



Public Toilets Consultation - Overview Report

Report by Projects and Media Officer – Ruth Horsburgh

The Public Toilets Consultation, which could be completed online or by paper copy, was held between 1st July – 12th August 2021. The Town Council received 984 completed responses and 2883 visits to the Survey webpage.

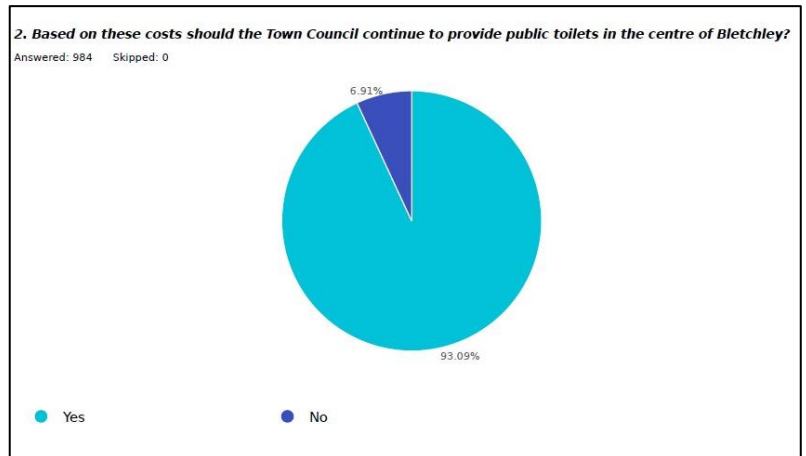
Based on pre-Covid monitoring the public toilets are well used with approximately 91,300 visits per year (excluding the disabled toilet).

Costs of the Public Toilets

The cost per individual visit is approximately 43p. Without doing any significant refurbishment work the average total cost of the toilet service per year is up to £40,000.

82.7% of respondents believe that the current service offered is good value for money and that based on these costs, 93% of those surveyed believe the Town Council should continue to provide public toilets in the centre of Bletchley.

In additional comments, respondents frequently said how valuable these public toilets are, for people of all ages and with different medical conditions, and highlighted that there are few other toilets open to the public in the local area and that this is important to consider when encouraging and enabling visits and shopping trips to the town centre. Some commented that if there were no public toilets they would be unable to visit and shop in Bletchley.



Several respondents said that they believe it is not good value for money but public toilets are essential and a needed facility, regardless of cost. A couple of respondents stated they would rather see the public toilets budget be used elsewhere.

Additionally, some respondents said they would be willing to pay to use the toilets however when asked if the Town Council should introduce a charge of between 20-40p, 70.8% responded saying there should be no charge. Concerns were raised about accessibility for those without bank cards and that no additional charge should be needed as it is a public and necessary service which should be covered by council tax contributions. Some people surveyed did comment that introducing a charge to access the toilets may help reduce anti-social behaviour and damage to the toilets.

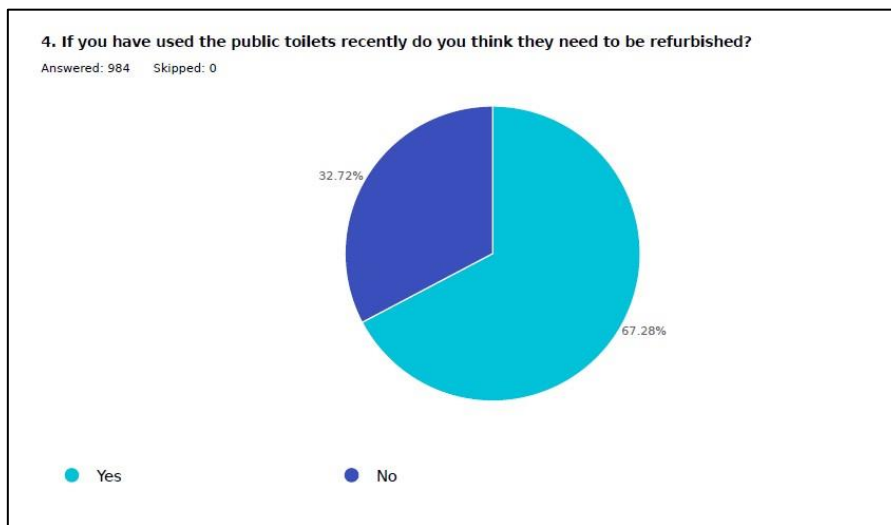
Some respondents stated that they would not mind paying to use the toilets, if cleanliness improved, and gave examples of other locations where this has been done locally. Some comments suggested giving the option of voluntarily donations instead and allowing both

