

Town Centre Public Convenience Provision

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm John Edwards, Street Scene Operations Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	High Street Ward

Executive Summary

Following the closure of both Fairmeadow and Brenchley Garden public conveniences and the subsequent review of the Community Toilet Scheme in 2017, the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee requested that options for a new Town Centre Public Convenience be considered.

There are five delivery models for the provision of a facility in the Town Centre; a purpose built pre-fabricated unit, an in-built facility within an existing unit, a temporary rental unit, reopening an existing facility or inclusion of a facility within a new development.

The key to a successful facility will be its location as this will ensure it is used and is safe and secure. This report outlines the costs and full appraisal for each of the delivery models and the potential locations for the Committee to consider and determine whether the provision of a Town Centre Public Convenience remains an aspiration and whether funding opportunities should be pursued.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the delivery models, locations and costs for a new public convenience within the Town Centre are considered;
2. That one of the four options set out in Section 2 is agreed.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	Tuesday 17 July 2018

Town Centre Public Convenience Provision

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The provision of public conveniences is usually a subject of much debate as although there is no statutory requirement to provide them, they can contribute to the public perception of an area and good quality facilities can have a positive impact on visitors. However maintaining good quality facilities which are not subject to vandalism and anti-social behaviour is a serious challenge.
- 1.2 In 2008, the Council reviewed public convenience provision across the Borough and this resulted in the closure of a number of facilities and the introduction of a community toilet scheme whereby local retailers offer the use of their toilets for public use. This significantly reduced the cost to the Council as cleaning alone cost in the region of £15,000 per block per year compared to the £300 contribution to retailers.
- 1.3 At that time two public conveniences were retained in the Town Centre; one at Fairmeadow by the River and the other in Brenchley Gardens. Unfortunately these were repeatedly vandalised and cleaning staff were vulnerable due to the growing anti-social behaviour particularly linked to drug and alcohol abuse. These facilities have both since been closed, although the public convenience in Brenchley Gardens is occasionally reopened to support events in the park. Fairmeadow public convenience has since been leased to a local business.
- 1.4 In 2017, the Community Toilet Scheme was reviewed with some businesses added and removed from the scheme to ensure those promoted offered good quality, clean facilities. At the time the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee requested that the provision of a new public convenience in the Town Centre be considered and the full costings be brought back to the Committee for debate.
- 1.5 There are some key considerations which need to be taken into account when designing a new Town Centre public convenience:
 - **Location** – this is the primary concern as the location needs to consider footfall, the impact on local businesses, utilities, visual appearance and security.
 - **Usage** – the likely usage will impact the size of facility needed, the cleaning and maintenance regime as well as viability for charging. The location is likely to have a significant impact on this.
 - **Cost** – the split between capital and revenue costs for providing the facility needs to be considered to take into account the full cost of providing the facility
- 1.6 There are four primary ways in which the Council could provide a Town Centre public convenience, aside from the existing Community Toilet Scheme which is not considered as part of this report.

Standalone facility

- 1.7 A new standalone facility could be purpose-built within the Town Centre. There is an increased use of pre-fabricated units with external cladding for public conveniences, as shown in the pictures below.



- 1.8 These facilities can be fully automatic including a self-cleaning function or semi-automatic which combines a higher quality facility with ease of cleaning. These can also incorporate charging mechanisms to generate a small revenue to support the operating costs.
- 1.9 Aside from the cost of providing such a facility the main barrier is finding a suitable location within the Town Centre. In order to identify a suitable location, the footfall, impact on surrounding businesses, visual appearance and security has to be considered.
- 1.10 Six locations have initially been highlighted as potential locations for a standalone facility purely due to space, however it is likely that many of these will not be deemed suitable given further consideration.
- Medway Street – redundant motorbike parking outside of the car park
 - Jubilee Square
 - Bottom of Gabriels Hill
 - Lower High Street
 - Side of Sessions Square
 - Brenchley Gardens (new facility)
- 1.11 Appendix 1 reviews each of these locations against a matrix of suitability. The only two sites which are likely to be feasible are Lower High Street and Medway Street, although this is not an area of high footfall.
- 1.12 Based on footfall in the Town Centre, it is likely that a DDA compliant unit plus 3 unisex toilets would be required. The footprint of this would be 6460mm by 2865mm. Alternative models are available or a smaller unit could be considered which may lower the capital cost.
- 1.13 The inclusion of a Changing Places unit could also be considered to increase the accessibility of the Town Centre to disabled adult visitors. However this

will significantly increase the footprint of the public convenience by 4000mm in length, which will have an impact on the viable locations.



