirements. When interviewing providers they were generally fully familiar with the statutory controls and required national standards, and so a somewhat different approach was required from when talking to users who were (quite justifiably) likely to be obsessed with single issues that affect them personally but which are when aggregated of national significance. Such

'personal' issues for example may include complaints about queues caused by under provision for women relative to men, cottaging, the location of the toilet roll, lack of space in cubicles, inaccessible urinals and insalubrious locations. But we also sought to be ask more specific questions to providers, and users respectively too.

4.6.1 Typical Questions to Providers

PART 1

- What is the best thing about your toilet provision (or best toilet that you are aware of) in your area?
- What arrangements does your organisation make with regard to finance and upkeep of facilities (if known)?
- What arrangements are made for the management of local toilet facilities and do you have any ideas about staffing levels? (attendants/cleaners)
- Are there any specific policies on opening hours/availability? (24 hours provision, or normal day time)

PART 2

- As a representative of a local authority/private organisation providing toilet facilities for the public what do you see as the main problems in this area? (prompts: finance, hygiene/cleanliness, vandalism, crime, sex, drug abuse, alcohol, vagrancy etc.)
- Are there any particular issues with regard to any of the above (if mentioned) that concern your organisation? Or are there particular complaints that you receive from the public?

For Local authorities in particular:

- With regard to the distribution of facilities and their location does your authority have any defined standards that you know about?
- Are there any plans for new facilities? if so in any particular locations (eg tourist hot spots, car parks, transport facilities)

For private providers in particular:

- Do you see an investment return on providing toilet facilities for the public? (return visits, publicity, marketing etc)
- Is design (of toilets blocks/equipment) an important element for your organisation?

For All:

- Any other issues that you consider important?
- Do you have any maps, plans or photos that we can have for our study?

4.6.2 Typical Questions to Users

PART 1

- What are your views on the level of public toilet provision in the local area?
- Have you experienced any particular problems?
- What particular issues concern you most about public toilet provision? such as:
 - Provision of facilities - location, distribution,
 - Functional equipment - water, drying, vending, disposal, changing
 - Dimensions - door openings, size of cubicles
 - Cleanliness -hygiene
 - Accessibility - steps, ramps, rails
 - Lighting
 - Opening hours - queues at peak times etc, visitor/tourist needs
 - Image - appearance, design
 - Security - sex, drugs, crime, vandalism

Part 2

(i) For special needs users, eg, elderly, carers, disabled:

- Do you consider that public toilet provision is currently adequate for your needs with regard to circulation, and also provision of equipment?
- Views on radar keys?
- Unisex provision
- Particular needs and additional items, such as changing facilities, tables, hoists etc
- Signage and format for deaf, blind, multi-lingual, foreign users etc

(ii) For parents/carers of young children and babies

- Do you consider that public toilet provision is currently adequate for your needs with regard to circulation space and provision of equipment?
- Any views on baby changing facilities for both sexes?
- Space for pushchairs and prams
- Seats for nursing mothers
- Unisex provision

(iii) For all

- What are your views on provision of attendants and paying facilities?

- Would you use an APC (Automatic Public Convenience)?
- Should restaurants, cafes, bars, hotels and shops with toilets be expected to allow their toilets to be used by non-customers?
- Are you will to pay for facilities, especially if they are well maintained?
- Are there any other examples, either locally or elsewhere you think are good?
- Are there any other issues you consider important?

4.7 Substantial Coverage

So by using a range of approaches and research stances a fuller view of the factors that shape policy and that contribute towards the evident gulf between user and provider perspectives was revealed. Responses to the interviews were categorised and analysed according to the key points and criteria listed. Additional thematic material and 'key words' and 'subcultural attitudes' were noted. Common areas of concern among the different respondent groups, and barriers or enabling factors were identified that may work against or facilitate a more positive approach to policy making were highlighted. Isobel produced a table giving a summary of the common issues, concerns, perceived barriers and problems see Table

As stated we were specifically concerned with 'public toilets' especially traditional on-street municipal toilets but also those off-street ones for the use of the public as found in shopping centres, car parks etc. We were not extending the study to hospital, school, hotel and pub toilets, although many of our respondents naturally progressed into these topics too, and if they were discussing generic design issues we let them have their say and then steered the conversation back again. Therefore some of the accounts below do include mention of other sorts of toilets.

5. EMPIRICAL SECTION: THE INTERVIEWS

5.1 Explanation

The first section comprises provider interviews and the second section user interviews. The points arising from these interviews are presented in the order they came across in the course of conversation at the time, either as answers to questions, or as additional points, reflecting what the respondents considered to be important. The whole text of the interviews is provided for illustrative purposes as it is great value in showing what ordinary people think about the public toilet situation in the area. However we have anonymised the respondents and, where small village locations are involved, the location too. The interviews take a variety of forms and the sequence of topics varies, but it will be seen that we did cover most of the points we prioritised. Indeed the priorities and sequence of topics are ethnographically (culturally) significant in terms of 'how' different respondents 'see' the problem. In places a little commentary is added, but many of the points speak for themselves as indicative of the toilet situation in this region.

5.2 Summary of Issues Raised by Providers

To set the context and help readers know what to expect and to find their way around the data, there follows, first, a summary of key points and themes arising from user and provider interviews, presented in alphabetical order.

Access

Some toilets are still underground, and steps in quite modern toilets too, all sorts of problems about space availability and problems of making toilets more accessible. Seems to be an excuse to close them

APCs

Not seen as an ideal solution by local providers, as the cost of hardware is only a small part of total running costs, can be 10 times initial cost. Also Danfo APC was 'attacked' in Hartcliffe and ended up covered in air gun pellet shots and then covered in protective netting. There was an APC in Weston, and another in Pill but removed, as seen as a liability and cost. It seemed very critical of leasing system and real costs. Bristol therefore was designing its own impregnable APC copying features from manufacturers to save cost of hiring.

Attendants

Attended toilets are always successful and vandal and maintenance free but seen as too expensive

Complaints from public

Generally concerned about closures, but not about cleanliness, leaks, cottaging etc, but rather desperate situation as so many are closing. Any loo is a good loo.

Closures

Concerns about impact on non-residents, e.g. bus drivers, mobile library staff, white van man, tourists. In contrast urban seaside areas often visitor/tourist toilets are prioritised and local toilets that of the most use to residents are closed

Cottaging

Constant problem in certain locations, especially along main road in laybys in rural locations, attempts to 'design out' cottaging, CCTV etc, but likely to doom toilet to closure

Drug Abuse

Disposal issues, attacks on attendants, need for installation of solid ceilings to avoid stashing drugs away by dealers. Use of ultra-violet light to make it difficult to inject in veins

Future Trends

Move towards the 'invisible toilet' the rise and shine approach in conservation areas, the Urilift that rises up at night and goes down into the pavement in daytime. Overall condones and caters to male night-time users, whilst daytime needs, particularly of women remain unmet.

Male/Female Equality

Inequality in ratio between male/female provision is sometimes reduced simply because the male side is redesigned to reduce cottaging or to install disabled toilet, so everyone ends up with less provision (hardly EO). Ideas about urinette (female urinal) seemed not to have reached this part of the world yet. Hardly likely to be practical in area where most people are over 40.

Money

Budgetary cutbacks are always an issue, need to save money

Parish councils often expected to make a contribution for to keep their local toilets open when they can least afford it

Opening Hours

Receive lots of complaints about reduced hours, very few 24 hour toilets despite move to 24 city and clubs/pubs binge drinking etc. Not as bad as London yet, with male only urinals being installed in Trafalgar Square by Westminster city council

Policy making

division of control is unhelpful, often split between environmental services, and tourism, and maybe parks and gardens (but not town planning) therefore no comprehensive approach,

RADAR/disabled

Relatively little provision, and if new disabled toilets are provided in existing blocks usually results in reduction in available toilets overall

Sanpro issues

Seen as a waste management issue, division of responsibility, so no joined up thinking as to the bins that are put beside the toilet bowl that are such a problem for women blocking access to toilet

Security CCTV Lighting

Seen as helpful in combating drugs crime cottaging but some toilets have no electricity

Spatial Strategy

None, generally evolved historically along bus routes, near football grounds, near tramway stations etc, no modern co-ordination, very fragmented.

Vagrancy

Overnight guests, problem if leave unattended toilets open, and also can be found in APCs if door opening mechanism is tampered with

Vandalism

implications: apparently often goes in phases which relate to school holidays in urban areas, and will often lead to subsequent closure

5.3 Provider Group Interviews

1. Provider Interview with Parish Councillors from Portishead and Wrington.

A meeting with two parish councillors one from Portishead and one from Wrington (another local village) was held in June 2001. This interview was undertaken with both Clara and Isobel present. This meeting was set within the context of ongoing e-mail correspondence with these and other parish councillors over threats by North Somerset District Council to close local village toilets. This interview highlights the concerns of semi-rural communities in the sector studied, and shows the strength of local feeling, and the importance of local facilities that may be judged to be only of minor importance by the governing district council, with its more urban agenda, based in Weston super Mare.

The meeting started with a general discussion in which the Wrington councillor explained how the local inhabitants had mounted a successful campaign to save their local public toilets, but with a maintenance and refurbishment cost contribution now being made by the Parish Council. The importance of these toilets for bus drivers, staff of the mobile library and ramblers, as well as those inhabitants who used the toilets (who the councillor assumed would be mainly the elderly and the young). The W.I. had taken quite a key stance and had written letters in support. This followed earlier success when the W.I. participated in a 'best kept village' campaign, so there is little vandalism and locals value this amenity.

The Wrington councillor considered that it was silly to close all the facilities at Kewstoke because of the number of tourists - there should have been consultation with the Parish Council. Apparently only two other councils (Yatton and Portishead) have agreed to adopt the same policy as Wrington by keeping an amount for refurbishment within the Parish's own budget.

Politically both these councillors were Liberal Democrats which had previously held power in the area. It was suggested that we should also interview the Conservative ruling group of North Somerset Council since they have attempted to save ,60,000 from the Environment budget and closed 16 public toilet facilities. The Conservatives argued that it is due to vandalism and usage and abuse of toilets, but no minimum rate was given. Apparently usage can be assessed by metres that measure the number of flushes in pts. Significantly the loo that is perceived as attracting the worst anti-social behaviour is actually located near the Police HQ. Clara commented that she had heard of this 'halo effect' from other Itas, where apparently drug users considered the safest place was always the toilet nearest the local police station (as no-one would think of looking there).

Neither councillor was aware of any strategy for public toilet provision, but they believe the Conservatives wanted to bring one in, following advice from the Director of the public toilets department for North Somerset. The Wrington councillor mentioned that when the Lib Dems were in power North Somerset had tried to close more facilities but there was "an enormous fuss", partly because it involved sacking two staff. Both councillors perceived that Weston councillors see Weston as the "economic engine of North Somerset" and give it greater priority than the outlying areas.

The Portishead councillor asked whether our research was about numerical decline, in addition to the state of facilities and we explained we were looking at both aspects. It was said that Portishead had quite good provision of public toilets previously - there are now 'only' six blocks which have been reviewed (five are open all year round, the other is situated near the swimming pool and is used on a seasonal basis). But they did have a wider catchment area as Portishead was the nearest town to the new Avonmouth Docks junction with the Motorway (at Gordano, Junction 19). The instance when an aircraft carrier came in to the docks, drawing large crowds, and the nearest toilets were closed. Portishead is also the terminus for the 358/359 Bristol

buses, but it was recently decided to close the toilets at the terminus and it was decided to sell the land for redevelopment (By Spring 2001 they had been demolished). This was seen as a serious issue by residents because of the length of the bus journey from Bristol and the record of delays, and poor bus service leaving people stranded. Also drivers had to find alternative facilities, such as down by the Hole in One pub which was not convenient for them either.

We asked them what they considered to be the best toilets in the area, and it was suggested that the toilets beside the Safeway Supermarket at Clevedon were ideal, having an attendant, and being part of the comprehensive redevelopment of a site, where a new town square, seating, toilets and landscaping were created as part of a planning gain agreement.

However, he perceived that some would be provided on a private basis for marina users (therefore excluding the general public), but he hoped that the retail and food element at the other end would provide good new toilets. However, he perceived that some would be provided on a private basis for marina users (therefore excluding the general public), but he hoped that the retail and food element at the other end would provide good new toilets. Subsequently Clara found a similar marina example in Watchet in Somerset where new toilet were installed with a prominent sign stating 'for marina berth users only'. It was lamented that when the new Coop supermarket was built at Portishead no planning gain was attempted. However with new Marina development now taking place at Portishead councillors were seeking planning gain.

They considered the worst toilets were in peripheral locations. For example the public toilets at Colliton Brook at Barrow Gurney near the traffic lights in Dundry Parish on an old A road. There was a great deal of local concern at goings-on including cottaging, drugs etc. and they were also in a bad condition. This led to a petition which resulted in closure of this site. An application to convert these public toilets into a take-away food facility had been received and the council wanted to make it a condition of the lease that toilet facilities for the public should be provided. Clara confirmed that in some parts of London, applicants for hot food take-aways and national chain sandwich shops are now being required to accommodate toilet provision, as a means of getting around the decline in public toilet provision. But such bargaining can only take place where the stakes are high and where local officers are willing to interpret the planning and public health regulations in the favour of public toilet provision. In fact we were to find when we interviewed them that North Somerset public toilet officers were also thinking along similar lines as a means of increasing toilet provision. However both councillors felt relatively powerless and argued there was a need for a change in the law to make public toilet provision mandatory

We then discussed management and maintenance. It was commented that the standard of maintenance varies between areas and this may be due to the fact that two different departments are responsible for toilet provision 1) Marketing and Leisure and 2) Environmental Services. Management is "haphazard between the town and parish councils" and this also applies to car parking arrangements. Everything came down to money and whenever budgets are examined it is always in the light of cost cutting.

The Council is always looking to close facilities rather than renew because of the bad state of repair. The Wrington councillor mentioned that tourism is declining in Weston therefore there is less demand for expansion. But, as we, and subsequent user respondents noted, it was a vicious circle as lack of toilets might reduce demand for toilets.

Neither councillor was aware whether there was an in-house or contracted out arrangement for cleaning and maintenance, but they presumed it was contracted out (but were not sure about the provider). They suggested that the officer responsible at North Somerset would be the best contact on this, but both did seem genuinely surprised that they did not know more about this. Subsequently we know they looked into various issues more deeply as a result of our discussion.

We then went on to discuss the main problems that had come to their attention. Concern was expressed at the lack of baby changing facilities in Portishead (but by the New Year a single fold-down babychanging shelf appeared on the end inside wall in the Ladies). There have been repeated problems at Wyndham Way site due to constant vandalism over the last two years.

We discussed drug abuse and the policy of a certain international fast-food outlet to use blue light (ultra blue) bulbs in all their branches to stop drug abuse, a policy also followed by a large national pub chain too. Both councillors mentioned that there is a very big drug abuse problem in Weston (second largest drug rehabilitation centre in the country) and one toilet has a needle exchange facility. (Strangely the toilets at Bristol Parkway railway station now have ultra blue lighting in spite of relatively high security location and 'better class of passengers' commuting to London.)

Payment was not considered a popular option (for raising revenue) or for keeping problems out. Apparently they are not aware of any approaches to install APC facilities - which were then discussed. Clara brought up issues of EU plumbing harmonisation and implications for replacing cisterns and other components. The Wrington councillor noted that problems already had developed in local schools and playing fields with new automatic flushing systems.

Clara prompted whether either councillor thought there were deficiencies in the provision - neither councillor was aware of any complaints or could think of anything specific. They did not seem to be aware of RADAR keys and did not think this was an issue. They had dealt with a complaint from a carer about sanpro facilities and bin maintenance, but did not seem to realise the enormity of this issue nationally. Little was said on ethnic issues, although in relation to the docks, the Portishead council gave us an anecdote about during his service in the Merchant Navy in the 1960s when the ships came into port there were separate toilet facilities labelled for Officers, Ratings and Asians. The Wrington concluded that she thought declining public pride (private space/public space debates) meant that public toilets were no longer valued as a general amenity.

General Conclusion: we sensed there was great concern by parish councillors from this interview and copious related e-mails from a range of such councillors about local toilet issues. But it seemed they had various bits of the jigsaw and were not necessarily putting it all together in terms of strategic policy, and this was complicated by the problem of the layers above of district, county and city ltas. Clearly they took the issue very seriously as a component of the decline of facilities in local areas.

2. Provider Interview with owner of a Major Retail Garden centre near Bristol.

This example was chosen because it is local, rural and has featured nationally as one of the largest garden centres in Europe, with many commendations for its toilets. In view of the usual unwillingness of retailers to provide toilets for customers we considered it was well worth investigating. The lady owner takes the viewpoint that the facilities she provides at The Centre must be of a suitably high standard and that she would want to use them herself. On a personal level she would always avoid local authority provided toilets and would make for somewhere like John Lewis, or a large store. The centre is still expanding and has developed from humble origins being located on the same site for nineteen years. Originally it had a portaloos followed by one whole new ladies toilet block, with the old ladies block being converted into a gents facility. There are now four blocks (one that accommodates staff facilities next to the offices) and a further six toilets are yet to be built. This interview was undertaken by Isobel and follows a more formal set of questions and a guided tour around the facilities.

Q: What is the best thing about toilet provision at the Centre?

There have been a few compliments about the way the toilets are maintained (as opposed to complaints). The owner regards the fact that people don't usually mention the toilets as positive - this implies that they are satisfied. Generally she thinks people are more likely to complain for example, about the length of queues at the tills.

Provision includes:

1 block x 2 ladies/2gents

1 block x 8 ladies/6 gents (by café) + 2 unisex disabled toilets + babychange area

1 block x 2 ladies/2 gents (staff)

1 block x 2 ladies/2 gents

Q: What arrangements does the Centre make for the management of the toilet blocks/staffing levels?

There are four staff employed as cleaners, and there will be two staff assigned at any one time to clean and unblock toilets as required. They have a contract for sanitary hygiene bins (there are two in the disabled toilets and two in the baby change, in addition to the standard sanpro provision in the ladies toilets). No figures or costs provided but this is clearly quite major commitment.

Q: Are there any specific policies on opening hours/availability?

Toilets are available at all times the centre is open.

