

Saddleworth Parish Council
Review of the Community Toilet Scheme

1. Background

- 1.1 The first issue to be addressed is whether the Parish Council should provide funding for public toilets. The provision of public toilets varies massively across the country. Section 87 of the Public Health Act gives local authorities a power to provide public toilets, but does not impose a duty to do so.
- 1.2 In November 2007 the Finance & General Purposes Committee agreed that **“there was a need to improve the quality of toilets in Saddleworth and that the Council needed to look at the possibility of paying cafes to allow the public to use their toilets.”**
- 1.3 In March 2008 the Department for Communities and Local Government produced a Strategic Guide entitled Improving Public Access to Better Quality Toilets. A number of options were identified including leasing by private operators, sponsorship or a Community Toilet scheme that operates in some council areas, particularly Richmond-on-Thames. **The Environment Sub-committee in April 2008 agreed that “public toilet provision should form part of a tourism strategy, and that the Council needed to discuss with Oldham MBC how it can be advanced, Pubwatch and the Saddleworth Business Association need to be involved.”**
- 1.4 The Parish Plan Questionnaire in 2008 included the following:
The Parish Council should fund the provision of good public toilet facilities in key locations in Saddleworth by an increase in the precept (Parish Council tax) of perhaps £5 per household per year.

The responses were - Strongly agree 25.62%, Agree 37.56%, No opinion 9.45%, Disagree 18.33%, Strongly disagree 9.04%.
- 1.5 Following the responses, the Environment Sub-committee in April 2009 agreed that the Council should look at a Community Toilet scheme and other options including automatic toilets, staffed toilets and possible funding sources.
- 1.6 A letter was sent to all cafes and pubs in Saddleworth and Lees to identify the level of support for the introduction of a Community Toilet scheme. Attempts were also made to identify the estimated running costs of opening the public toilets in Delph.
- 1.7 A number of positive responses were received with only one negative one. Discussions then took place with Peter Rafferty, (OMBC Head of Street Scene), Imogen Fuller (OMBC Principal Regeneration Officer) and Lisa MacDonald (OMBC Saddleworth & Lees Area Manager) to agree how to progress a Community Toilet

Scheme in Saddleworth and Lees. A briefing paper was submitted to the Environmental Sub-committee and District Partnership on setting up and running a scheme which could potentially become borough-wide. A working group comprising Councillors Begley, Cullen and Franklin was formed to formulate a proposal to the considered by the Parish Council and District Partnership.

2 Current scheme

- 2.1 Premises that had expressed an interest in participating in the scheme were contacted and asked to supply details of their opening hours and available facilities. The premises were inspected by Ian Meynell (OMBC Saddleworth & Lees Street-scene Manager) and the working group decided which premises to include in a pilot scheme. It was agreed that each premise would display a sign which would include "You're Welcome to use our facilities", symbols to show the facilities available and the Saddleworth Parish Council and Oldham Council logos. The aim was to provide a facility in each village / locality.
- 2.2 The fees range between £600 and £900. The fee is based on the number of hours that the toilets are available between 10 am and 8 pm and the facilities available. The basic fee of £600 is paid to establishments who have basic toilets which are available for at least 40 hours during the day-time. An additional £100 is paid to establishments with longer opening hours. The current agreement states that extra funds are available if premises have facilities for the disabled and baby changing, an additional £200 is paid to these establishments.
- 2.3 The pilot scheme in March 2010 comprised:
 - Saddleworth Craft Co-operative – Delph
 - Ram's Head – Denshaw
 - Swan – Dobcross
 - Diggle Hotel – Diggle
 - Three Crowns – Austerlands
 - Royal George – Greenfield
 - The Little Shop – Uppermill
- 2.4 A further four premises were added to the scheme:
 - The Granby – Uppermill – May 2010
 - The White Hart – Lydgate – August 2010
 - The Old Bell – Delph – December 2010
 - The Roebuck Inn – Strinesdale - March 2011
- 2.5 The toilets outside the Brownhill Visitor Centre, which are available seven days a week and the one at the Civic Hall, which are available from Monday – Friday, are also designated as Community Toilets but receive no payment. The Museum was approached and offered funding to improve their ground floor toilet but refused to join the Community Toilet scheme
- 2.6 The scheme was jointly funded by the Parish Council and Saddleworth and Lees District Partnership in 2010 – 11. The signage and publicity was produced and funded from the Oldham Council Tourism budget.