- 1.14 The anticipated cost for a standalone facility is shown in the table below. This includes the capital investment needed for the facility as well as the annual running costs and potential income through “pay to use”.

	Capital Investment	Revenue Cost
Build Costs	£134,000*	
Rent		£0
Business Rates		£2,500
Utilities		£4,500
Cleaning / Maintenance		£66,600
TOTAL Cost		£73,600
Income		-£6,500
Net Cost	£134,000	£67,100

* For inclusion of a Changing Places unit the Capital investment is likely to increase by £20,000 to £40,000. If an attendants office and Changing Places unit is required the additional cost would be around £65,000.

- 1.15 The cleaning costs include an attendant based on a 7 day per week service with two members of staff working shifts. This could be reduced if the facility was only attended at specific times. An attendant would significantly reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour and vandalism which have previously be prevalent in the Council’s public conveniences.

In-build existing premises

- 1.16 There is also the opportunity to install facilities into an existing building within the Town Centre. This could be carried out through the installation of prefab units which enable easier cleaning and charging or a bespoke in-build.

1.17 The main issue with this is that there are very few buildings within the Town Centre which would be appropriate for conversion to a public convenience. It is unlikely that it would be acceptable for a retail unit to be used as this could have a negative impact on the neighbouring retailers and would significantly increase the revenue costs.

1.18 It is noted that there was a previous toilet within Market Buildings which could be considered for this option.

1.19 The table below shows the capital and revenue costs for an in-built in existing facilities. Whilst the capital cost is lower as the outer cladding and roof would not be needed, the annual running costs would be significantly higher due to annual rental costs.

	Capital Investment	Revenue Cost
Build Costs	£102,000	
Rent		£19,000
Business Rates		£7,500
Utilities		£4,500
Cleaning / Maintenance		£66,600
TOTAL Cost		£97,600
Income		-£6,500
Net Cost	£102,000	£91,100

1.20 Alternatively the unit could be fitted out with toilets, sinks and hand-driers by a building contractor. Similar work has recently been undertaken at the Vinters Park Crematorium and cost in the region of £60,000. However this did not include the disabled toilet or the ability to charge for use. Therefore a full refit for 3 toilets and a DDA toilet with charging mechanism is likely to be in the region of £90,000.

1.21 The main benefit of using prefab units are that they are specifically designed for easy cleaning and to reduce the costs of maintenance. The images below show the design of the prefab units which can easily be jet-washed clean.



Reopen existing facility

1.22 Within the Town Centre footprint there are two existing public conveniences – Brenchley Gardens and Fairmeadow. As already mentioned these have been subject to significant vandalism over the years and have attracted anti-social behaviour. Fairmeadow is in the process of being leased to a local business as a customer toilet and storage facility. Therefore is not currently available to bring back into use as a public convenience. Brenchley Gardens would require some refurbishment however could be reopened.

1.23 The main barrier to this is the location of the existing facilities as both are away from the areas of high footfall and during the hours of dark are particularly vulnerable to anti-social behaviour. Improved security and the presence of an attendant could be explored, however Brenchley Gardens is already a manned park and there are still concerns about security and anti-social behaviour. Reopening the public convenience is only likely to increase the appeal of the park for criminal behaviour and alcohol and drug abuse.

1.24 A full refit of the public convenience at Brenchley Gardens would be around £50,000. The running costs would be in the region of £12,300 per year including utilities, cleaning and business rates.

1.25 Therefore based on the location of the existing facilities it is not recommended that they are considered for reopening.

Rental Unit

1.26 Alternatively a temporary unit could be hired which would increase the revenue costs but removes the capital investment requirement.

1.27 The costs for the rental of temporary standalone facilities are included in the table below. Comparable prices have been included for the rental of a premium unit as shown in 1.7 and more basic portable units available for short-term rental.