This is 9 - 6 on weekdays

Wednesday from 9 - 8

Sunday from 10.00 - 4.00

They also have late night opening in the spring and at Christmas time.

They also have an 'ask only' toilet facility near the till that a member of staff will escort someone to, e.g. small child, or elderly person from a coach party. This adjoins some staff toilet provision/staff room which Isobel was shown on my tour.

Q: As the owner of a private organisation providing toilet facilities for the public what do you see as the main problems in this area?

The owner says she is "horrified at users" and the way they use and treat the toilets within the garden centre. She pointed out that the Centre does attract a large number of disabled and elderly people who have bowel and bladder problems. She is very sympathetic to these users (her own husband is disabled so she has first hand experience) but considers that often the carers who accompany them tend to abandon them once it comes to using the toilets. The toilets frequently get blocked by people attempting to flush sanitary/incontinence towels down them, or even deliberately blocked with unsuitable items. Other problems have included flooding the sinks - they used to have integral taps but this led to abuse, so now they have fitted push button taps and provide luke warm water only. Hand driers and hand towels are available in all facilities. Because the centre attracts large numbers of elderly men who are a large sector of gardeners (and generally they tend to have more bladder problems than women in the owner's view) they provide large numbers of Ladies and Gents toilets and disposal bins. She has not been aware of any queues forming for the toilets at peak times, even in the ladies toilets. (User attitudes and disrespect for toilets are a huge problem frequently commented upon at toilet conferences. As was commented in Singapore, jokingly, people generally leave the toilet as quickly as they enter it. Users are unwilling to wipe the seat or clear up after them as they are afraid of other people's germs.)

Q: Any other particular issues with regard to 'problems'?

There have had instances where hypodermic needles have been found in the toilets occasionally - this was followed up to check if it related to diabetics on the staff/or general drug use. There have also been occasions when groups of young people have been obviously consuming drugs. They attract groups of DSS visitors approximately every six weeks.

The owner indicated that there is a high degree of pilfering and the wrappings will often be found in the toilet areas, or stuffed down the toilets.

Q: What arrangements are made for finance and upkeep of facilities?

She uses the general maintenance men for 'unblocking' problems in addition to the two proper cleaners. She also employs two young men who can "yield instruments" if required. The main cleanup takes place in the evening when the centre is closed. She did not think franchising out the toilet facilities would be an acceptable proposition.

Q: Are there any plans for new toilet facilities?

Yes, another six toilets yet to be built.

Q: Experience of dealing with architects/builders over design requirements?

The owner feels very strongly that it is virtually impossible to get a higher specification other than the 'standard package'. This is because she wanted the toilet pans to be at a higher level than normal in the disabled toilets for users transferring from wheelchairs. She thinks the average building company is totally out of touch with reality and her experience of architects has been no better (she even approached a female architect). They will argue on the grounds of health and safety standards that provision has to conform. Isobel pointed out that there is a Women's Environmental Network that is working in this area, and also mentioned about ITAAL which she had not heard about. She did not appear to want to specify names or companies at this point. (The height of the toilet pan is a major issue with all)

Isobel showed her Clara's diagram of the [narrow] cubicle layout and she confirmed that all her toilets were much larger than this standard at her request. She believes very strongly about all toilet doors having a very wide gap between the door and the bowl, with the (swing opening inwards) doors all been designed to be slightly open so that users can ensure that cubicles are not occupied. They also have a simple sturdy catch mechanism. She would also have liked all the provision to have been suspended but the cost implication of this was very high.

Q: Do you see an investment return on providing toilet facilities for the public?

Her verdict is that customer care is not about toilets.. However, any private facility is judged on its looks and if it exceeds expectations then it will be noticed or appreciated. She knows that The Centre attracts a lot of return customers and also attracts customers from a very wide catchment area (Dorset, Wales, Cornwall).

Conclusion: The owner seemed to be more aware of many toilet issues than public sector providers and had managed to accommodate high level toilet provision and maintenance within her business expansion plans with good business returns resulting. But she was also under no illusions as the habits and problems of the general public in terms of toilet manners, shoplifting and loitering but still retained a generous and public spirited attitude.

3. Provider Interview with Contracts Manager, Neighbourhoods & Housing Services, Bristol City

Both Clara and Isobel interviewed this officer who is responsible for the running of public toilets in Bristol. We were received with great enthusiasm and offered a ride around Bristol in the van to visit key toilets. He was genuinely proud of his best toilets. Subsequently they sent us a full list of the public toilets in Bristol, but did not have a map (although they might have had in the 1960s we were told.) We did not use specific questions, and were rather drawn along by the agenda of the respondent who sought to explain his concerns to us, but we also had an opportunity later to ask more structured questions. The introductory discussion centred on the fact that Bristol is just undertaking a strategy for the City's toilet provision. Most of the facilities have evolved over a series of phases from the turn of the century, the 1920's, 1930's, 1940's and more recent additions over the last thirty years. There are plans for a toilet strategy of sorts which will look at the condition and amount of misuse (cottaging/drugs abuse etc), and to some extent at demand, but there is no policy on location or distribution of provision. The Council has a performance indicator to increase baby change and disabled facilities by one facility per year. Bristol does not use water usage as a measure for considering potential closures (a very non-social measure). There are 55 sites in total (now likely to be 53), and 6 blocks have been shut in 2001, and possibly 20 more are being targeted for closure in the future. Indeed the whole emphasis seemed to be upon closure, but also upon looking for creative ways to provide alternative solutions, not least by using agreements with fast food chains.

We asked about maintenance and upkeep. A contract with SITA (a major European waste disposal contractor) for the cleansing and maintenance of public toilets across the authority has just finished and has been awarded to Specialist Hygiene Services who are based in Merton, London. The officer indicated that they are already operating in the south west with a contract for Taunton Deane. SITA retain the much larger contract for refuse and street collection of recycling, but office cleaning has now returned in-house to the Council. The contract for the 'toilet budget' is worth approximately half a million pounds for both cleaning and provision of attendants. (As time went on we realised the enormous role that such private contractors play nowadays in the world of toilet management and provision, and opportunities arose at various toilet conferences to meet representatives and discuss matters further.)

The last traditional toilet block built was at Castle Park at the back of the Galleries, there were previously two blocks at Fairfax Street, and this was as a result of a planning gain agreement with the developers. In future the Council is thinking of moving towards the installation of APC's at key locations such as the Dockside (a Millennium funded Arts and Regeneration area), in the centre and along Whiteladies Road (a secondary centre famed for its bars, clubs and 24 hour culture and plagued with night-time street urination). Where refurbishment takes place it will probably be along the lines of single toilets accessible directly from the street. One recent example is at Fishponds Road Park where this has been the style adopted. (This toilet was often mentioned by users too but few outsiders would find it because of poor signage along the main roads).

Q: What is the best thing about toilet provision in Bristol?

The manager considered the improvement's last year at Colston Avenue, also at Prince Street which is situated in a 1930's subway and has an attendant on-site Monday to Friday, also Castle Park and Quaker's Friars. The refurbishment at Fishponds Park this year will have babycare and a disabled toilet as well as an attendant (it was previously unattended). (But we are not talking 'more toilets' here rather additional facilities in existing ones resulting in less cubicles overall...)

Q: What arrangements are made for finance and upkeep of facilities?

As mentioned earlier the contract has just been changed. The Council budget allows approximately , 60,000 annually for repairs and maintenance, and between , 25,000 - 30,000 for vandalism as well as a capital account of , 43,000. To some extent there is a degree of 'mix and match' with the two revenue budgets, alongside the capital budget. He said that generally councillors are supportive of funding for public toilets, but he could not name any particular champions. (Actually this is quite reasonable much higher figures being quoted by other municipal authorities, the main cost being not construction but running the toilet).

Q: What arrangements are made for the management of local toilet facilities?

There is an area wide operation with seven area based offices responsible for minor repairs, all cleaning aspects and refuse and office cleaning. The manager has overall control of supervising these seven areas offices. (Again there are many arcane divisions in the toilet world related to buildings, maintenance, waste disposal and plumbing functions.)

There are 11 attended toilets employing 16 attendants on a full-time basis, with two or three for cover. The normal opening hours are from 7.00 a.m. - 7.00 p.m. One exception is in Stapleton Road where there are two urinals open twenty-four hours a day. Colston Avenue toilets are also open twenty-four hours, with an attendant for part of this time. As yet there is no closed circuit television provision on any of the Bristol toilets. (Bristol is famed for its remaining male-only wrought iron urinals, for example one serves taxi drivers located at the top of Whiteladies Road).

Q: What are the main problems in the Bristol area?

There are continuing problems with drug abuse, particularly at the St James Barton roundabout site, where a female attendant was attacked quite recently with a syringe.

This problem is becoming more widespread, and yellow sharps boxes are provided at Quakers Friars, Colston Avenue at St James Barton which Cannon Hygiene maintain. Frequency of emptying such boxes as well as sanpro bins seemed to be a worrying issue in terms of retaining user confidence

Vagrancy was also seen as a difficult issue, and cottaging is particular concern at Anchor Road (secluded toilets screened by trees behind the Cathedral also known as a cottaging venue). This toilet block is being removed and will be redeveloped as a car park and garden, with the possibility of installing an APC in future (This is one of the few practical toilets still serving surrounding parking areas). The Council has a policy of installing solid ceilings where there are problems with drug abuse e.g. Colston

Road (a strategy also adopted by Westminster). Another example of damage has occurred where a historic limestone terrazzo floor has been scarred by lemon juice used by drug addicts (makes a change from urine!).

Vandalism appears to go in phases. Apparently it is particularly bad during the school holidays across the city where toilets are unattended, with no distinction between ladies or gents. At Southmead (big council estate) where there is an InterPublic APC provision where street shutters are used at night to secure the toilets. (Clara subsequently visited this APC and found it covered in shot marks, and heavily protected with metal grid screening, and locals informed her it was seen as a challenge and a sitting target from the day it was installed.)

Q: Complaints from the public?

Apparently the general type of complaints received from the public tend to be when facilities are shut - for example due to vandalism, or when they are being refurbished. Clara raised the issue of difficulties in finding the toilets on the waterfront near the @Bristol, particularly for coach parties. He agreed that these are badly signed but considered this may have something to do with the architects not wanting to detract from the new building. We commented that this was indeed a strange approach to urban design and he agreed. The @AtBristol Centre has now put up temporary signs directing people to these toilets, as no-one can find them. There are also toilets by the exhibition cafe which are characterised by long queues for the Ladies poor access and few cubicles. He commented that at the time of the Millennium Celebrations large numbers of Portaloos were wheeled in to the Millennium Square to meet revellers needs, and we commented that this was such a growing tourist attraction area that it would be reasonable to provide higher levels of permanent toilet provision.

Q: Distribution of facilities?

Most sites have historic locations, in parks or along bus routes and in some cases are linked to bus shelters on the older housing estates. There is no strategic approach or planning policy, as far as He is aware to ensure there is adequate locational coverage. Like many areas toilet locations just evolved on an ad hoc basis, and nowadays they are not necessarily in the right place relative to modern transport and activity patterns.

Q: Plans for new facilities and refurbishment?

The Council are considering adopting 'DANFO' style individual cubicles ([modular prefabricated Scandinavian) for Ladies and Gents but making their own rather than buying the original. (Clara subsequently interviewed a key Scandinavian APC provider organisation). Possible sites are on Bedminster Down and Bridgwater Road. They have already received interest from a builder who wants to combine the toilets with a café on the same site at Bridgwater Road.

Clara highlighted the toilets at Horfield - apparently they are structurally unsound, and the Council are trying to get them redeveloped, but there are problems because they are situated within a listed building. At Park Row the roof has recently been repaired

because there were water leaks into the Ladies block (this building is listed internally and externally). As mentioned earlier, the Fishponds Park block has very recently been refurbished. Clara commented that although such buildings might be listed they were very unreliable as toilets not being regularly open, and often subject to building work (Greed,1996a re more details on Park Row and the role of public toilets in urban conservation areas and see Greed,1999b).

Q: Design issues?

Clara probed about the issue of different levels of provision between male and female facilities. He hopes to send us some plans and details of dimensions for comparison. He indicated that the Council is now adopting a policy of trying to equal out the level of provision, for example there are three cubicles for women at Fishponds and just one for men, together with a urinal. Size was also discussed and apparently the cubicles at Colston Avenue are very small and the sanpro bins had to be adapted to enable them to fit within the cubicles. Apparently the access to the plumbing facilities behind the facilities is also very small and not of a standard size - this requires a 'narrow plumber'! So even-ing up and modernising the facilities can lead to less facilities once modern plumbing and access requirements are provided.

The manager was aware of some councils installing blue ultra violet lighting to avoid drug abuse, as mentioned at the BTA conference, but it has not been adopted in Bristol. Low wattage fluorescent lights are installed where possible in council toilets in Bristol. Normally ceramic toilet bowls are used, but in some instance stainless steel vandal proof bowls with seat pads are used (no moveable seat and disliked by many users). All toilet blocks are supplied with hot water and surface mounted wallgates. Individual soft toilet rolls (without covers) are supplied in all the Ladies toilets, with hard IZAL type paper in the Gents.

Q: Consultation with the public?

The Council has a Citizen's Panel which does consult on public toilets. Recent comments have endorsed the policy of moving towards fewer facilities of a better quality. However, there is no liaison group to discuss issues about steps/ramps.

4a. Provider Interview with the Tourism Development Manager, North Somerset Council at the Winter Gardens, Weston-super-Mare

This interview was undertaken by Isobel in Weston. A wider, less structured discussion was undertaken because specific toilet design questions were not so relevant, but the relationship between toilet provision and tourism was crucial.

The pressure to close some of the seafront facilities was first discussed. This matter is often raised at monthly business meetings by local traders and hoteliers who oppose such a move. North Somerset have had several successes in the 'loo of the year' award in the attended facilities on the sea front and at Grove Park, despite the fact that the facilities are not modern. The old Victorian buildings are very difficult to adapt and modernise. The Marketing and Leisure Committee raises any particular issues with Technical Services who are responsible for day-to-day management of public toilets (division of powers).

Weston-super-Mare has over three million visitors with the peak month being August and during the period from June to September with over 350,000 people staying in the area annually. There are also over three million day trippers. Income from tourism accounts for £147m into the area. So clearly there is a continuing need for toilets. The female officer thought disabled provision was particularly poor. On the seafront there is only one RADAR key operated toilet next to the Victorian café (and users subsequently told us of queues here). Apparently the seafront manager looks after all the concessions on the front (donkeys, deckchairs, etc) and he has been considering what possibilities there would be for a totally new toilet block. He has previously been looking into the possibility of a catering concession and seeking sponsorship for toilet provision - she thought he had considered approaching one of the toilet roll manufacturers like Andrex (Isobel thought this was rather a novel idea and don't know if any other authorities have considered such an approach, but Clara noted that advertising on the back of toilet doors is becoming more widespread and is also found above urinals too). She thought we might like to talk to him, maybe by telephone or when we next visit to see Technical Services. She also thought public provision in the centre of Weston was low, apart from the shopping centre toilets at the Sovereign Centre - which she considered are somewhat hidden away near the car park entrance, and not always well looked after.

The most modern toilet block is probably the one at Locking Road, and there is also a council operated toilet at Colston Street situated in the car park which also serves National Express coaches. The officer has been working in Weston for three years and remembers that there used to be a 'superloo' (a test site ?) near the library which was removed some time ago. (This is the same loo that was referred to in the other Weston interview that was so unpopular, and has gone down in local folk legend.)

Vandalism is a continual problem. A murder at Clarence Park in the Gents in 2000 was also mentioned. This summer there has been a new initiative introduced called 'Beach Watch' which has been organised by the local police in attempt to cut down on undesirables or potential known paedophiles in view of the numbers of children in the area during the summer holidays. She indicated that she thought there could be concerns in relation to toilet provision in this area. Drug abuse was not mentioned.

Blue Skies: Blueprint for the Future This is Weston's future strategy consultation document, which was raised by the officer as relevant. Isobel had looked at the key points from this strategy on the North Somerset website. Apparently it covers a twenty year period and looks ahead to the changing characteristics of tourists generally, forecasts for future of tourism in the South West and the need to improve tourism infrastructure and visual appearance (including design, maintenance and cleansing), traffic congestion etc. within Weston. (Little visible on toilets in it). The officer indicated that there has been extensive consultation with local businesses and they take the viewpoint that as long as the Council does all the statutory things, businesses will take on the wider issues. Isobel pointed out that local authorities do not have any statutory requirement to provide public toilets, a fact that she was not aware of, and Isobel provided the officer with further information on this point.

The Tourism and Marketing department has a new Assistant Director who is very concerned about image and signage; they are looking into the hand written signs that attendants often put outside the toilet blocks in order to try and improve them and provide more consistency. The officer thought foot showers/showers on the beaches were another possibility - in order to try and cut down on sand spread into toilets.

The Tourist information centre receives complaints from the public and these are collated on a spreadsheet on a regular basis. She could not recall many related to toilet provision - although sand in the seafront toilets is often an issue which is difficult to resolve, but complaints tend to be related to hotel accommodation, etc.

Isobel asked about visitor surveys and whether toilets featured in these. Apparently there is an annual visitor survey throughout the South West that looks at destinations for benchmarking. North Somerset employs fieldworkers to survey the public at random and the questions do cover public toilets. The officer considers that toilets do form an indicator of an area, and she thought they were very important but that the Council is continually having to cut budgets, so essential services such as education etc. tend to be afforded greater priority.

Isobel asked her about experiences elsewhere in tourism management, in relation to other seaside resorts. She could not think of any that were notable, although she and her manager had recently visited Brighton seafront but she could not recall using any of the toilets! She did say that colleagues continually mention how much better and well maintained American public toilets seem to be in comparison to the UK. Her view is that the main problem is that most of the facilities are located in old Victorian buildings that are not easily modernised.