- 2.7 In 2011 - 12 Oldham Council undertook a review of public toilets in the Borough and agreed to provide £5,000 to each District Partnership area to support Community Toilet schemes. The Parish Council and District Partnership each provided £1,600 to fund the scheme up to and including the 2013 – 14 financial year.
- 2.8 At the end of March 2014, the Parish Council was advised that the £5,000 Street-scene funding would not be available in 2014 -15 and no specific provision had been made for funding from the District Executive.
- 2.9 In April the Parish Council agreed to fund the existing scheme until the end of September and that a review of the Community scheme would be carried out.
- 2.10 The Environment Committee meeting in July agreed **to recommend to the Council that it continues to contribute to the funding the existing community toilet scheme until March 2015 during which time:-**
- a) a plan will be drawn up for a **Saddleworth Public Toilet scheme which includes a review of the existing community toilet scheme and incorporates a plan for the Wade Row public toilets,**
 - b) a detailed costing of what it will take to fund the revised scheme,
 - c) confirm whether OMBC is able to contribute to the future funding of the scheme, and
 - d) a survey of residents is carried out to determine whether the **Saddleworth community is prepared to fund the scheme as part of the precept. The District Executive will be asked to contribute towards the cost of the scheme in the current financial year.**
- 2.11 The Finance Committee on 21st July recommended deferring the decision until September. The District Executive meeting on 24th July considered the request for a £4,100 contribution towards the cost of the current scheme and deferred a decision until the completion of the Parish Council review.
- 2.12 The Parish Council on 28th July agreed to only accept recommendations a & b above. A Task and Finish group comprising the Parish Council members of the Environment Committee and the Chairman of the Finance Committee was formed to undertake the review.
3. Public Toilets in Saddleworth
- 3.1 There are currently three operational public toilets in Saddleworth, Wade Row in Uppermill and two at Dovestone, one in the main car park, the other at Binn Green.
- 3.2 The funding for the Wade Row toilets was withdrawn as part of the public toilet review in 2011 – 12. They have continued to operate on a limited basis being locked and unlocked by the Street-scene team.
- 3.3 It is anticipated that the Wade Row toilets will close in the near future and it has been suggested that the Parish Council could consider taking them over. There are four elements of costs associated with the operation of the toilets:
- a. staff time to open, close and clean the toilets
 - b. utility charges

- c. consumable materials
- d. repair and maintenance, including vandalism.

3.4 Information has now been obtained from Oldham Council about the likely costs of operating the toilets. Further discussions will be held with Carol Brown AED – Neighbourhoods to look at funding options, these will be reported to the relevant committees, as soon as they are available.

4. Possible changes

4.1 The first decision that the Council needs to make is whether it wishes to provide funding for some toilet provision in Saddleworth.

4.2 The intention of the current scheme is to provide clean, safe and accessible public toilets in more convenient locations for residents and visitors. Consideration should be given to the suitability of the current locations. It is virtually impossible to determine how many people use each facility, it is, however, possible to look at the relative footfall in the vicinity of each premise.