	Premium DDA+3 Revenue Cost	2 x portable units Revenue Cost
Build Costs		
Rent	£37,631*	£22,000
Business Rates	£2,500	£2,500
Utilities	£4,500	£4,500
Cleaning / Maintenance	£66,600	£66,600
TOTAL Cost	£111,231	£95,600
Income	-£6,500	-£6,500
Net Cost	£104,731	£89,100

** this is the annual cost based on a 5 year contract and would reduce to £28,000 or £24,000 for 10 or 15 year contracts respectively*

1.28 Whilst the rental model offers a more flexible opportunity and removes the need for capital investment, the revenue costs are significantly higher and would cover the capital costs in 6 years.

1.29 A photo of the portable unit which could be installed is shown below.



Alternative delivery

1.30 In addition to these four direct delivery models, it is also important to consider what other developments and improvements are being implemented within the Town Centre that may deliver a new facility.

1.31 Although there are no specific plans as yet in the public domain, there are a number of proposed major developments including Maidstone East and the Bus Station which could result in new facilities being provided. The Mall has also recently refurbished its toilets and opened a baby changing facility. There are likely to be further developments within the centre which could include an opportunity for a Changing Places facility to be included.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is for the Committee to review the potential costs for delivering a new Town Centre public convenience and determine whether, given the costs, there is a need to identify funding to deliver this. It is important to highlight that, at the present time, there is no funding available to provide a new facility.
- 2.2 **Option 1:** The Committee could decide that the need and aspiration for a new public convenience within the Town Centre warrants investment by the Council and that if funding can be identified, which would be the preferred delivery model. The provision of a good quality facility in the appropriate location will undoubtedly provide a benefit for Maidstone's visitors, however this comes at a significant cost and is not a statutory service. Funding would have to be sought through Policy and Resources Committee as this cannot be provided with the Committee's existing budget, unless savings are identified elsewhere within the Committee's budget.
- 2.3 **Option 2:** The Committee could decide that **Option 1** is preferable, however alternative locations or delivery models should be progressed instead.
- 2.4 **Option 3:** Alternatively the Committee could decide that although there is a desire to provide such a facility, the cost is prohibitive. Therefore the Council would continue to deliver the Community Toilet Scheme.
- 2.5 **Option 4:** The Committee could decide that as the provision of public conveniences is not a statutory requirement for the Council, a new facility should not be considered.

3. RISK

- 3.1 There are undoubtedly risks linked with a decision to provide a public convenience within the Town Centre, predominately around cost, maintenance and anti-social behaviour. However this report is intended to present the options to for debate and for the Committee to determine whether one or more of the options should be refined prior to being brought back to the Committee for decision.
- 3.2 The risks associated with the decision to provide a Town Centre public convenience will be included as part of that report and will be assessed against the Council's risk appetite.

4. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 4.1 Previously reports have been taken to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee regarding the Community Toilet Scheme and as part of this there have been regular discussions about the provision of

facilities by the Council. Whilst the Committee took the decision to retain the Community Toilet Scheme, the potential for a publicly funded toilet continued to be raised by Members.

- 4.2 In 2017, the Committee requested that the options for a public convenience be fully explored and the costs considered. These are presented as part of this report.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 5.1 If the Committee decides Option 1 is the preferred choice, a report will be prepared for Policy and Resources Committee to determine whether funding can be agreed to support the recommendation.

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims as set out in section 3	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Risk Management	This is covered in Section 4.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	If the Committee decides to further explore one or more of the options to provide a public convenience within the Town Centre, this can be carried out within already approved budgetary headings and so needs no new funding. However the implementation of any subsequent decision to provide a facility will require significant capital and revenue funding which is yet to be identified. This will be need to be addressed before that decision can be implemented.	

Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Legal	The Council has no statutory duty to provide public conveniences.	
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no implications	
Equalities	The recommendations do not currently propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment. If a decision is taken to provide a public convenience, a full equality impact assessment will be carried out.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Crime and Disorder	Should a decision be taken to provide a public convenience within the Town Centre, the Community Protection Team will be consulted on the impact of anti-social behaviour.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Procurement	There are no procurement requirements at this time.	Head of Environment and Public Realm

7. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Location assessment for standalone facility

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None