4b. Provider Interview with Environmental Contracts Manager, North Somerset Council, Weston

This manager came to UWE and was interviewed by both Isobel and Clara. We started by establishing his priorities as to toilet strategy. There is no strategy as such but tourist toilets are protected against closure, and he considers that it is better to close facilities if they are not up to standard (but presumably not to replace them). At the strategic and local levels toilets are protected up to a point, but it is necessary to get Town and Parish Councils to assist with funding (not a popular point with parish councillors we had found). He cited the example of Clevedon where the Council would not agree to help with funding and Five Ways was closed (the one by the Post Office in a district centre much used by elderly shoppers). But there were other ways of funding toilets. For example, at Kewstoke by the Toll Road the pts are adjacent to the Shell Shop which uses these public toilets for its staff and has taken a freehold lease so that it will be responsible for the upkeep of these public toilets in the future as it has no toilet facilities within the shop. (Both users and providers allude to this one.)

We discussed vandalism and cottaging with Colleters Brook toilets on the A38 layby being mentioned (a site we subsequently found featured on an international gay

cruising web site). There are now plans drawn up to open a snack bar and this will be let out to a concession and the toilets will be modified. Currently there is a takeaway facility. Clevedon has two award winning toilets - one situated by Station Road near Safeway and has a male attendant, previously opened from 8.00 - 8.00, but now 9.00 - 6.00 (just when evening shoppers and visitors might want to use it). Also the Chalet in Clevedon by the bowling ground is open from 8.00 - 8.00, but is not attended in winter.

At Portishead the Council have spent over , 5,000 on security lighting at Wyndham Way (Clara had talked to the men in the repair van who said that 15,000 had been spent on that toilet in one year because of vandalism). A typical toilet costs , 100,000 to buy land and develop, provide all services, water, electricity and sewage to provide a new facility, plus , 30,000 for attendants per toilet block.

Other examples of important but problematic toilets were discussed, such as Locking Road, Weston Super Mare which are used by coaches, lorries, but these facilities are often abused. Also in Clevedon, Pier Copse, at the end of the seafront (as mentioned earlier) is important for boat passengers and the Council is trying to work with the Pier Company to retain them. Toilets in Weston were variously discussed, for example the Park toilets are to be transferred to the Marketing Department of the Council (2 in Clarence Park, previously 5, and 2 in Ashcombe Park and more to close.)

We discussed funding sources for the future. The manager was wondering about potential for European funding. We discussed Southend-on-Sea which has Objective 2 funding for seafront renovation. We also discussed implications of European harmonisation on toilet policy. He indicated that toilets need to get statutory funding, with ring-fenced money to ensure that there is adequate standard of provision. Currently they target the rate support grant, but there are bigger commitments, for example recycling. Also there is no co-ordination between private and public toilet facilities. Clara emphasised the importance of linking this provision to the town plan.

As to the future and new forms of toilets, they had had a Decaux APC model on a trial basis, but this was going to cost , 10,000 a year to run and so it was not retained in Weston (as mentioned). There is also one in Pill apparently, but this is likely to be dispensed with shortly, and Clara noted afterwards this is the one blocked by recycling skips and ungettable, although its on the Avon bicycle route, a toiletless ride. There is also a Danfo model at Burnham-on-Sea which was installed as part of the Challenge Anneka television programme several years ago as part of the refurbishment of the Lifeboat station, and which significantly includes a Ladies, Gents and a third door labelled 'Urinals'.

As to changes in design, it was argued that design issues are always restricted by the initial size of the facility. For example at Birnbeck Pier there were four to five cubicles but this was cut down to two when disabled access was increased. There is always an issue in providing disabled toilets since they require a lot of space

(JMU,2000). As the DDA comes into force it may actually reduce the amount of overall toilet provision.

Overall he takes the view that public toilets "are a reflection on society" and he put the following factors in this order:

1. location
2. design
3. attended
4. lower ownership

He concluded by suggesting that possibly UWE could get involved in a research campaign to improve Wyndham Way, Portishead toilets and persuade the Co-op to become involved, but was not offering funding, only moral support. Potential maybe for a student dissertation! Subsequently improvements were carried out to these toilets as stated suggesting we had raised the profile of local issues.

5. Provider Interview with one of largest Scandinavian toilet manufacturers in London in order to discuss issues with regional and international directors.

This visit was undertaken by Clara Greed in late September, and it became more of a discussion than an interview although many relevant points were made, as we considered their various high tech products, including APCs and prefabricated modular public toilets. A sense of unreality and feeling I had fallen into an alternative universe pervaded this very down to earth interview session. 'How did I get to be an 'expert' on male street urination?' I asked myself, such is life.

The issue of male street urinals figured ominously in the discussion as one was about to open in London. I was advised that 12th October 2001 was the opening day for the new Trafalgar Square male-only urinals installed by the company in question, one to start with by St Martins in the Fields, which open out like metal wardrobes (photo). I was told they were not to be seen as discriminatory as they said they were 'additional' and they were not there to provide 'convenience' but rather to deal with 'street urination'. So they imagined they were quite a different category from the lack the public toilets, and inequalities issue. They said they were 'additional' not 'replacement' to prevent men going in doorways. They showed me lots of photos and chatted away as if it was all wonderful and told me it was difficult to do a 'urinal' for women too and asked what I would do for 'the ladies'.

The international manager gave a potted history of the company, founded in 1969 in Sweden, 1985 started providing toilets to local authorities, nowadays have 34 disabled organisations that 'vet' their designs in various European countries. We discussed their Swedish corner design (a diagonal disabled toilet) and other gizmos and wondrous contraptions. Swedish toilets have heated pavements and access ramps because of the climate and 'assume' a higher level of surveillance and surrounding infrastructural support it seems.

They have agreement with Railtrack to provide toilets for drivers and staff. Also partnership scheme with London buses for on street toilets, 80 of these which will be painted red to match the buses, with key pad and swipe card entrance. (Strike on the London Underground at the time was, in part, to do with lack of staff toilet facilities at outlying stations). Wolverhampton buses are also interested, something about 'pre-pay' toilets there (by then my mind was wandering and I suggested loyalty points for regular APC users but they did not appear to realise I was joking, very strange interview altogether).

The UK representative said how he went all around the country and noted where they were closing, London Borough of Peckham has none now, Isle of Wight threatened to close all of theirs until Health officer stepped in, Newport Pagnell critical. But Fenland, Colchester and Canterbury were all authorities that reduced their toilets and then seeing the effects on trade and tourism went quite the other way and installed a lot of new ones by this Scandinavian company.

As to management three factors were stressed, design, location and management, and said that location, location, location was the most important factor to avoid problems, and gave me many examples of ones down alleyways in places I had never heard of. Various other discussions about 'peace of mind pack' and 'toilet kit' that appeared to be management agreements that gave 'extended guarantee' to local authorities when choosing this company's toilets, and he referred us to the sales pack where the advantages of choosing this company are set out.

After about 2 hours of discussion, coffee out of a company cup, various interruptions, and looking at photos, I stumbled back into the sunlight and walked back to the station, and photographed a large sign by the shopping precinct stating, 'owing to vandalism toilets closed till further notice' and checked the other loos in the shopping centre, single corridor access, have to go past the gents, very odd. I jumped back on rickety Metropolitan line train and returned to civilisation. The absolute 'matter of factness' of discussing biological functions and the technological solutions to the toilet problem was somewhat of a culture shock, even for such a hardened toileteer as myself.

Subsequently I received many long phone calls, e-mails with fascinating attachments and even a Christmas card from several other Scandinavian APC toilet manufacturers, and had clearly stumbled on a whole new world of toilet innovation which defied all British taboos and traditions peopled by most helpful toilet designers and providers.

6. Provider Interview: Woman representative of expanding private toilet company in the South West

This interview was undertaken with both Clara and Isobel present at the UWE. The respondent (one of the few female commercial provider managers) commutes from a farm in North Devon to the company base in Herefordshire, and stopped off en route at UWE to visit us and discuss her company products. They have been appointed a

distributor of the products of a Finnish toilet company, but also distribute mobile toilets for special outdoor events and are becoming agents for several other new toilet 'solutions' too.

Although her work is mainly commercial the respondent is also working towards the ideal uni-abled toilet which would be accessible to wheelchair/pushchair users and be large enough to accommodate both vehicles. This could be one module, divided up into a different number of cubicles or stand alone. She cited the misuse in a local toilet block in a village in North Devon where the local children use the toilets as their own 'patch' causing a great deal of vandalism. Her theory is based on the fact that wasted vanity/basin space is an invitation for misuse.

We discussed local authority provision and the difficulties councils face in funding public toilet facilities, with decisions usually being taken by male councillors who have little or no understanding of what is required (and very often with little knowledge of their own local facilities). She reinforced the need for a national standard for toilet provision, and Clara countered that the current standard from BSI is hardly sufficient.

The provider put forward strong arguments for individual toilet compartments opening straight on to the street, getting away from the 'need' for vanity units and rows of washbasins which is where she considered potential vandals congregated. This ideal toilet model would incorporate all washing, drying, bin facilities and would be totally private and would be serviced by a two foot x six inch corridor behind (the narrow plumber concept). Users would have a queuing standing space. She endorsed that it is the congregation of people loitering within larger spaces that appears to make women wary. She would also like to incorporate a shelf that the disabled could use for transfer on to the toilet and some non-slip grip handles positioned at the side of the seat.

We moved on to discuss the role of attendants - she took the view that many councils could streamline the service that they currently operate by utilising attendants more efficiently. She suggested moving one attendant across three toilet blocks in a town centre on a rotational basis. Just one block could be kept open for twenty-four hour access, and thus the closed toilets would remain clean ready for morning opening. . We also discussed opening times she seemed to favour extremely limited ones, and suggested that cleaners should walk between 3 sites at least, not very taken by all this. But what happens in between we wondered? And when would attendants have time for their cup of tea?

She said lack of interest at local level for provision because, 'the people who use it are not the people who pay for it' in relation to local rates and taxes. Her concern with vandalism and cost seemed to determine all other considerations. She is in favour of mixing male/female, abled/disabled, childcare/disabled, in one multipurpose unit which opens right out on the street with individual doors, and washbasins inside the separate toilets. She argued 'her' toilet was clean, no steps, functional, etc, but I still

could not see why people would not vandalise, go in pairs, or take up residence inside her individual toilets. But she thought that her individual units could accommodate pushchairs, luggage, wheelchairs everyone all in one universal unit, but I wondered how many of these there would be in questions of queues, plus the real fact that male and female mixing often results in male takeover, and disabled/childcare mixing often results in complaints from both parties as both 'operations' can take ages

Her company is developing the Urilift/Urilady with Shippax/Marco based on a combination of the two products. It has a square service bay that can be covered in an appropriate paving material to match the surroundings and only a two inch stainless steel rim is visible in the pavement for the cylindrical toilet. The hand washing and soap dispenser/and hand drier operates over the toilet bowl to maximise space. This is operated by a remote control by council/or police. The prototypes are for the City of Westminster and are designed to stop on-street urination. The biggest bonus is the loophole that avoids the requirement for planning permission (Clara questioned this as definition of development, includes, in, on, or under the ground!)

There are no facilities for the disabled along Urilift lines. But the problem is seen as one of male street urination not one of convenience and increased provision for all users. Also something about planning loophole to get permission as she said it was a temporary structure (but I said it is permanent because of underground structures which like mining do require permission). Vastly expensive solution with all that mechanism and what a challenge to vandals. But apparently it is the 'solution' to create invisible public toilets in sensitive conservation areas (rather than having prominent ones that are themselves an urban design feature). In London temporary male urinals are being installed and are to be operated by the police! (what legislation enables this one might ask?). Shippax had already told me they had a man in a booth at Swedish railway stations deciding whether to let people into the automatic toilets there. Whilst none such devices had yet reached Somerset, yet as stated more traditional Danfo installations were already provided, and Her company already provided toilets to show grounds and agricultural events, and was in negotiation with a range of Itas in the region as to installing some of the more novel appliances. Perhaps to allay our fears she told us about a dress shop in Appledorne, Holland (a small town), where the owner had encouraged the installation of a male urinal in front of the window, to avoid night time street urination. (In fact I heard many times about this legendary example from others.)

Then we went on to London Transport issue and got a different version from the other company I visited as apparently there are to be many more of these units for drivers, (passengers can suffer still), with 18,000 drivers of public transport in London. They used to 'go' in the depot when buses when from depot to depot, but now they stop and start in all sorts of places. Drivers are not allowed to take their takings into public loos says union and cannot leave the money on the bus either.. Also they are getting into the London underground too by providing toilets for Tube drivers. When I suggested the real need is for passengers ones too, the argument came back, well the passengers vandalised them before so they dont deserve them sort of argument (I as a pasenger never vandalised anything personally nor do most people).

She also thinks that councils could exploit their own advertising on toilets rather than going through the major suppliers, thus promoting town maps and local information and companies. Most councils now lease toilet facilities on a three to five year basis then buy them outright. Clara outlined how Bristol City Council were considering designing their own automatic toilets, but the provider pointed out that this could prove difficult if the original designer moved on, and there would also be maintenance issues since automatic toilets require twenty-four hour emergency cover.

They have recently won some of the contracts to supply toilets for the London Bus Company for exclusive use by the drivers. This initiative was brought about because of complaints particularly from female drivers about lack of toilet facilities on new routes that do not begin or end at the bus depots. The unions intervened with the requirement that facilities were provided where drivers could also carry cash safely and subsequently swipe card access will be provided. Apparently there are 600 bus routes and 1,800 drivers. Clara pointed out that Danfo are also supplying some models.

We concluded by discussing BTA activities. She has recently visited Richard Chisnell and the Convenience Company has agreed to sponsor the BTA for a twenty-four month period with the use of two company logos on all corporate BTA leaflets and publicity. She has not encountered any other women in the same field, and frequently has to attend male dominated

council meetings. Final comments, October is American toilet month?! Although she was pushing Urilifts in concluding she argued it was better to have toilet bowls rather than urinals so can be shared in unisex facilities, as all 'sit to shit'.

In conclusion a need for national 'potty training' on how to use APCs was seriously discussed as there is such unwillingness among the public to use them (not without good reason as the user interviews showed). Additional ideas to counter fears of claustrophobia, crime and being trapped included providing a spy hole in the door so users could see what they were coming out to, or having one way glass panels so users could see out but not be seen. As to the vexed question of street urination and male-only street urinals, subsequently as the research progressed various products made by some of the providers interviewed were covered in the local press, usually with extreme concern, not least the Urilift (Bristol Evening Post, 8.2.02) which resulted in several media enquiries and interview requests for Clara and Isobel. Clearly these matters are of great concern to the general public.

5.4 Summary of Issues Raised by Users

There now follow the interviews with users, preceded by a list of key themes which summarise the user concerns and responses.

Common Areas of Concern to Users

- Closure of facilities
- Fear of APCs, lack of awareness and scared of using them
- Insufficient disabled facilities

- Insufficient ladies toilets, and poor ratio with men resulting in queuing
- Lack of provision of toilets in shopping areas
- Signposting and better directions

Barriers

- Charging and not having the right amount
- Concerns about emergency pull cords and light switches among the elderly/disabled
- Difficulty with locks
- Higher seats needed for elderly, but not favoured by those who prefer to hover
- Inward opening doors leaving little space between the bowl and edge of door
- Lack of toilet seats and/or dirty wet seats
- Lack of adult changing facilities
- Poor hand washing facilities
- Pubs/hotels using disabled toilets as broom cupboards
- Size of cubicles, generally too small, and inaccessible for those with luggage and pushchairs
- Toilet design in hospital (not well designed particularly for the disabled)
- Unequal spatial distribution, and urban/rural split, less loos in rural areas

(note not all of the toilet issues apply strictly to 'public conveniences')

Enabling Factors: What People Wanted

- Adult changing facilities
- Attendants because of need for better maintenance and supervision
- Baby changing facilities separate from disabled toilets
- Better signposting
- Choice of hot and cold water supply for washing
- Extra space for luggage and pushchairs (many users are women on foot with babies)
- Larger cubicles to enable more 'inclusivity' and less division of abled/disabled facilities
- Longer opening hours to co-incide with evening shopping
- More hooks and shelves
- More facilities in association with public transport stops and stations.
- More provision in retail stores and town centres, eg Boots, Woolworths
- Separate, secluded baby feeding facilities

- Some unisex provision too for parents with small children
- Support for village facilities, but 'not in my backyard'

5.5 User Interviews

1. User Interview with Local Woman

The first respondent was a local woman concerned with the way in which public toilets disabled her because of her size, and because she had experience as a carer for her disabled father and her growing children. This first interview may be seen as a pilot practice attempt as well as covering many issues that were of relevance in relation to access, disability and user experiences of Bristol toilets. Both Isobel and Clara were present. The initial discussion centred on the shape/design of toilet doors and the problem of legroom. She has personal experience of a stroke user (her father and the problems with facilities with different heights and surfaces). She discussed terminology - she favours 'versatility of access' and 'inclusive' and clearly wanted more accessible toilets for everyone rather than just for the disabled.

Q: What are your views on the level of public toilet provision in the local area? (particularly problems etc, distribution)?

She described her experience of public toilets. She found that stores in retail stores tended to be larger than those on street, such as the new ones at the Galleries Bristol and The Mall, Cribbs Causeway. This is particularly noticeable in relation to access to disabled loos. She discussed disability and mentioned how there was generally 1 larger cubicle in every standard loo in US and Europe). She did not like the terms 'disabled' as it implied a third sex, or a sexless group of people defined by their toilet needs.

In respect of Bristol she said she was not aware of any signage around directing people to public toilets, but she knew where they were likely to be such as in parks. Outside towns she thought that toilets were generally related to tourist areas, but where there were none it was felt that men were better designed to urinate in the countryside.

Q: What particular issues concern you most about public toilet provision?

Size of cubicles is very important to her, this is particularly because of her desire to enter a cubicle without making contact with the surfaces, also sufficient wall space. Cleanliness is important (but she stressed she was not obsessed with this). One often finds facilities for hand washing frustrating - water can be very hot, no plug or hand drier (increases chances of bacteria). She prefers recycled paper towels/or roller towels.

Clara raised the point about having a washbasin in the cubicle but she did not favour this option because of having to touch the latch on the way out (compare with provider 6 interview: in fact 50% of germs are picked up in toilets from door handles).

She likes to have several hoods and shelves, and does not like the thought of putting her handbag on the toilet floor and then putting it on a table at home afterwards. She said she prefers to sit on the seat to go, and as the conversation developed we discussed, sitting, squatting, hovering and standing. 'Hovering' is a big issue for women.