1. **Saddleworth Craft Co-operative** – the premise is in the Centre of Delph
2. **Ram's Head** – Denshaw – adjacent to the Oldham Way walk and Pennine Bridleway and on the access road to and from the M62.
3. **The Swan** – Dobcross
4. **Diggle Hotel** – Diggle – The premise is near to the canal and footpaths
5. **Three Crowns** – Austerlands – on the A62.
6. **Royal George** – Greenfield - is close to footpath network.
7. **The Little Shop** – Uppermill – potential large footfall from visitors and families using King George V field.
8. **The Granby** – Uppermill – compliments service provided by The Little Shop opening into the evening.
9. **The White Hart** – Lydgate – on A669
10. **The Old Bell** – Delph – on A62
11. **The Roebuck Inn** – Strinesdale – , adjacent to footpaths.

4.3 The Commercial in Uppermill has approached the Parish Council about joining the scheme. Their opening hours and location would enhance the service in Uppermill.

4.4 The current fee is based on the available hours and range of facilities. It does not take into account the potential higher footfall at some premises, particularly those in Uppermill. Consideration should be given to changing the fee to more reflect the service provided.

5. Funding

5.1 The scheme was initially funded jointly by the Parish Council and the equivalent of the District Executive and latterly with Street-scene. The marketing of the current scheme was carried out by the Oldham Council to ensure compliance with their corporate branding

5.2 Whilst joint funding reduces the call on the Parish Council precept it creates doubt about its continuity as it is dependent on District Executive budget pressures.

5.3 The current Parish Council budget provides a net budget of £1,600 to fund the Community Toilet Scheme. An increase in the funding would require savings to be identified in other budgets or a small increase in the precept. The additional cost of funding the existing scheme is £6,600 which, if all funded from the precept, would require an increase of 83p per year for a Band D precept payer.

6. Options

6.1 A letter has been received recently from a local resident praising the scheme and suggesting increased publicity in local publications and walking leaflets.

6.2 As explained above a Parish Council funded scheme would be more sustainable and would reflect the views and needs of the public of Saddleworth. It would be another example of the Parish Council providing a service. If the scheme was solely funded by the Parish Council, one-off funding should be made available for improved signage for the establishments.

6.3 A flat payment, in respect of available hours, facilities or potential usage, could be introduced. A fee of £600 to all the premises on the current scheme would reduce the cost to £6,600.

6.4 The number of premises on the scheme could be reduced, a basic scheme with each premise receiving a payment of £600, would cost £3,600. This could be funded from within the Environment Committee budget.

6.5 An on-going annual budget of £5,000 would allow a basic service with scope for some expansion.

7. Summary and Conclusions

7.1 Members need to consider whether the Parish Council should continue to fund a Community Toilet Scheme, and if yes:

- a. Should it be Parish Council only scheme or should the District Executive be asked for funding to support the scheme?
- b. Should there be at least one premise in each locality, if not which ones should be retained/removed?
- c. Should there be a flat rate fee, irrespective of available hours, facilities and potential usage?
- d. What is an appropriate level for the fee(s)

7.2 Members need to consider whether the Parish Council should consider taking over the responsibility for the operation of the Wade Row toilets bearing in mind the likely costs and operational issues.

8. Recommendations

8.1 The Parish Council should fund the current Community Toilet scheme until 31st December 2014, with the exception of The Granby which should be removed from the scheme from 30th September and replaced by the Commercial.

- 8.2 The current scheme should be terminated on 31st December 2014. A revised scheme should be introduced from 1st January 2015. The following premises will be included on the scheme:
1. Saddleworth Craft Co-operative - Delph
 2. Ram's Head – Denshaw
 3. The Swan – Dobcross
 4. Diggle Hotel – Diggle
 5. The Little Shop – Uppermill
 6. The Commercial – Uppermill

Each premise would receive an annual fee of £600. The current signage would be changed to identify the scheme as a Parish Council scheme, some advance signage should also be provided.

- 8.3 The estimated cost of the proposals in the current financial year is £7,400, including £200 for signage, should be funded from balances. The ongoing annual cost is £3,600.
- 8.4 Members agreed, in principle, that the Wade Row toilets should be kept open. The Parish Council should consider taking over their management, subject to the completion of a business case, and that they were handed over in a good state of repair.