cash and card payments. A few people commented that if introducing a charge would ensure the toilets stay open, this would be better than having no public toilets at all.

Current Condition and Possible Refurbishment

Some respondents commented on the current state of the public toilets and when asked if the public toilets need to be refurbished, 67.2% said they should be refurbished. A couple of comments stated that they feel the toilets to be unsafe and unclean and could also benefit from being staffed.

A respondent raised the concern of ongoing regeneration works and if the current public toilets block may be knocked down. Others commented that regardless of regenerations works, it is essential that there are public toilets in the area.



Possible Community Toilet Scheme

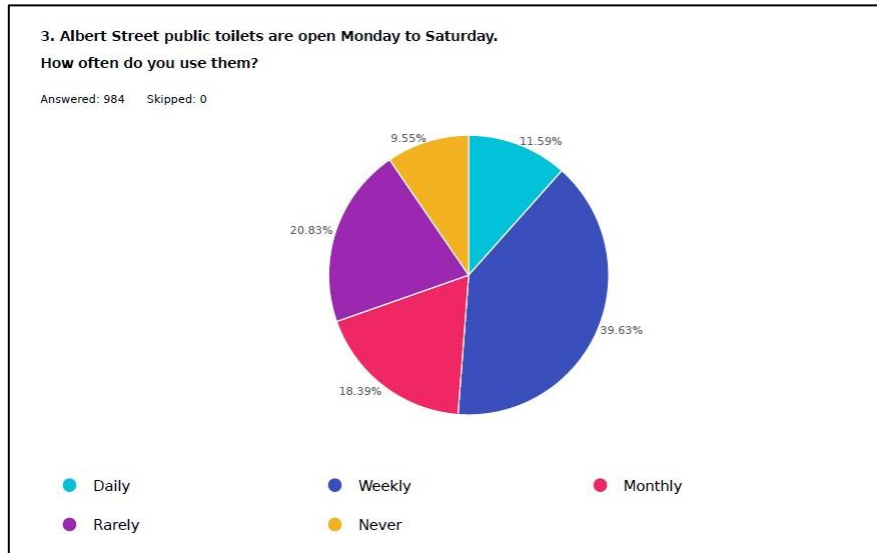
Question 7 asked if the Town Council should introduce a community toilet scheme, with 57.8% saying no to this idea.

Concerns were raised about accessibility and how many facilities would be available to everyone in practice. However, some comments said this could increase trade for shops and was a good idea in principle. However, others felt this would compel people to make a purchase and would put pressure on people visiting shops. Several comments stated that they would not use this scheme as they would be too embarrassed to ask shop owners.

A few people stated they had not been allowed to use toilets in shops previously and were unsure how many shops would have the appropriate and accessible facilities for public use, how well these facilities would be signposted and if shop owners would commit long-term to any potential community toilet scheme. The lack of provision for when the shops are closed was also raised as a concern. Some suggested that a community toilet scheme and having public toilets open could work well together. Again, a few people commented saying that this suggestion would be better than having no toilets open to the public at all.

Usage

39.6% of respondents said that they use the toilets on a weekly basis. Almost 30% of people surveyed said they rarely or never use the public toilets, with some stating in their comments that the toilets were unclean ('disgusting', 'smelly') and preferred to wait use toilets elsewhere or when back at home.



Additional comments Question 3 included the suggestion of the toilets being open 7 days a week (open on Sundays) to coincide when local shops are open.