Lighting was not an issue for her, but wet floors and leakages are a problem (need regular checking and maintenance.)

Opening hours: If she is out late then the sorts of places she uses there will be access to loos, but there are always 'no go areas'. Generally she thinks it can be a lively experience, but probably more of a problem for quiet places and small towns. She mentioned pubs where there are no women's toilets. She discussed nightclub toilets and how her own teenage daughter had recently used the Gents coming home and had slipped and fallen over.

Queues: She was aware that women take longer to use the toilet, for example at events at Wembley stadium. Clara mentioned how there is a need to push for equal provision. She suggested they could make more unisex loos and she would not be embarrassed by this but there might need to be night-time policing by attendants.

Security: Generally this had not been a particular issue for her. She has had interesting conversations and experiences when travelling. She would like to see short term lockers when travelling (to store luggage) e.g. the size of Paddington turnstiles reputed to be 18 inches as well as being downstairs, and very difficult for her to get through.

Payment: Charging for public toilets equates to taxing someone for service at point of source. There are issues of public hygiene and convenience not just of local payment. Also she was worried how payment might exclude people.

Special needs users: Again she was concerned about issues of standard facilities - standard heights, which do not accommodate small or large people. Cubicles need to accommodate pushchairs or users need to be allowed to use disabled toilet. Also she said there was a need for more dual/multiple use and child seats.

Signage is an issue for her as mentioned at start of interview. She didn't know how this would be dealt with for those with vision impairment. Symbols used for sighted are often different - needs standardisation, not by number of legs and non-stereotypical.

Crutches and sticks require hooks, also umbrella stands would be useful. It can be difficult for these users on slippery floors.

She thinks that absorbent toilet paper rolls essential (not Izal varieties) but dispensers can present issues if they are too large and block access

Emergency cords in loos would be a good ideas as a security issue.

Changing facilities should be equally accessible by all sexes, with proper bins for nappies and baby changing tables present issues about cleanliness. Clara mentioned need for safety straps where there are hard floors.

APCs: She had never used one. Aware that they are self cleaning and environmentally sound. She suspects that people fear risk of exposure because of automation. If there were more APCs they may become more mainstream. Perhaps the public need training. Also Clara noted that if there were a spy hole in the door so people could see what was outside they might feel more secure and less cut off from the world.

We discussed the issue about more people being born or dying in public toilets according to the news.

Attendants: She thought toilets were often associated with sleazy connotations (?) if not the attendants themselves. But attendants were useful where people feel vulnerable at night. They require training and decent salaries.

Use of private facilities: Essentially a service to the public - in France the public have a legal right to use the loo. Can be an economical way to use provision - say for evenings, access issues and for young people unaccompanied (pubs, bars etc.).

Image, appearance and design: Hygiene more important in her viewpoint. Mentioned hotel at Swallow Falls, Wales where there are fish in the tanks. More important to be functional and clean than beautiful design.

Any other issues : Shopping malls and service stations usually have good standards (but often too small), particularly where they are sited in old buildings.

Clara mentioned about standards and distribution. The respondent thought motorways always provided signage, but was less certain about signage for the disabled (RADAR books only has a small number of entries). Aware when travelling abroad that coach drivers and tour providers always know where to stop and where there are decent facilities.

Thought there was room for development of mobile phones and short cuts e.g. press L for loos as there is for taxis. (This issue has been taken up by BTA with Nokia apparently they expect payment from providers to be put on service but still a

possibility since so many mobile phone and APC manufacturers both happen to be Scandinavian.) But no mobile toilets just mobile phones!

She discussed her upbringing on a Hampshire council estate at Basingstoke where there was excellent toilet provision which was well cared for and respected with no evidence of vandalism, and that was normal every estate apparently had its toilets (compare with Hartcliffe and Southmead council estates in Bristol nowadays.)

She thought the ratio of facilities could be planning gain issues or a town centre tax?. Public provision should be based on the numbers of people coming to an area.

Good practice examples: Machyllneth in Wales, with alternative energy and self composting toilets. St Fagan's house of the future on exhibition.

Conclusion: this was an example of an educated user who was also conscious of access problems because of her own size and the fact that she travelled quite extensively and often had to find a loo.

2. User Interview with Community Playgroup in a Local Village Hall near Weston

(present: leader, plus three female parent helpers interviewed by Isobel)

This visit was carried out by Isobel, and consisted of a group discussion within the setting of the playgroup activities going on around and was not, therefore, based on fixed questioning. The playgroup meets in the village hall every weekday morning from 9.30 to 12.00 but the children do not all attend each session. It is a modern, large two storey village hall on a very large plot of land with ample car parking and open space. However, due to Social Services regulations the children are not allowed to play outside but can make use of the very large hall. There is also a ruling that only registered users of the village hall can use the toilet facilities, although they do get requests sometimes from holidaymakers which they have to refuse. The playgroup was in mid-session and the children were just stopping to have their break of dry toast, assorted fruit and a drink in a structured atmosphere. Isobel was allowed to talk to the parent helpers while they supervised the children so the interviews were really informal 'chats' because of the amount of time available. Following the break the children regrouped into a games session.

Overall the parents and the leader Isobel met do not make much use of local authority provided public toilets, except when visiting local parks. They all have the use of a car and on outings, for example, such as shopping trips they would always prefer to make use of private facilities provided within large stores, cafes, leisure outlets.

The leader (middle aged) emphasised that she very rarely ever uses public toilets, unless absolutely necessary. if she is going shopping then she will perhaps have a coffee in Littlewoods store and would use the facilities in the shop. She certainly

would never go in an APC. Isobel asked her about outings with the playgroup children and she indicated that this was never really an issue. If they were going on a planned outing to a leisure park then they would be fairly certain that toilet accommodation would be adequate for a party of small children. They had recently taken the children for a walk in the village and they ensured that everyone had used the playgroup/village hall toilets before they set off. There is one remaining public toilet near the toll bridge/shop approach road which are dingy and depressing and down a very steep flight of steps. But the other facilities towards Sand Bay have been closed down so there is really very little provision for tourists visiting the attractive National Trust open land. Otherwise visitors would have to use the local pub or café.

The three helpers had children of playgroup/school age and no longer had to cope with nappy changing etc. One has a two year old and a ten year old, and had recent experience of using baby change facilities and breast feeding. They all generally favour using the Sovereign Centre toilets in the main shopping centre in Weston Super Mare since the provision is good and the toilets are usually clean and well maintained. They were also positive about Grove Park in Weston and thought the facilities were particularly good. They would not use the seafront/tourist toilets unless absolutely necessary - they are often sandy from people coming off the beach. However, one parent/helper thought these facilities had improved recently and as there are attendants present the standard was maintained, also there is a shower room available.

Ashcombe Park in Weston was cited as lacking in facilities, particularly with regard to hand washing. One helper mentioned that there are some toilets without seats. This park has a café that opens serving food and a huge children's play area. She also mentioned a very pleasant park just outside the town at Milton that has no baby change facilities. There is no bus station as such in Weston and the buses stop along the seafront so they did think this could be an issue for anybody travelling who needed to use a toilet.

They mentioned the fact that at the Winterstoke Retail Park outside Weston (Great Mills etc) there are no public toilets available and there are no cafes, although there are burger bars (take away food). They thought that these sort of large retail facilities should make provision for some sort of public toilets because they are the types of places where families make take time to browse and not visit quickly just to pick up one item.

They had also had difficulties at Worle where the two toilets situated near Sainsbury's are often shut, and the facilities are often poor. They understood that it is possible to ask for a key, but they did not think this was a very satisfactory solution. (Nationally the BTA has had a lot of feedback about the closure of supermarket public toilets that had previously been provided following pressure in the 1990s.)

Isobel asked about APCs. One parent had experience of using APCs in Teneriffe on holiday and had no problem with this concept, but acknowledged that there are none

in the North Somerset area. She would not object to paying 20p to use such a facility if she knew it would be clean, but did think that it would be helpful to have a change machine. (Others commented to Clara that if the APC is not working or it will not accept your coin there should be guidance as to where the next toilet is available.)

Baby change provision and feeding was discussed. The respondents agreed that unisex provision would be helpful; one of them mentioned that her husband had felt uncomfortable taking his daughter (as a baby) into the male toilets. However, one respondent had felt very uncomfortable once when breastfeeding her baby in a facility that she did not know was 'unisex' for parents. She also thought that baby feeding accommodation should be provided separately from the toilets. She mentioned that in the Sovereign Centre there are three cubicles for mum's who want to breast feed.

Experience with elderly/disabled issues were considered. One parent/helper has experience of taking out her elderly mother who is diabetic and has some bladder problems. She is aware how difficult it can be to find a suitable toilet, and often they have to ask in shops for help (apparently her mother has been provided with a special card to display in these emergencies, presumably from the Health Authority).

Any other particular concerns about provision?: Few comments were forthcoming - so Isobel tried to prompt from some of the items on the list. One respondent said that she did not think hand driers were adequate for children because it was difficult to get their hands dry and they would end up having to wipe them on their clothes - she had a preference for paper towels. Otherwise they did not have any particular comments they wanted to make about dimensions, design etc. possibly reflecting the fact that they only use such facilities on an occasional basis.

User Interview 3 Portishead Women's institute at Portishead

(With three main members and Isobel and others joining in)

The WI members had planned to take Isobel to the local pub for a discussion - it was shut at 11.00, so instead they visited the one café on the High Street. To their surprise we discovered that it did have one unisex toilet (of dubious hygiene and with a roller towel) for customers, but there are no signs to indicate its availability. So the meeting took the form more of a conversational discussion (with other customers overhearing and joining in!) but with specific questions included where possible, and specific topics raised indicated in this account.

Q: What are your views on the level of public toilet provision in the local area?

There used to be two toilets open twenty-four hours, but they are now open only from 8.00 a.m. - 8.00 p.m. Apparently there also used to be one toilet block opposite the fire station, and one outside the swimming pool on the seafront. One member indicated that SITA is responsible for maintenance for the local authority. As

residents they sometimes use the toilet facilities at the Folk Hall next to the church, it is specifically for patrons only, but another had found this embarrassing when she had popped in, and found there was an event in full swing with people in evening dress. They also thought provision is low considering the rise in population in Portishead, and increasing amount of residential housing development in the area.

Disabled facilities and access are poor in Portishead - there is just one toilet with a RADAR key situated opposite the Co-op superstore, and there is no signage to indicate where it is situated (next to the men's toilet at the rear, with just a ramp as an outward indication). They also thought provision was low considering the number of tourists visiting the village, particularly those staying in Redcliffe Bay and Weston super Mare. For example, there are sometimes large numbers of day trippers, and on Wednesdays visitors come specifically to the model sailing club. One member recounted that quite recently an elderly couple had got off the Weston super Mare bus and found the seafront toilets closed for maintenance, and since she couldn't suggest anywhere close by, they got back on the bus and went home! She thought this was a really appalling situation.

It was commented with concern that the facilities in Avon Way (local centre) have been set on fire and vandalised and are due to be closed down. The only alternative is a pub some two hundred yards away.

Q: What particular issues concern you most about public toilet provision?

In relation to the facilities adjacent to the Co-op the WI members' complaints were mostly about the shabby visual appearance. They admitted that generally the facilities are quite clean and well maintained inside, and that this comes as a surprise when viewed from the outside. They were also concerned about the proximity of the recycling bins which do obscure the entrance.

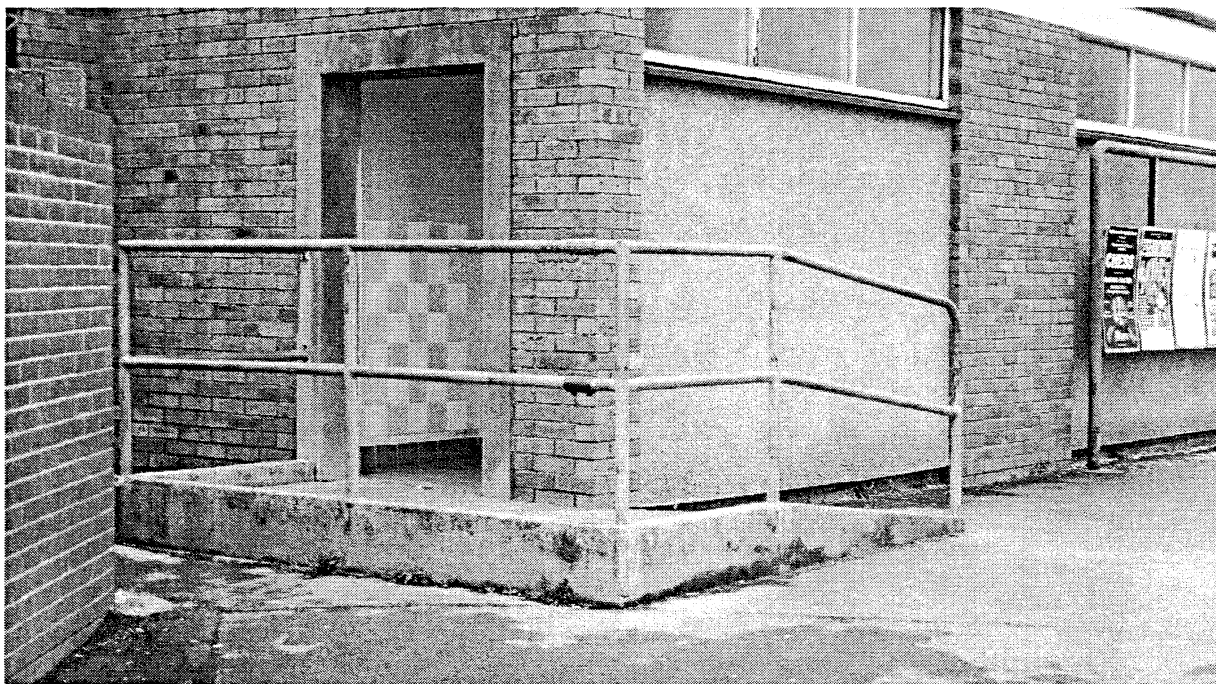


Figure 5 Access to the disabled toilet facilities by the supermarket car park Portishead, a very sharp corner to negotiate with a wheelchair, and the set back entrance is a haven for evening drug users and problem groups



Figure 6 You can just see the Portishead car park toilets behind the array of recycling bins and other rubbish

Bigger cubicles generally needed. They all thought that cubicles tended to be too small with no room for shopping, or for example luggage when travelling (coach/bus stations). This was seen as a particular issue for mothers with pushchairs. None of them would want to put personal items on the floor. Hooks on the door or wall were seen as an essential requirement.

Hand driers: They all thought paper towels can be wasteful and become messy if not disposed of properly, so they were prepared to use automatic hand driers.

Special needs/Radar keys: One member's husband (wheelchair user) and another's son both have Radar keys but often find it extremely difficult to locate appropriate facilities. One lady mentioned that a local pub in Portishead will not allow her husband to use their facilities as a 'non-paying' customer which she thought was somewhat uncharitable.

Toilet seats: One member said that she always carried toilet seat covers with her and that she had found the stainless steel vandal proof seats particularly uncomfortable to use.

Using Gents toilets: They all volunteered that they had at times used the cubicles in male toilets (particularly when on coach parties etc) to avoid the very long queues for the ladies.

Vandalism and drug abuse: There is a problem with syringes and one of the group had visited Australia and thought that ideas such as a sharps bin on the wall as used there was a good idea, also the practice of installing 'stable type doors'.

Views on the way local facilities are managed and maintained:

One member, the most knowledgeable, indicated that SITA is responsible for maintenance through a contract for North Somerset Council, and was aware that usage is measured by water efficiency. She had figures stating that the Council has , 66,000 to refurbish and maintain 40 toilet block facilities in the area, but that cuts are still forecast.

Q: What are your views on the provision of attendants and paying facilities?

They cited a good example in Weston Super Mare where attendants ensure standards are maintained.

Q: Should restaurants, cafes, bars, hottest etc. with toilets be expected to allow their toilets to be used by non-customers?

They agreed with this question and thought that it might actually encourage people to become a customer if there was the reassurance that there were toilet facilities to use. They are aware of a planning application for a twenty four hour Tesco superstore towards Wyndham Way in Portishead and presume that this will have toilet provision included. We also discussed the new marina development which they generally welcomed although they had some reservations about the potential 'exclusivity' of some areas of this development. However, they seemed confident that there were likely to be new loos associated with the new shopping complex at the marina.

Q: Would you use an automatic public toilet cubicle?

Generally they didn't like APCs, one of them recounted that they knew somebody "who had got cleaned" while inside by the flushing operation. They were also concerned about the need to have the right change to use one.

Needs of cyclists: the most knowledgeable member goes cycling quite regularly and finds that there is no provision (stands, cycle racks etc) for people wanting to use public toilets. Along the Bristol to Bath cycleway she considered that most of the facilities were "pretty grotty", and often pubs along the route may well be closed at certain times of day. She had a similar experience when cycling near Bridgwater as well.

Other examples: They all recommended facilities in Weston super Mare by the playhouse (but couldn't name them) where there is an attendant present.

Exeter was named by one of the group as having good toilet facilities.

Abroad - Portugal was put forward as having clean and spotless facilities, even in remote non tourist destinations. In Eastern Europe (not clear where, Czech) someone recalled toilets where the toilet seat was automatically sprayed between users.

Bad: Bristol bus station - described as "really awful" , down steps, paying. Extremely difficult if travelling alone with a case, and not at all welcoming for tourists. A couple of ladies on an adjacent table in the café also made a contribution as this point (overhearing our conversation with some interest!) with one of them saying that she travelled by coach frequently and had never come across anywhere as bad as Bristol - she had found such facilities were always free and maintained to much better standards, citing Leicester and Nottingham.

Glastonbury was cited as having particularly small toilet cubicles for the average user.

Other issues: They emphasised that the W.I. nationally had campaigned to get rid of turnstiles, and last April had campaigned locally about the proposed closures in North Somerset.

User Interview 4: Age Concern Day Care Group, A Village Hall, North Somerset

(3 helpers, 14 elderly ladies interviewed by Isobel)

This interview was carried out by Isobel on her own with a larger group of 17 ladies altogether. The situation and nature of the audience meant that direct questions were not always possible, and not everyone could hear, and so key points covered one way or another are highlighted in the following account.

This group meets in the village hall on a Tuesday each week from approximately 10.30 a.m. - 2.00 p.m., and the participants are fetched from their homes in various villages around (Locking, Banwell, Winscombe, Kewstoke, and Sandford), in a specially equipped bus with a hoist for wheelchairs. There was one wheelchair user from the village. Isobel was invited to stay for lunch, with the village hall also being the temporary home for the lunch arrangements for the village school so it proved a lively affair! There are newly refurbished lavatories attached to the hall (two ladies, one gents, one disabled [interesting ratio!]).

Generally very few of this group get out and about independently, and quite a few of them are nearly housebound to some extent, although a few did appear to be more mobile and do make trips outside the home. Many of them have home carers to enable them to live at home, and this Age Concern service is an offshoot to keep them in touch with others of the same age. The bus is also used to take them on short trips in the neighbourhood which is obviously a major highlight for them from their comments.

Isobel made an announcement to the group about the aims of the project. The assistant supervisor who was in charge, had already pre-warned the party of my arrival and the topic (the toilet lady). However, as many of them were very hard of hearing, and a couple are also partially sighted Isobel decided to move around and talk to them in two and threes about some of the issues. One or two of them were under the misunderstanding that Isobel was from 'the council'. Their knowledge and use of public toilets appears to be generally quite limited, and therefore many of the questions were inappropriate so the following points highlight some of the issues for this age group. Much patience and explanation on the part of Isobel was required.

Isobel came away with the view that this Age Concern project is really excellent and provides an important lifeline for many elderly people allowing them to have some company and a hot meal. The staff employed by Age Concern to run this scheme work in a different village in North Somerset each day of the week. The volunteer helping at Sandford that day was a very sprightly 81, helping to cook, wash-up and serve meals.

Level of provision in local area: According to details from the two councillors we interviewed there are still toilets in Wrington, Blagdon, Congresbury, Yatton, Burrington, Backwell (but those in Banwell, Winscombe, Bleadon and Pill have been closed, or earmarked for closure).

Very few of the group were aware whether there were actually still toilets in the villages where they came from - an indicator that they don't actually use them. However, they all quite strongly supported the retention of existing village toilet facilities for inhabitants and visitors, and were in favour of every village having a public toilet. Sandford does not have any facilities, although it is a very long and fairly large village judging by the new intake at the primary school. The village hall facilities are purely for use by groups making use of the hall.

Particular issues about toilet provision:

- * A plea for higher toilet bowls was put forward (many of this age group realised that this could be problematic for children).
- * Those that use public toilets were quite keen on attendants, and cited the block in Grove Park, Weston-Super-Mare which they considered a very good example [I have taken photographs of these which are not yet developed]. "if all toilets had attendants there wouldn't be any problems"
- * More grab rails would be helpful for those who are infirm. One mentioned that she could not use her walking frame in public toilets but has to use the seat to 'push up'
- * None of them had experience of APTs or would even consider them.
- * Nobody had any particular concerns about soap, heaters, hot water - probably reflecting the fact that they mostly use 'private' facilities when away from home.

Special needs users: None of this group had heard or understood the concept of RADAR keys. The one lady confined to a wheelchair is very constrained and uses hoists at home, but is unable to use toilet facilities away from home at all. However, she was instrumental in getting the new facilities in the Village Hall (she was Chair of Village Hall committee) as it is used very widely by a great many different groups

A few of the group thought that there was too much emphasis given to baby/toddler changing facilities over other users.

Quite a large number of these ladies have to take 'water tablets' which means that they need to use a toilet quite regularly (diuretics). However, when they are going out somewhere for the day they usually don't take the necessary tablet for fear of not being able to cope with the problem. Isobel asked them about trips made from the day centre, but apparently these are of quite a short duration, presumably for this very reason.

Facilities in shops in general: Those in the group who are more mobile would like to see some of the larger stores that they visit providing toilet facilities. They thought Boots the chemist where they got prescriptions was a good case, also food shops such as Iceland, and large branches of Woolworths. They were also in favour of restaurants, cafes etc., making toilets available to non-customers.

Other examples: Reports of some good toilets in Weymouth, Teignmouth, Lyme Regis. The wheelchair user could recall excellent facilities in Spain that provided an attendant and each toilet was cleaned between use.

User Interview 5 A contact via Carers Newsletter, who is Clerk to a Nearby Parish Council and MS sufferer

This lady contacted us after the announcement about our research in the North Somerset Carers Newsletter in July. As well as being clerk to the parish council she is also honorary secretary of the Avon local councils association. Note that this Carers group is a major network in North Somerset and covers all sorts of carers and cared for people's needs, linking to all sorts of other relevant organisations. An item requesting information was put in their newsletter, which Clara Greed already receives because of her mother, and both Isobel and Clara were invited subsequently to other carer's events. (Clara sought to keep clear of local meetings because respondents might know her already and could be 'awkward' in keeping a research perspective and in her own dealings with the care system for her mother with the council.) This respondent was able to give us a combined personal and parish perspective.

The conversation covered a range of topics and initiatives being run by the group rather than taking our questions as the starting point. Isobel carried out this interview.

Survey on contributions towards upkeep of village toilet facilities:

She has been carrying out a survey of other town/parish councils to see what their attitude is about making contributions towards upkeep of public toilets. This information was given in detail but semi-confidential in nature. Overall we found that parishes received a request from the district for contribution to the upkeep of toilets ranging around £10,000, but some paid more, some were unwilling to pay and some paid as little as £1,500 for maintenance.

Views on level of public toilet provision in the local area:

She agreed that provision is patchy, there is no public toilet in Long Ashton, and while many people would support the need for one they do not want it next to their property! There is one disabled toilet in the village hall. It would cost around £70 to have a RADAR key lock installed (Clara was quoted £250 by other provincial authorities' notes and thousands by one London borough). Mrs Addis has a RADAR key and she finds that this is an excellent arrangement provided she is in her wheelchair or motorised scooter.

Requirements for special needs users: Cleanliness has never proved to be an issue with disabled toilets in her experience. She has not yet encountered any in a poor state.

When they went to look at the new disabled toilet at the marina in Portishead they discovered that it had a step at the entrance. Her son who is an architectural technician took some photographs and the Council said that this was because the building had not been 'signed off', and that it was to be sorted out after landscaping etc!

Her experiences reveal that even in hospitals there is some very suspect and incorrect design. Toilets are often too low, the soap dispensers are often unreachable (too high from a wheelchair). Even on wards she has seen wash basins fitted on the wrong wall, so they are not reachable from the toilet.

Her local Somerfield supermarket (presumably Nailsea branch) provides a disabled toilet that does not have a RADAR key, which means that the key has to be asked for. This toilet only has a grab rail on the right hand side, so she has to use the sanitary bin as a lever as well. She thought there was also a problem at the Sovereign Centre if waiting to use the disabled loo when it is occupied, because the doors to other toilets open outwards at this point.

* Hooks are also very important - for coats, and she knows of one man with a colostomy bag who needs somewhere to put his equipment, rather than on the toilet floor.

* Hot and cold water supplies can be problematic, particularly if the water is boiling hot (she has had this experience in Caldicot). Needs to be hot and cold supply.

* it is not ideal to incorporate baby changing facilities adjacent to disabled facilities, because sometimes mothers become impatient and bang on the doors. Many disabled people will need plenty of time to manoeuvre.

* Her experience of emergency pull cords is that they are often installed too high up, or they are tied up - she believes that many builders do not fully understand the purpose of such cords. In one disabled toilet in North Somerset she even found a cord tied to the grab rail on the toilet so that it would go off automatically when the rail went up!

Use of facilities at restaurants, cafes, bars, hotels and new buildings/transport interchanges:

Ideally, she thinks that hotel and pubs that will not provide toilet facilities for the disabled should not have their drinks licences renewed. However, she is aware that in North Somerset has been trying to concentrate on fulfilling its statutory duties.

She uses the Weston Park Hotel in Clevedon that has no disabled loos, also the Royal Pier Hotel which only has toilet facilities up steps.

She cited example of new housing development in the village by Barretts - none of these properties will be built with disabled specification in mind, they would have to be adapted at a later date.

She recalled that there used to be a disabled toilet with RADAR key at Bristol bus station by the bookings hall, this was after my enquiry about the general facilities being through a turnstile and down steps. (Clara notes there still is one but it is behind another intermediate locked door that gives access to both the disabled toilet and the baby changing room, which is an arrangement that is disgraceful and much worse than the layout before Badgerline took over). (Throughout the research the lack of decent toilets at the bus station was often raised and was the concern of media interest from local newspapers and radio.)

One particular gripe is that many hotels and pubs will use the disabled toilet for storage, or as broom cupboards. She has experience of this on many occasions, including a new pub on the waterfront at Bristol. Her husband got very annoyed and moved all the equipment outside!

Automatic public toilets:

Yes - she has used these in Tenerife, and would be "very pleased to pay" for such a facility if introduced locally.

Other research:

She is aware that Bath University (she thought Engineering Dept? (not found)) has been asked to design a collapsible toilet seat design by a disabled lady.) She heard about this through the Vassall Road newsletter. Bath University also assisted a relative who became paraplegic following a motorbike accident and helped design a

motorbike for use by disabled riders. (In fact, Reading university building engineering dept is better known for such disabled gizmo research.)

She also finds a spray called DESMO very useful if she has to attend meetings. it is used to prevent urination and was designed with bed-wetting children in mind. She took part in the medical trials and finds it very effective.

User Interview 6, Mother and carer of ten-year old severely disabled son with cerebral palsy contacted through Carers group

A mother of a severely disabled child contacted us after the announcement about our research in the North Somerset Carers Newsletter in July. She preferred to make an appointment after the summer holidays as, her son aged 10, goes to a special school in Weston Super Mare during the term time. Her views are those of a carer who has to accompany her child to disabled toilets to change nappies. She hopes to start attempting to train him to use the toilet with support from health services (which will require lifting support as he cannot stand unaided, although he can get about quite fast on his knees) to enable him to gain more independence.

Views on level of public toilet provision in the local area:

She doesn't use very local toilet facilities within Nailsea, but agreed that there was limited provision apart from Somerfield, and an unpleasant block by the car park (which I have visited).

In Bristol she uses the Galleries where the toilets are situated on the top floor and Quakers Friars which considers is particularly unpleasant as people loiter about.

She was pleased to see that the new Children's Hospital has automatic doors at the entrance, but found that the actual toilet facilities were very small and the doors much too heavy for someone pushing a wheelchair. She was also pleased to see that there was a disabled parking space, but apparently this is a 'drop off' point only which is not much user for adults or children being accompanied who would have to be left on their own while the driver went off in search of a parking place.

In Weston-super-Mare she finds the Sovereign centre facilities on the ground floor are satisfactory and big enough for carers and wheelchairs. She was not aware that there were any toilets in Portishead, so Isobel indicated that there were some by the Co-op (including disabled) and at the far end of the seafront.

Q: What particular issues concern you most about public toilet provision?

From the viewpoint of a carer pushing a wheelchair she has enormous problems pushing doors open. She has a RADAR key, and generally uses disabled toilets when out with her son but finds that very often the doors are too heavy and the door entrance widths are too small for even a small wheelchair. Usually the access corridors to toilet facilities are also very narrow. She would like to see more

automatic doors at entrances to toilet facilities since this would also be helpful for mothers with pushchairs and prams

Changing Provision: There is no provision for larger child/adult babychange generally. Normally she has to use the floor, and this entails carrying with her suitable mats for this purpose. She prefers not to use the normal babychange facilities provided as the other parents and small children will often stare or draw attention to her son's disability. She particularly dislikes floors which are made of granite or concrete, and worries about hygiene implications.

As a non-disabled user she does not experience any difficulties with heights of washbasins, toilet roll holders, and hand driers etc.

Locks on disabled toilets can sometimes be awkward. She finds that it is not always clear when inside a disabled toilet whether it is locked, and believes that this is because they have special catches to be opened in emergencies. Frequently she pushes a door lightly on approach to ensure that she does not disturb the occupant, as some disabled loo users do not appear to use the locks.

Emergency cords: She would also like signs to indicate the purpose of the emergency cord and she thinks it can be confusing if they are situated next to/or adjacent to the light switch.

Provision of attendants: Yes she is always impressed by the difference where there are facilities that are attended and cited Grove Park at Weston with the cheerful flowers and notices.

Automatic public toilets: Had not heard of these at all, or seen any, so reserved judgement on whether she would consider using them.

Should restaurants, cafes, bars, hotels and shops with toilets be expected to allow their toilets to be used by non-customers?

No - she considers that the toilet facilities have been provided for genuine users/patrons.

Particular examples of good and bad provision of facilities: As a carer she finds that shops generally can be very difficult for those pushing wheelchairs as the aisles are inevitably too tight, and the same applies for stores providing café facilities where the tables and chairs are crammed in to maximise profits.

She cited the The Centre Garden Centre (which we interviewed) as being a very good example of a facility that caters for such users with good toilets, and some reserved café tables for disabled users. She believes this reinforces the point that customers

will return again to places where they know there is good toilet provision, and many big stores could become more appealing if they made a greater effort.

7. Additional user respondents

In the course of the research a range of individuals from other areas contacted us expressing interest in the research, imagining it was national, and wanting to give their views. All this was useful background information but also confirmed the need for further national-level research. The comments of just two such respondents are presented below.

A telephone Conversation between Isobel and woman bricklayer in London was undertaken. This lady , had spoken at a Women in Construction Conference in May 2001 and knew of Clara and her previous research on women in the construction industry via her involvement in the Women and Manual Trades organisation (which is always concerned with lack of toilets on building site). She phoned in out of interest on her own bat. Clara subsequently put a note out on the newsletter of the Equal Opportunities Taskforce in Construction because of a range of interest coming back. Also she contacted Women's Design Service who have a continuing toilet interest. (In fact Clara also received various other incidental e-mails, comments at meetings and interested enquiries from women in the construction industry always worried about loos).

The woman bricklayer explained to Isobel that she normally has to make use of toilets made available for canteen staff, but this is very much on an ad hoc basis; she has to negotiate this facility herself. She has recently been working at Canary Wharf where there were either toilet facilities for canteen staff at basement or level 24. (Clara had actually inspected Canary Wharf herself and taken photos of poor toilet provision in relation to her construction research.) One of the main difficulties that she faces is the requirement for changing facilities, so on her last site after a request she was provided with a locker and a peg to hang her clothes. Sometimes she will have to resort to using public toilets, but has been intimidated by attendants due to her appearance and comments from the public (she did admit that she can look like a man on site as she ties her hair up and puts on a peaked cap, but nevertheless has pink glasses!). On other occasions the attendants are really helpful and will give her preference over tourists (she mentioned St Paul's as being particularly good). She starts work at a new site this week, and imagines that she will have to use the toilets at Liverpool Street Station initially.

One of the major problems is that she often ends up not going as often as she should to use the loo - say only twice a day, and obviously she is conscious that this is a health risk. She does not like to go too often because her workmates who are generally all male will make snide comments because of the length of time it can take, which is usually due to the location and the difficulty in accessing the inconvenient facilities. She has resorted to using male toilets for changing, but this is not an option she willingly would use. Normally there are 6 - 8 toilets for men per site and often none, or one, for women.

At site inductions the contractor will point out the toilet facilities for the men, so Caz will wait until the meeting is over to ask about the female options. Generally she thinks her employer is good but on probing she agreed that probably because the management are all male they do not stop to consider the issue of toilet provision for women on building sites. They do send her on training courses, for example, for first aid, which she considered very important.

Isobel asked her about the conference (mentioned in first para.) and it seems she was one of very few actual female site workers who talked about their work, the rest were people who had been elevated to office positions. Apparently she did not stop for the whole conference because she had been promised the chance to ascend a very high hoist lift as a reward!

Isobel also asked about other women on building sites, mentioning archaeologists (because my daughter has worked on such sites in this capacity and told some very depressing stories about female toilet provision). Usually she does not come across other women working in trades, even though Isobel gathered that she has been working as a bricklayer for nearly ten years. She has found that the problem with the changing facilities provided for archaeologists is that they are very dirty due to all the mud etc. so this is not a real option.

Isobel asked her about APCs in London, which she referred to as 'dalek' toilets which she was adamant that she would not use. She said she had no problems with paying to use a public toilet, but this was not an option she would consider.

A Woman Academic in Nearby Wales

This lady's feedback was sent by e-mail to Clara by a senior woman academic who had previously supported the AMC (prior to BTA) toilet organisation in Wales) and who is involved in research on urban governance and business research. She had already arranged her comments into the following categories, which are presented as she wrote them:

1. Levels of Provision

Standards of provision can be broadly grouped into two categories viz. numerical standards (ideally, how many public toilets should be provided) and quality standards (ideally, what constitutes good public toilet provision).

Numerical standards:

[Respondent wrote] 'I have argued that attempts by campaigners to establish ideal standards of public toilet provision e.g. 1993 Public Conveniences (No.2) Bill have been undermined by public policies which measure only existing levels of provision.'

Gender differences in numerical need for public toilet provision which are incorporated within the ideal standard measure have thus also been ignored. Existing levels of public toilet provision institutionalise gender inequality by failing, in Macpherson terms, to provide an appropriate service' which is different for the two sexes. Just as racism may be institutionalised in public services by a failure to recognize the different needs of ethnic minorities e.g. inadequate training of NHS doctors to diagnose sickle cell anaemia; so sexism may be similarly institutionalised in the failure to make different public toilet provision for women. [For full definition of Institutionalised Racism, see Macpherson report on the Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence published February 1999 on www.cre.gov.uk].

NB: At the time of Jon Owen Jones' Public Conveniences (No.2) Bill the EOC provided an opinion that the proposed gender differences in numerical provision which his private members' bill proposed, could not be defined as unlawful positive discrimination since they were necessary to provide women and men with equal access to the public service. I

cannot find copy of EOC opinion; my only reference to the EOC is in a letter from Susan Cunningham to LAN Grist at the House of Commons dated November 22nd, 1991

Quality Standards:

Quality standards cover a range of matters which relate to the usability of a toilet facility e.g. is the toilet of adequate size? Is it clean? Is there an adequate supply of tissue? Criteria for what constitutes quality have been established in a number of publications viz. Wales Consumer Council report Toile tissues 1996, Women's Design Service; Loo of the Year Award; etc BSI and Building Regs

With the shift in emphasis in government policy towards Best Value in local authority service provision, rather than strictly numerical performance measures, there is a possibility that local authorities will look again at the interrelationships between numerical standards of provision and quality standards of provision.