There were responses received saying that that they were a bus driver and that they regularly used the public toilets. Others also commented that the toilets are used by people working in the local area, e.g. market traders, street cleaners. Some commented that although they hadn't needed to use the public toilets, it was reassuring to know that they were there for themselves and for family and friends. Many comments stated that these toilets are used by mothers and their young children as well as older residents and are essential to enable trips to the town centre.

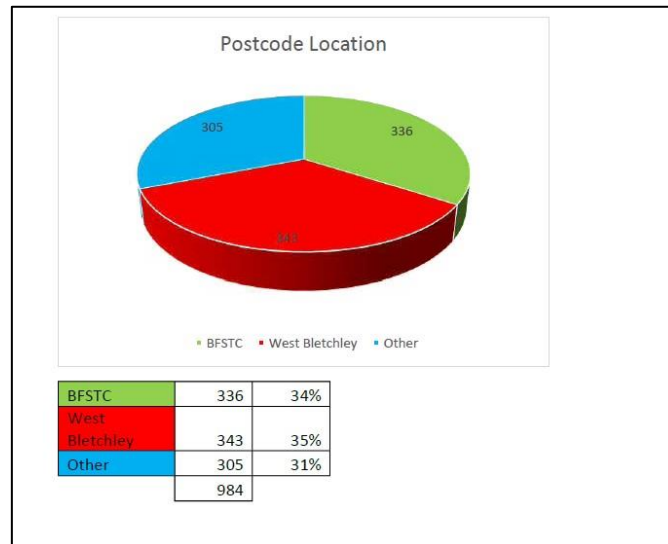
In Question 10, 19% of respondents said they considered themselves disabled. In additional comments, people said that although they are not disabled, they require access to public toilets or referenced a family member or friends who are disabled and would need access to a public toilet to come to the town centre. 25%.1 of respondents said they are a main carer for somebody who is vulnerable (for children and/or adults). In most comments received for Question 11, people said they were responsible for children, partners and/or parents.

When asked about the location of the public toilets in Bletchley, 51.7% said that the best location for public toilets would be Albert Street or nearby the existing facilities. 14.5% said the Bus Station, 27.7% said Queensway with 6% naming other suggestions, including the Brunel Centre, the Agora, Leon Recreation Ground, the Dinosaur Park, outside the old Co-op building, and Bletchley Leisure Centre. Most comments in response to Question 8 wanted to ensure that any public toilets were close to the shops and were accessible.

In Question 9, when asked hypothetically if the public toilets were closed how this would affect them, most said that this would inconvenience them or their family and friends and they would need to find a new toilet (either a public toilet or in a shop – with some saying that they would resort to going to the toilet in public in bushes, alleyways etc.). Several comments stated that if there were no public toilets, they would visit Bletchley less often and

for not as long or even not visit at all. A large number of comments raised the concern that young children, people with medical conditions and older people can need the toilet very quickly and unexpectedly, so having no public toilets available in the area would be a major concern. Some people stated it would not affect them personally but raised concerns for how this would affect others.

From the postcode data provided in Question 13, 34% of responses came from people in the Bletchley and Fenny Stratford area. 35% of responses came from people in West Bletchley. 31% of responses came from other postcodes in Milton Keynes (please see the Full Report for a full breakdown of areas).



Final Comments:

In Question 12, when respondents were able to share any additional comments overall, most comments stressed the importance of the public toilets remaining open. Reasons included ensuring accessibility and provision for people of all ages and with different medical conditions and encouraging people to visit and shop in the town. Some respondents suggested additional locations where public toilets could be added alongside the existing facility; Leon Rec and in other parts of Queensway.

Some comments raised concerns over the costs of the public toilets and suggested reassessing contributions made by other local councils and businesses. A couple of comments stated that the toilets should be closed down. One comment raised a safety concern over the possibility of having gender neutral toilets.

From these responses to Question 12, and in line with other comments provided throughout the survey, the majority commented that public toilets must remain open in this area.