Speaking personally [says this woman academic in Wales]:

Queues are still a problem e.g. St. David's Hall in Cardiff which I attend approx once a month for Orchestral concert season [8 months of the year]. Such high pressure leads to inadequate flushing between uses, making toilet use unattractive and lengthening the queue. Very uncomfortable to get interval socialising and toilet use into the same time frame. This especially discriminates against single people. Leisure services need to gear up far more to older people, women in the future.

Most toilet cubicles are still too small/narrow - difficult access for large/heavily pregnant women; sitting on toilet seat is uncomfortable because sanitary towel container is too close. This very off-putting if container is stained or over-full

Cardiff town centre toilets (at back of Debenhams) now labelled their 'disabled' women's toilet a 'wide-door' toilet which is accessible to everyone. It includes hand

washing facilities but no hand-drying equipment. It appears to be used by women with small children a great deal. There is a separate unisex baby changing room.

Toilets bowls often too low - making it difficult to rise for older person or anyone suffering arthritic conditions (or similar).

Tissue dispensers may either be empty or over-stuffed so that paper has to be yanked from the container and sheets fall on the floor making a mess/looking unattractive and leading to no paper sooner than necessary.

Soap dispensers may be empty or messy - dripping onto hand wash basin

Only cold water may be available; or sometimes hot water is dangerously hot. Taps may be in poor state of repair resulting in water running constantly.

Hand-driers may be out of order or running constantly making the toilet very hot. Paper towels may suffer same fate as toilet tissue (as above).

Only satisfactory toilets are those which are routinely serviced - in particular those with attendant on site. However, regular 2/3 hourly servicing could be satisfactory alternative, as in most stores.

Experiences of APCs

Attempt to use the APC outside Queen's shopping mall in Cardiff (emergency situation) failed because machine ate my 10p but door refused to open. It would cost more than 10p to write and complain to the council or to telephone and locate the correct department. No prominent notice about what to do in event of door failure, or where the next nearest public toilets were.

APC near Oxford Road Arcade, Cardiff. Works OK but door is ill fitting and does not feel secure.

Comments on APCs:

Unisex facilities are fine, also good access and spaciousness. Clean and seemingly vandal-proof. Instructions in both English and Welsh but typeface needs to be bigger to make it more accessible for people with visual impairment. 10p charge is probably acceptable if charging is only way to secure access and cleanliness. Is there any evidence that charging deters misuse?

Experience of other APC users:

Environmentally-friendly toilets on Ramsey Island (RSPB-owned, off St. David's Head). Toilets labelled 'Stand Up' and 'Sit Down' rather than men/women. Dry use toilets - down draught (no smell). Poor access (up flight of steps) but otherwise attractive (pine-panelled room), cannot recall hand washing facilities (or water-free alternative).

2. Legal issues/Public policy in Wales

The National Assembly for Wales (NAW) has no powers to make primary legislation such as the type proposed by BTA viz a statutory duty on local authorities with specific ratio of provision to local male and female populations.

However, NAW does have secondary powers e.g. freezing level of NHS prescription charges; and might be able to make all public toilets freely available e.g. a right to use a toilet in pubs, bars, cafes, shops restaurants etc. without being obligated to be a 'customer'. Such a move would immediately enhance the numerical level of provision overall, although it would be unlikely to address the 2:1 ratio of provision in favour of women.

The Government of Wales Act 1998 has two main 'equality' provisions enshrined in Ss. 48 and 120 viz: S. 48 The Assembly shall make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its business is conducted with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people.

S. 120: (1) The Assembly shall make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people.

(2) After each financial-year the Assembly shall publish a report containing: . (a) a statement of the arrangements made in pursuance of subsection (1) which had effect during that financial year, and (b) an assessment of how effective those arrangements were in promoting equality of opportunity.

The policy by which the NAW Equal Opportunities Committee has chosen to operationalize the above duties is called Mainstreaming Equality which aims to integrate equality into all public policies, programmes and actions from their inception through to their implementation and review [Rees 1999:165) (and see Greed,2002,d).

The implications of this policy as far as public toilet provision is concerned are, in my view:

1. If it is a policy to provide public access to toilet facilities, then all people of Wales need to have equality of access (same point the EOC made to Jon Owen Jones). It is not the duty of the NAW to provide toilets, but to ensure that no one is discriminated

against in their access to this public service. Therefore, it could declare the right of access as suggested above regardless of who the provider of the service is. Through their various Partnership arrangements with Businesses; Local Authorities ; and Voluntary organizations; the NAW could ensure that links are made to Best Value criteria and ensure that local authorities (L.A.s) take responsibility for operationalizing the suggested policy. For example, L.A.s routinely inspect premises where food is served to the public to safeguard public health - if they do not already do so, these inspectors could include publicly-available toilets on the premises 'm their remit as well. Voluntary organizations like BTA and Disability Wales could advise on criteria for what constitutes good access for all.

NB: Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which relates to providers of goods and services to the public [see www.drc.gov.uk/dda/finalcode is due to come on-stream in 2004. Restaurants, pubs etc. will 'm any case be gearing up to provide accessible public toilets for wheelchair users.

2. Equality of access might be interpreted as free access. At present people with disabilities have access to a RADAR key card for free access to (mainly) APTs. Such key cards are designated positive actions or add-ons mi terms of equal opportunities theory; that is to say, the norm is to pay for access, but for the disabled person something extra is 'added-on' in order to normalize their access. A case might therefore be made that in order to mainstream equality (no positive action/add-on provisions) the 'normal' access to public toilets should be free at the point of use.

NB: I know of one L.A. in England which contracted out the provision of APTs 'm the town to a private supplier. The supplier was responsible for providing a total service including collecting and

banking the cash from a 20p charge. The LA claimed that the cost of doing this themselves outweighed the value of the income from all the APCs in the town (11 in number at the time of my research (Edwards 1998b]).

3. The NAW might consider ensuring that EU Objective 1 money where it is being spent on tourism developments projects in particular incorporates development of high quality public toilets as a feature of Welsh hospitality to visitors. This would also underscore the link between good hospitality and improving the quality of life for local people.

This response combines both a personal and academic perspective, as Edwards has also published and researched on the governance aspects (see Edwards in references)

8. Responses from Additional Male users

User groups tended to be female-dominated, and indeed this is because women experience more problems than men as presented, nevertheless there are very real

problems for men. Therefore this section seeks to provide some more information on male-user issues, although many of the same issues had already come up when interviewing provider groups who were predominantly male, and who therefore tended to see 'all' user issues from a male-user perspective. However, (to avoid any possible criticism) in addition Clara Greed sought to talk to BTA associates and other concerned men. In summary the main male concerns appeared to be the problem of cottaging (cruising) and the increase in gay internet sites showing both locations for 'good sites' (several of which were in our study area) and daily updated bulletins on police surveillance and raids tended to exacerbate the situation. Clearly there is a tension between those users, male and female, who see cottaging as a major problem and those who see public toilets as fair game for quite different purposes. Clara had also investigated the police perspective and was in contact with Colin Cockfield, via the BTA, who is a senior police officer whose specialism is policy and research on cottaging (Cockfield,2001). We did not approach the police direct in the local area but in view of the prevalence of CCTV cameras in some areas Clara did make known our research to relevant security organisations.

Whilst some men saw toilets as exciting sexual places, many, especially the elderly, seemed afraid of them, not least of being shoved into the urinals from behind or taunted and robbed. In parallel, the extension of the 24 hour city and of the evening economy appeared to have increased toilet problems as a whole and made certain groups (who were not young male and able-bodied) feel less welcome in the city streets nowadays). This issue is currently being pursued by various disability groups (JMU,2001) and by the Institute of Alcohol Studies (formerly the Temperance Society) because relaxed licensing has resulted in a proliferation of clubs, pubs and bars, but WITHOUT commensurate increase in public toilets, public transport and all the other back up services that are needed to deal with larger numbers of people in the evenings. In particular when people are chucked out of the pubs and clubs late at night no toilets are open and thus street urination takes place and arguably such incivilities and criminal behaviour softens the situation for greater problems. It is argued that the provision of a greater range of facilities for all types of people, male and female, abled and disabled, old and young, families and individuals - would create a more citizen-friendly atmosphere and restore order and civility thus resulting in more people benefiting from the evening economy.

Clara was also contacted by the American representative of the Shy Bladder Syndrome organisation (paruresis) whilst he was visiting London and making links with the BTA and the UK Paruresis group. The immense problems for men who are scared of using a public 'restroom' (toilet) were fully discussed (Soifer,2001). This had design implications in that many such men (perhaps 10% of the male population) would prefer urinals with privacy dividers between them, or more cubicle provision in Gents toilets. Interestingly this is one of the 'few' predominantly male problems, as although a few women do suffer too, the greater problem is that of incontinence, although some are 'put off' by the prospect of hidden CCTV cameras watching them. But for most women the greatest problem is simply finding a loo that is open and does not have a queue! But both paruresis and incontinence limit the sufferer in terms of time away from home (2 to 4 hours max was cited) and the range of travel (10 miles at most was cited) because of getting back to one's own toilet, leading to very major travel, employment, shopping and socialising problems. In the USA the enforcement

of random drug testing in the workplace, requiring an 'instant sample' was a growing problem for the piss-shy, and had resulted in perfectly respectable employees being dismissed for failing to deliver on demand. The introduction of such measures in the UK would, undoubtedly, reveal a far greater number of sufferers of urinary dysfunction than has been recorded so far.

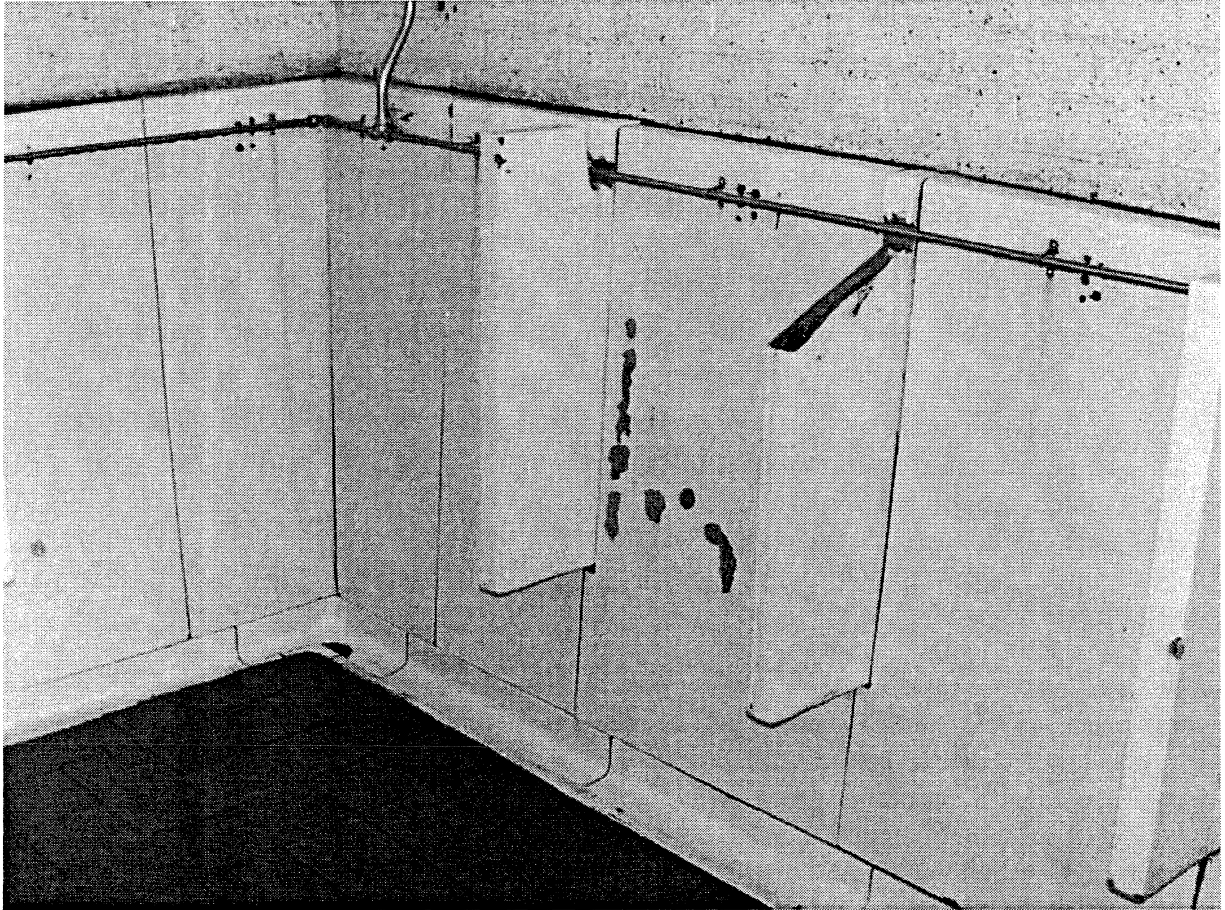


Figure 7 This Bristol urinal does have some element of privacy with partitions, whereas many simply consist of unseparated continuous troughs.

In comparison, in Singapore emphasis was placed upon the fact that moslem user, both male and female, generally prefer more 'modest' designs and 'moslem urinals' are available which have a much more built up side panel between users, as well as squat 'turkish toilets' being the 'norm' for both women and men in much of the Near and Far East (and to some extent still in Europe). It would seem that no-one, male or female, was very happy with current arrangements. The sit or squat debate is beyond the scope of this particular occasional paper but Clara has pursued them in other publications (Greed,2002e). Comparisons with Singapore and other parts of the world are beyond the scope of this paper but are covered in other publications (see Greed,2002a).

6. OVERALL FINDINGS

6.1 Overview of Situation

We have already presented the key themes, barriers and concerns of user and provider groups in earlier sections. This section sums up the situation in the following key points:

(i) Whilst user groups had a clear idea of where toilets 'ought to be located' and they had a strong sense of personal loss and inconvenience when 'their' toilet was removed, providers took a more distant, pragmatic approach and tended to decide on the fate of toilet provision in relation to the number of problems associated with it rather than its usefulness to user groups. Overall we found a fragmented situation, with each 'toilet provider' holding a piece of the jigsaw but no-one having overall knowledge of where each other's toilets were. This resulted in a lack of any spatial toilet strategy as to ideal distribution, location and frequency of provision. One of the objectives of the project was to produce a map of the local area showing the toilets. This proved very difficult (although we have produced a draft map), as many ltas do not possess maps of their facilities! Weston did, however, have a toilet strategy, which was used as a tool in deciding which ones should be closed. Toilets are divided into three categories, tourist, strategic (central) and local, the latter being seen as the least important. In contrast user groups in surrounding villages informed us that all sorts of people depend on local toilets such as the mobile library staff, hikers, 'white van man', meals on wheels ladies, bus drivers and postal staff.

(ii) Management issues discussed with local authority officers always centred on finance, maintenance and the cost of combating vandalism. But parish councillors seemed genuinely concerned and sought our support (as if we had the power to change things). It was found that where attendants were provided running costs were far less, and most users welcomed attendants too. As a result of problems there was some interest in APCs (Automatic Public Toilets) from providers but a sense of fear, even terror, from user groups. Overall providers seemed obsessed with technical plumbing issues, and there was a lack of a wider social implications.

(iii) Great concern was expressed about the problems of access and design, when talking to all the user groups. Generally it was found that women in these groups were the most dissatisfied. Common complaints were lack of toilets to start with, inadequate numbers of cubicles for women leading to queues, small sizes of cubicles, the narrow space between toilet bowl and the door, the problem of disposal bins being put too close to the toilet bowl; and the lack of clean seats or any seats resulting in women hovering - were all discussed. Normally it took a while for respondents to warm up and 'talk toilets' but once they did there was no stopping them. Many expressed a need for baby-changing facilities, (miraculously the first fold-down changing table was fitted to the wall of the car park toilets in Portishead 6 months after our research started but was located inside an erstwhile toilet cubicle thus reducing the overall provision by 20%). Lack of adequate disabled toilets and huge problems of reaching them were raised. A multitude of detailed issues about door

locks, RADAR key, emergency pulls, the question of paying or not, and special facilities were discussed. Links were made with several disability toilet groups with members in this area, such as ITAAL (Is There An Accessible Toilet) as well as those campaigning for adult changing rooms.

Figure 8 Many women said were concerned about sanpro bins being too near to the pan making access difficult and resulting in close contact with unemptied bins whilst others disliked aluminium seats and dirty lids on public loos.



(iv) There is increasing social pressure to make public toilets accessible to all, including the disabled, women with small children and babies, and the elderly. But at the same time in Britain, and many other Western countries, there is an equal desire to design out crime, that is to make public toilets vandal proof and to protect the premises, fixtures and fittings from theft, destruction and mis-use. As a result many modern toilet designs resemble 'fortresses' with controlled access being achieved through entry charges, and with vandal-proof designs which are not user-friendly. On the other hand accessibility groups are demanding unrestricted access, more facilities within toilets and more space for circulation, baby changing and safe waiting areas. Access and women's groups are particularly concerned about restrictive components such as steps, narrow entrances, and pay to pcc turnstiles which may it difficult for people to enter, particularly those accompanied by baby buggies, luggage, heavy shopping and small children. This paper, which addresses both design and social responsibilities issues, seeks to suggest ways of reconciling these potentially conflicting objectives and to outline ways forward. There is a need for greater supervision and surveillance of premises with the use of toilet attendants. it is argued that rather than restricting access and discouraging use, instead public toilets should be seen as a valuable social investment which will, in turn, lead to an improved social, economic and cultural image and vitality in the surrounding area.

(v) Culturally, a fragmented and divided perspective predominated among providers, who tended readily to categorise into male/female, abled/disabled, public/private, in their approach to dealing with toilet issues. A fortress mentality towards public toilet provision and design predominated, because of the problems of crime and vandalism, whereas users wanted more accessibility. It is significant that most toilet providers are men and most toilet users are women, but the agenda of 'what happens in the Gents' seems to determine what the Ladies gets too. Emphasis is upon male users as the standard, with women's provision always being seen as 'special' provision. 'The problem' that providers appeared to be addressing was not one of providing better toilets for everyone, but rather of reducing crime, inside and out of toilets. Whilst the situation is nothing like that found in London, the local area is beginning to experience the problem of the '24 hour city' namely male street urination, and this topic seems to be taken far more seriously than the demands of parents with small children.

6.2 Public Demand for Toilets

In conclusion we found that users want more toilets, and often in areas that local authorities would not consider important enough to warrant provision, but which are visited by justifiably large numbers of people who would be so glad to find a toilet when they want one. Users especially want toilets located in relation to shopping areas, in villages, beside main bus stops and stations. They want longer opening hours, more unisex facilities in relation to disability and baby changing provision, but otherwise they want traditional segregated toilets and certainly not APCs. They want attention to design detail, especially more usable space in the toilet cubicle. Providers meanwhile are locked into restrictively managing evermore limited provision, without seeing the bigger picture that 'bathrooms mean business', that is better toilet provision results in more shoppers and tourists, and thus more revenue. This situation that can only change by making provision mandatory rather than permissive and increasing funding. Social well-being and quality of life is being severely affected and their travel patterns restricted. Elderly respondents spoke of their sadness of not being able to visit their favourite seaside places, whilst young mothers dreaded important food shopping trips because of lack of toilet facilities, whilst some disabled and incontinent people simply gave up. One conclusion of the research is that if the government is really going to promote joined up thinking, sustainable cities and social inclusion, then it is absolutely essential that public toilet policies become an integral part of local government strategic policy making.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND REASONS

7.1 What can be done?

All this research begs the question, 'what shall we do about it?'. Therefore, in this section a range of more prescriptive guidance principles is given, drawing partly on the Nuffield research and on other work undertaken by C.Greed, BTA and other toilet organisations. Firstly it is important to state the reasons why toilet provision is important:

7.2 Why Public Toilet Provision Must Improve

1. Everyone needs to go to the toilet several times in the course of the day, not only the disabled or incontinent, but everyone of all age groups needs them when away from home
2. Those who do suffer incontinence and other urinary problems need toilets of necessity. Women need toilets with decent clean seats they can sit on to prevent retention of urine and the development of incontinence.
3. If local authorities provide toilets for the groups in 1 and 2 above there will be less people developing continence problems and requiring NHS treatment. Spending a relatively small amount on public toilets will save far more money in the long run from the health budget.
4. The disabled need accessible public toilets, as does everyone else as a basic human right. Everyone temporarily disabled by childcare, pregnancy, baby buggies, injury, accidents, shopping and luggage is entitled accessible public toilets.
5. Women as the majority of the population, and of the elderly and the disabled need adequate free public toilet provision as a basic equal right. Women constitute 80% of shoppers so the provision of good toilet facilities in retail areas and town centres will increase the revenue and profitability of that area and contribute to national prosperity.
6. Providing public toilets for all will encourage more people to travel by public transport, to walk, and to cycle, without fear of being caught short. This will contribute toward reducing pollution, creating a greener environment and sustainable cities.
7. Culturally providing adequate toilets at all hours for all people (not just male urinals) will facilitate the development of the 24 hour city, and help clean up the streets and alleyways, and contribute to citizen choice, freedom and the quality of life.
8. Good toilet design will contribute to improving the urban design and architectural quality of our towns and cities thus making our cities more attractive and raising their profile with huge beneficial social and economic spin offs.

9. A nation's image is judged by its toilets as they are often the first thing that tourists see when travelling to a country. Adequate public toilets will increase tourism and benefit the whole economy.

10. The state of public toilets is an indication of the state of the government and nation as a whole. Neglected slovenly conditions generate more crime and vandalism. As one of the few 'public' facilities located out in the community they act as an emblem that is an outward and visible sign of the state of society and the government itself. Closing them because of damage condones vandalism.

11. It is legally indefensible to provide such discriminatory levels of services for women.

12. It is politically important to improve public toilets as it shows the government is in tune with the local human needs of the electorate (60% of those entitled to vote are female).

(Source: Clara Greed developed this list from discussion with various groups previously).

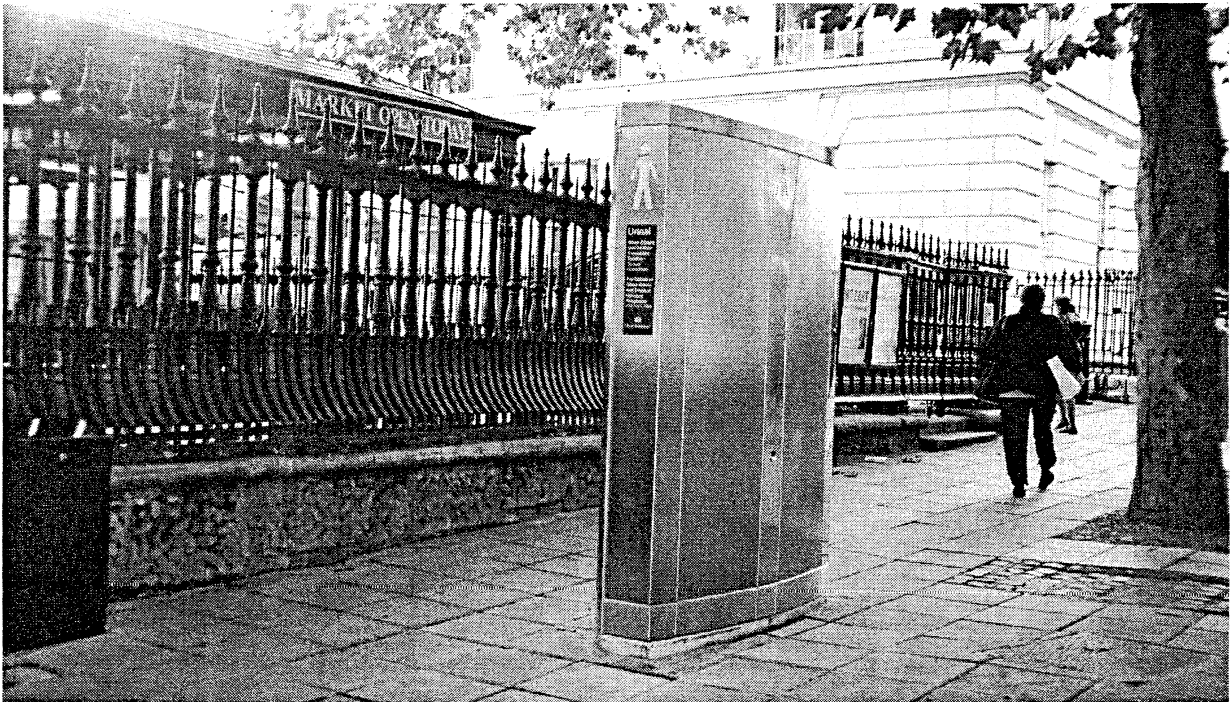


Figure 9 A modern male street urinal in London, which is opened at night for would-be street urinators. Is this the future of British public toilets? Bristol is already considering such contraptions.

7.3 BTA Recommendations

There follows a practical list of what BTA thinks should be done to address many of the issues that our user-respondents highlighted. As stated BTA have produced an extensive range of literature and these may be found by e-mailing, enquiries@britloos.co.uk. This list covers most of the problems, and over the years Clara Greed and other BTA steering group members have had an influence and input upon its contents, not least in respect of women's issues. However the actual format and order of topics is as written by the BTA. Therefore this list predates the research but includes earlier input by Clara Greed. Readers should peruse this list in the light of the research findings with a critical and comparative eye:

1. The signposting of public toilets needs to be improved qualitatively and quantitatively: more signs are needed with precise information about distances and facilities provided.
2. Local authority public toilets need to be located in central, open and well lit areas.
3. External and internal lighting needs to be improved to make visiting a public toilet a safer, more inviting and pleasant experience.
4. Access to public toilets needs to be improved and should be on ground level or on every floor of any public building.
5. Adequate heating and ventilation are essential features of any public toilet.
6. All public toilets should be supervised permanently or checked at very regular intervals to maintain the highest levels of hygiene and cleanliness
7. A range of cubicle sizes should be available in public toilets in accordance with BS 6465 Part based on the location and use of the toilets in question.
8. All cubicles should contain hooks, shelves or racks so that articles do not have to be placed on the floor, easily operated toilet paper dispensers and, in women's toilets, there should be disposal facilities for sanitary products.
9. Cubicle doors should have easily operated locks.

10. Adequate washing and drying facilities should be provided.
11. More public toilets should be provided for women.
12. More public toilets should be provided for people with disabilities.
13. More unisex toilets for parents and children are needed.
14. information should be available on a range of different aspects of toilet provision:
15. Opening times should be displayed clearly externally,
16. Alternative toilet locations should be listed externally
17. The range of facilities available should be displayed externally, including where to obtain the keys for toilets for disabled people;
18. Fire instructions should be displayed clearly internally;
19. Names, telephone numbers and addresses for making complaints or reporting damage should be displayed internally;
20. information about all the available facilities should be displayed clearly in the appropriate places
21. Any tourist information, including maps, should have accurate and up-to-date information about public toilet locations, opening times and facilities
22. information about public toilet facilities in tourist areas should be displayed clearly in appropriate world languages.
23. More public toilets are needed in tourist areas.
24. Planners in tourist resorts need to accommodate the needs of tourists both day visitors and long stay visitors when providing toilet facilities. Toilets should be designed to meet a wide range of personal hygiene needs, including, showers, drinking water and extensive washing and drying facilities.

25. improved systems of information exchange are needed by all providers of public toilets to improve standards and combat problems such as vandalism, graffiti and other illicit activities.

26. Architects, planners, designers and builders need to work closely together to provide better designed toilets. Public toilet provision should be based on the needs of consumers and not service providers.

27. Building Regulations need to have wider and more detailed scope.

28. BS 6465 Parts 1 and 2 need to be applied comprehensively as a minimum standard and not as an aspiration and applied retrospectively by refitting existing facilities.

8. SPATIAL STRATEGY

8.1 The Missing Link

Whilst all the above objectives are admirable it is important to reset the toilet debate centre stage within the key field of spatial planning strategy, as otherwise it will be left to fester in the Allotments and Parks Department, or the Plumbing and Sanitation Department - completely separate from strategic policy making and urban governance. There is, of course, a need for fundamental legislative change in order fully to mainstream toilets into urban governance activities. At present there is no requirement that public toilets should be shown on any statutory plan (except in the case of National and Country Parks in some instances). Also there is no requirement that toilets should be mentioned in respect of any area of urban regeneration, integrated transport policy, land use zoning, equal opportunities policy, or environmental sustainability policy. As stated we need to follow the lead of Japan and incorporate toilet provision within our spatial planning activities (Miyanshi,1996). Details of how this might be achieved are beyond the scope of this occasional paper, but below, in summary, the principles of establishing a 'spatial toilet strategy' based on a hierarchy of levels of facilities, location and distribution is presented.

Therefore in this particular occasional paper we conclude with an emphasis upon the wider spatial dimensions. The details of the individual toilet block, its design and layout are also extremely important and are dealt with in chapter 12 of the forthcoming book on public toilets (Greed,2002,a). But we must add here that BS6465 is not ideal by any means, and that at the very detailed level one of the biggest complaints from women was the lack of space in cubicles and the need to provide a gap between the toilet pan and the door and between the side of the pan and the sanpro bin. We recommend a 'cordon sanitaire' of at least 20cm all round, which would considerably improve the situation. But one of the biggest faults of the toilet world has been to fall into the trap of dealing with plumbing and design detail in isolation from questions of distribution and location therefore our preferred solution is presented below.

8.2 A Strategic Spatial Toilet Strategy

8.2.1 City-wide Strategy

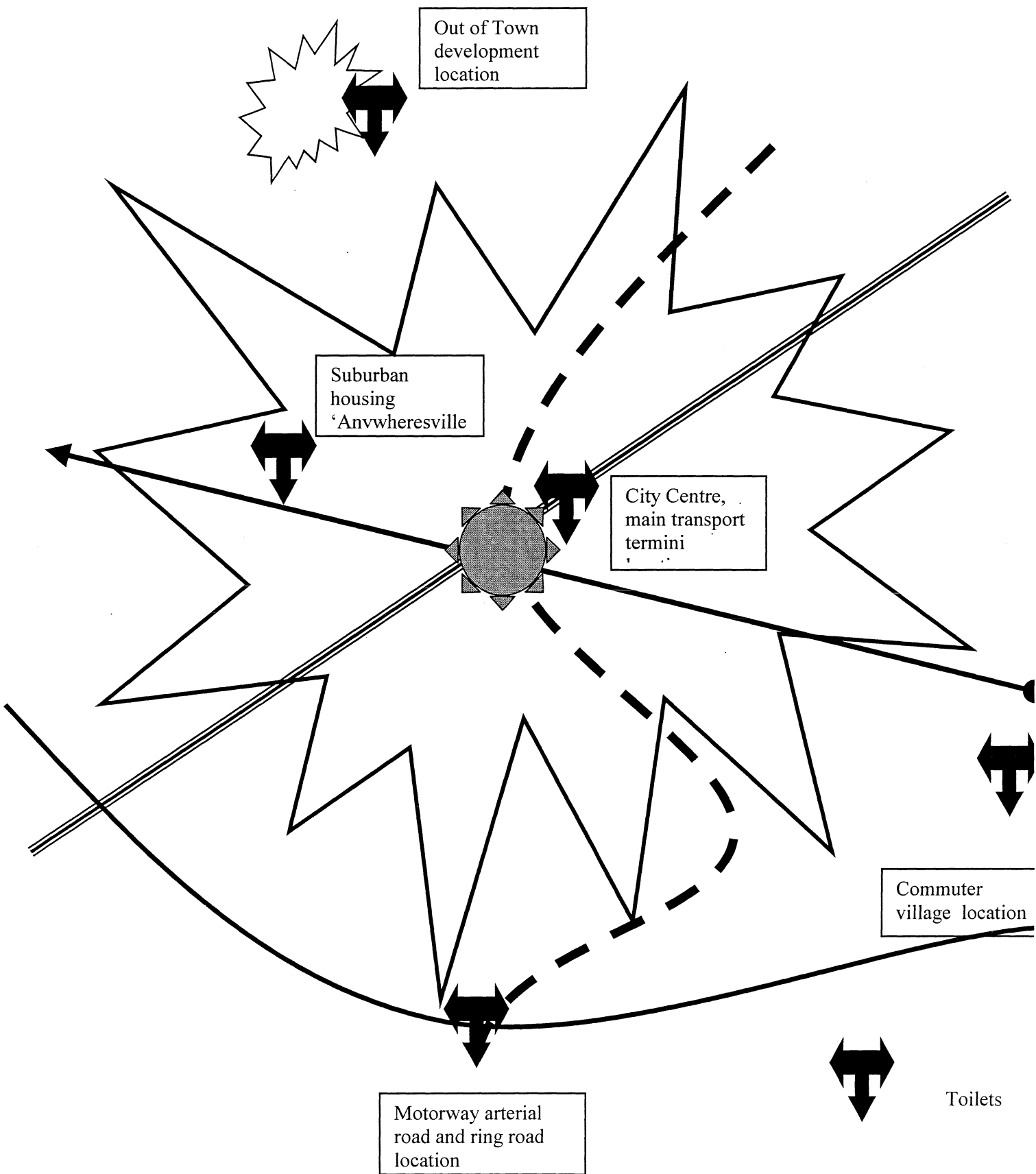
A hierarchy of toilets, according to size, demand and types of use needs to be established supported by a spatial toilet strategy for the area in question including key points such as:

Main centres and transport termini

District centres and major district attractions

Local area toilets in relation to shopping facilities (as different types of people use different toilets, not everyone will use a pub

Diagram 2: A City-wide Strategy and hierarchy for toilet provision



Toilet provision in relation to car parks over 100 cars if not already covered by any of the above, dedicated car park toilets for 300 spaces and above

Provision in out of town locations where none other exists for access to the public such as Science parks, shed retail centres, warehouse areas

Provision every 2 miles on all cycle paths, main footpaths, hiker and tourist pedestrian routes

8.2.2 In Rural Areas

One set of toilets per village of over 1000 population if not on a tourist route but all villages of over 500 to have toilets if on a tourists route, bus route or main road route.

At least 3 lots of toilets if it is a seaside village or beauty spot.

Distribution every so many miles depends on what is there already

In rural areas there are long stretched out areas with little population in these cases toilets should be reliably be found at cross-roads of main roads, by churches or indeed in churches and by post offices.

Need to enter into agreements with owners of existing premises to use and maintain the toilets with rate reductions, advantage of DDA here and possibility of increased off street private provision but with access from outside wall.

In other words toilets should be provided in all the key locations shown on Diagram 1

8.2.3 Urban District Level

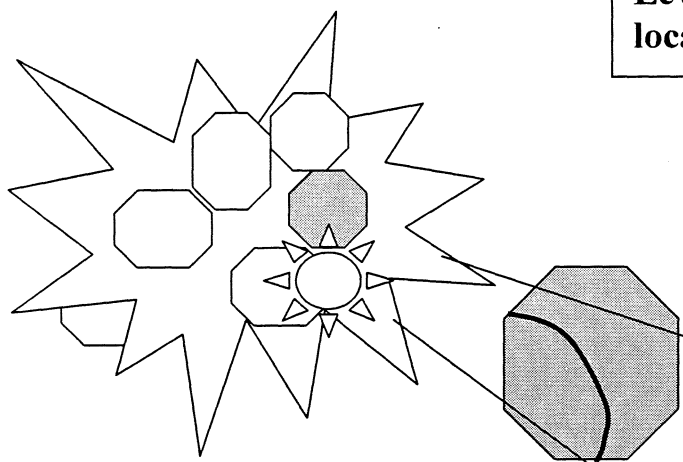
As above, with proviso that different types of people use different buildings, for example women with children and women on their own may be unwilling to use pub toilets, because of lack of access, fear of being followed out again, religious reasons, licensing laws and fear of leaving children outside. Also pubs are not open all the day especially not in early morning shopping and school run hours. See diagram

At district level design and siting of toilets should fit in with the surrounding area, architecture and urban design

8.2.4 Local Level Toilet

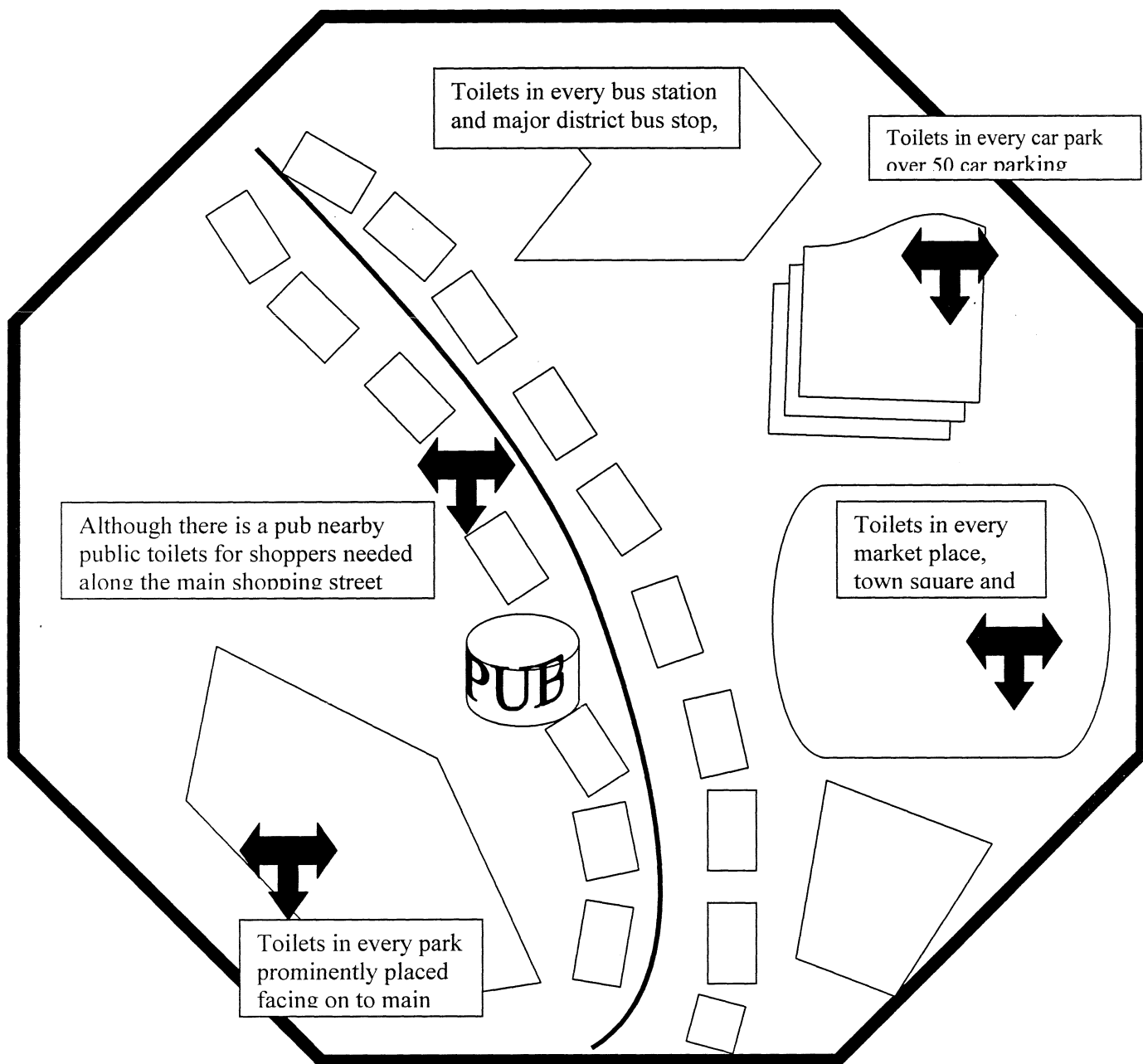
This is the level where access is crucial, but also design too, and one should not fight against the other. it is important to allow for car parking and link them to transport and to the surrounding area, rather than just putting them anywhere. in cases where near a park need to be safe and not to have bushes all around. But as Isobel mentioned the 'not in my backyard' NIMBY factor does mean that they may not be welcome, after all users are more likely to be visitors, tourists and shoppers rather than residents who have their own facilities but when they go to other people's areas then they become the visitors in need of a toilet.

Diagram 3: The Local Toilet District Level: Not everyone uses the same toilet locations



This is a condensed diagrammatic sketch of a district centre, which comprises one cell in the structure of the city.

Principle: Adequate toilets should be provided for each different user group, for example not everyone can or wants to go into a pub, and there should be adequate toilets for both public transport users and car users.



In rural areas maintenance and sense of ownership is crucial, need to care for the toilets and make them theirs. Particularly so since parish councils seem to have little money or control but are often asked to fund them but not to maintain them thus losing the local link Also consider the role of village halls in the level of provision.

In seaside areas Looking at past levels of provision along seaside esplanades it was not uncommon to find 6 to 8 sets of public toilets in a two mile stretch of promenade, thus providing one large set of toilets for approximately every 3 beaches. Older children leaving the safety of the family and popping to the toilet should not be expected to have to walk a long way out of sight to find a toilet, whereas small children cannot wait to go so far. Nowadays many resort towns are cutting back on provision, for example Brighton has been much criticised for reducing provision. Arguments that toilets can nowadays be found in 'Ibiza-like' clubs and pubs that have grown up in the streets surrounding the beach, and which serve a predominantly male nightlife, are of little relevance to families with children, people who are wary of entering such establishments and disabled people. Reinstatement to original levels of provision is vital to bring back tourists to our declining seaside towns.

8.3 Planning Toilets for Everyone

8.3.1 Inclusive Planning Processes

Toilet planning is a process as well as resulting in a product. If the decision-making process is weak and ill informed than the resulting policies and products will be unsatisfactory. Therefore this section gives attention to the process of toilet strategy development.

One means of developing a toilet strategy and spatial plan is to use existing town planning methods, which may be summarised as SAP (Survey, Analysis, Plan)

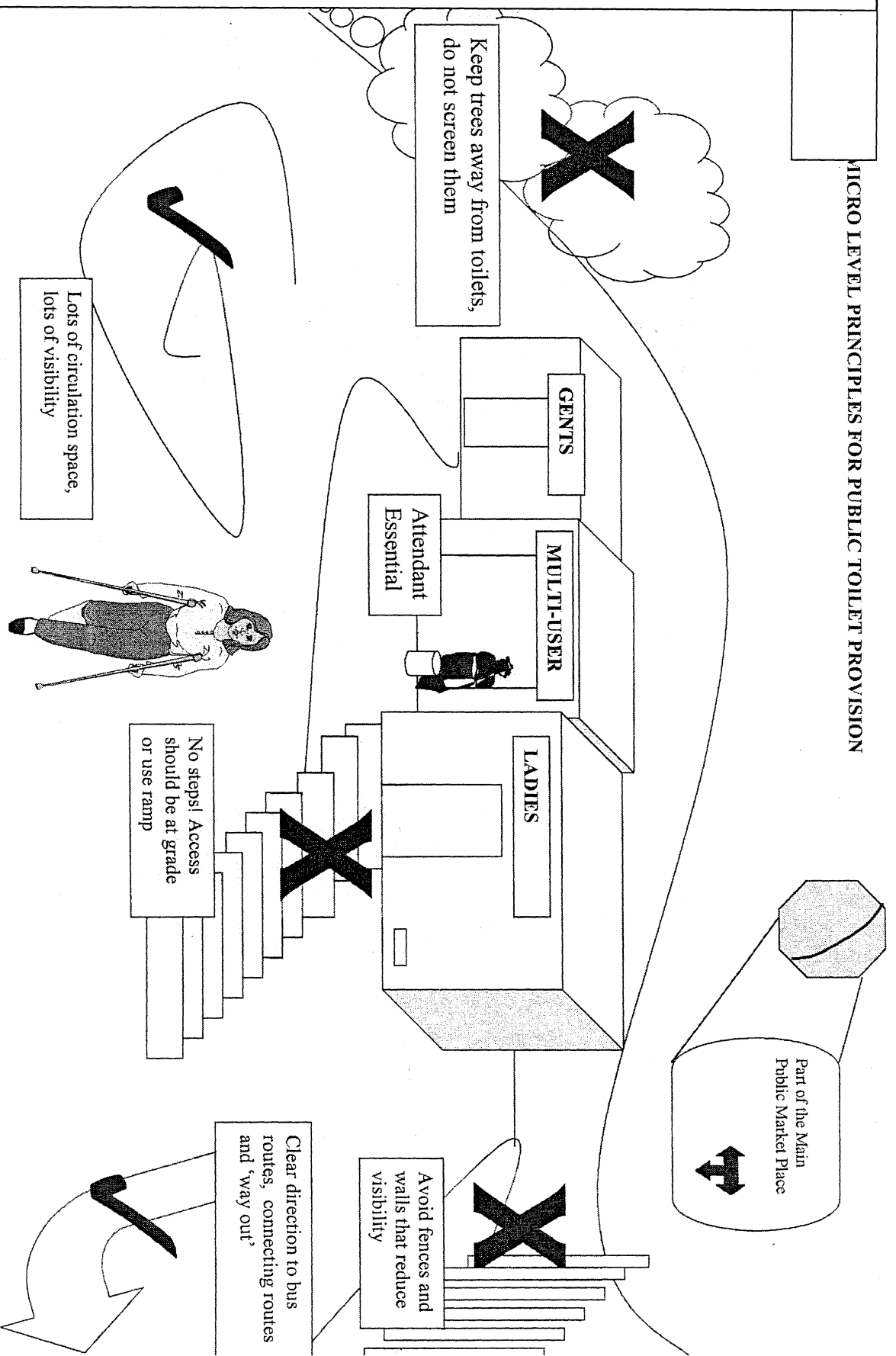
1. Collect data and ensuring data sources are fully representative

Start of by surveying what is there already, find out what existing quantitative data is available, and make sure that all data used is disaggregated into male/female, abled/disabled, and baby care and other facilities. Also look at qualitative data, for example what toilet locations receive the most complaints and letters to the council? Are there any additional surveys from a social, health or urban design perspective for example, which include social trends, and policy attitudes rather than just facts and figures?

2. Analyse data and look for strengths and weaknesses of existing provision

it is important to look for gaps in provision, areas of duplication of provision (unlikely) and to develop all this in relation to a map or GIS system so that a complete picture can be developed of both on street and off street provision, and of both public and private provision. But, it is also vital to distinguish between the different user groups, as not everyone has the same level of access to all facilities for a variety of physical, geographical, cultural, social and personal reasons.

Diagram 4: The Local Site Level of Toilet Access and Provision



3. Developing options, alternatives and thus plans by means of inclusive participation

Rather than imposing minimum fixed standards, which research and user-feedback has already shown to be inappropriate for large sections of the community, it is important to undertake public participation and consultation exercises with user groups, both in respect of national issues, and in relation to the specific circumstances of a local area. For example, we found that in some apparently deserted villages, there were in fact large numbers of toilet users, at certain times of the week, such as mobile library staff, hikers, postal workers and health workers who all needed a toilet and did not have a fixed base or office in the village to use. It is very important to ask women as well as men, and to take into account issues related to demographics such as age, disability, ethnicity, car ownership levels and travel patterns. For example, in sports stadia and facilities it may be assumed that most patrons are men, but in fact at certain times of the week or in the case of special events such as pop festivals women may outnumber men, and find there are few facilities for them.

4. Communicate the findings and seek further feedback

Having established the policies required in relation to the needs of the local population and visitors to the area, and having developed policies with reference to the suggested hierarchy of levels of provision, it is very important for providers to remain open, and not to appear to 'go all secretive' again. Follow up monitoring and review is necessary in the light of feedback, complaints and recommendations. Also surrounding land uses and development might change increasing or reducing demand. One of the problems with current toilet provision is that much of it is in the wrong place, having been established to meet the work and travel patterns of many years ago.

One of the most crucial stages is the initial data gathering because of the fragmented nature and mutual ignorance of provider groups in respect of each others toilets. For example it was found that the local council seldom liaised with NCP car park managers, or with town centre and shopping centre managers, resulting in both gaps and duplication. So it is important to ask:

- What information is needed to ensure that all toilets and users are taken into account?
- Who should be involved in deciding what information is needed? Not just the council
- What existing quantitative data is available, in-house and externally?
- What existing qualitative or evaluative research is available, in-house and externally?
- What additional data are needed? is a new street survey necessary?
- Is there a need to generate new primary data?
- Is there a need for secondary analyses of existing data?
- Who will be partners in information gathering/provision?

- What processes are required to consult effectively with these partners and users?

We found there was tremendous goodwill and enthusiasm among some user groups to undertake surveys, to share their findings, and to help the council, even by cleaning and helping to mend the toilets (rather than waiting weeks for the council). But their help was not called upon, indeed it was mainly ignored or treated with suspicion. Clearly greater liaison between user and provider groups is vital.

9. CONCLUDING POINTERS FOR THE FUTURE

9.1 DDA Implications

As can be seen public toilets are not a high priority in local authorities at present, chiefly because there is no ring-fenced funding for them, no mandatory requirement that toilets must be provided, no concept of a toilet strategy and a generally low-priority and low status image for the whole subject. Public toilet provision appears to have been detached from mainstream urban policy making and municipal governance. Whilst provision for the majority of people has declined, the DDA has increased provision for around 5% of the population who can officially claim they are disabled and therefore entitled to use a disabled toilet. But in reality nearer 60% of the population are disenabled by the lack of facilities, poor access, steps, narrow cubicles, dangerous locations and fear of public toilets, but there is no improvement in sight to meet their needs. Women in particular are badly disadvantaged, not counting as disabled, but not receiving equal provision, in terms of numbers of 'places to pee' nor in terms of appropriately designed facilities. But all the population once 'away from home' at the seaside, out in the country, on extended shopping trips, stranded by poor public transport or out in charge of small children, pushchairs, babies, and/or luggage is soon likely to find there is a major problem. Therefore in the interests of creating accessible, sustainable, user-friendly cities it is crucial to improve public toilets. It is hoped that this research and the associated outputs and publicity will help further the cause along with the work of all the other groups involved. Therefore this research may be classified as 'action research' in that it is policy and implementation orientated, but it may also be judged to be qualitative, reflective, and cultural in that it is fundamentally interested in exploring people's personal experiences and 'world view' (sense of reality) that so determines the nature of policy and whether toilet problems are even 'seen' let alone acknowledged. In particular the recent revisions to disabled toilet provision under the new BS8300, published in December (BSI 2001) will no doubt raise expectations among 'non-disabled' but undoubtedly 'disenabled' groups such as those responsible for pushchairs, the elderly, women, those responsible for small children, not to mention tourists, commuters and the ubiquitous 'white van man', so there is bound to be growing public pressure for better facilities for all. So the DDA is raising expectations for everyone, and disabled people and their activities are providing role models for everyone else to seek better toilets for all.

9.2 Following on from the Pilot Project

This study was intended to help crystallise key themes and issues in respect of public toilet provision within the context of a 'typical' provincial urban setting. It will also establish a clearer methodology which will be based upon interviewing respondents in relation to key criteria identified by user and provider groups. But an element of more qualitative, sensitive and open-ended interviewing is also envisaged particularly when interviewing individuals as to their personal problems. It is intended to develop this cameo study into a cross-regional study in collaboration with other colleagues in Wales, Scotland, London and Sheffield, to highlight disparities and differing policy approaches along the spectrum of urban/rural; cosmopolitan/provincial;

abled/disabled' male/female; and north/south divisions inter alia. Key contacts who are senior researchers have already been established to give a greater geographical and social spread to the next stage of the research. It is also intended in the next stage to make a stronger link between researching the agenda that drives the built environment professionals responsible for provision (not least sanitary engineers, surveyors and building controllers) with the wider health agenda that informs so many user groups, particularly in respect of the particular needs of women, the disabled and the elderly (not mutually exclusive or unitary groups). To this purpose it is intended to re-activate existing links with the Faculty of Health at the UWE and with its counterparts in other regions in order to provide a fully-rounded research perspective for stage 2, incorporating both the built environment and the health dimensions of the issue. It should be noted that the FBE is already a centre for WHO research and that the propose has established a range of key national links through her membership of bodies such as the Centre for Accessible Environments, Joint Mobility Unit, the Continence Foundation, the British Toilet Association (of which she is an honorary member). The findings that emerge from stage two will inform the develop of policy guidance and advice that will help bridge the gap between provider and user needs, and between the priorities of built environment and health professionals.

Thus it would be extremely worthwhile to look at the national toilet situation and ask the following questions, 'why is that some local authorities seem to be able to provide so much better toilets than others - with the same constraints and resources?' (such as Ceredigion in Wales which has become a national toilet leader in joined-up toilet thinking and imaginative solutions (Ceredigion,2001). And 'what policies and strategies are needed to change the toilet situation for the better?'. Likely factors that need to be investigated would include central government (and DTLR) priorities, local government management and resources, and the question of whether public toilet provision is included (or not) in the mainstream strategic fulcrum of policy making and corporate management strategy within the local authority in question.

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28.11.01, page 5 of G2 Guardian, 'Round the bend' by John Aglionby conference write up, 'there's been a sexual revolution but no defecation liberation'

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26.04.02 'Let's do lunch' midday HTV television programme featuring a short documentary on Bristol centre's toilets and interview with Clara Greed by Richard Wyatt and Polly Lloyd

7.05.02 Radio Bristol phone in discussion with Clara on Bristol toilets as part of This Morning Show with Susan Osman

June 2002 filming for Carlton TV documentary on 'Metroland Toilets' for Autumn programme based on London toilets.

Maps

Geographers A-Z Map Company Ltd, AZ Bristol and Bath, Edition 1A, Sevenoaks Kent

North Somerset Council Planning and Environment Department

North Somerset Tourism (December 2000) 'All the Best of Somerset' Director of Marketing

Several gathered by Clara Greed from various motorway service stations, community groups and keen locals. But no maps of official lta maps of toilets available or produced for the area.



Figure 10: Members of the WI discussing the public toilets in the car park at Portishead as photographed by Isobel Daniels.

THE END

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