

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

<b>STRATEGY/ACTION:</b> Closure of East Row Toilets	<b>Department:</b> Services for Place
<b>Person responsible for assessment:</b> Sandra Innes <b>Person responsible for strategy where different from above:</b> Ian Thompson	<b>Date of assessment:</b> 25.01.2012

**Brief description of strategy, partners and those who will be affected by its delivery:**

East Row Public Conveniences are based in the Town Centre and available to all the public to use, including those with a disability. The service is chargeable to all users except for those with a disability. The charge was introduced as the first option in April 2011 as a measure to help sustain the costs of this service and therefore enable them to remain open. The charge has not generated the required income and consideration has to now be given to closure.

The closure would impact on all current users including town centre shoppers; however there are other facilities in the town. Since introducing a charge for the use of East Row Toilets there has been some migration towards the Dolphin Centre and this has caused a number of issues in maintaining the ground floor toilets to the required standard. If the toilets were closed, it would include the disabled facility at East Row and this would have a further impact with a high probability that disabled clients would also start to use the Dolphin Centre. There is a radar key controlled toilet opposite the town hall at the end of Shopmobility.

There is a concern from the Market traders that they will lose business as footfall has lessened since a charge was introduced, and it is felt that if the toilets close then there would be an even greater loss of customers coming into that area of the town. The East Row toilets are used as a contingency by the markets staff if their toilets are out of order.

Since charging began in April 2011 to 15 January 2011 there have been 118,465 paying customers (calculated from monies received to access the facilities), an average of 2889 customers each week. It is not possible to identify the number of non paying customers as this detail is not logged – these would include disabled clients and children accompanied by a

parent/carer.

There would be a reduction in disabled toilet facilities in the town centre should East Row Toilets close.

<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>
<b>net TBC, £38,000 gross potential for £10,000 decommissioning costs</b>	<b>£38,000</b>	<b>£38,000</b>	<b>£38,000</b>

Increasing the charge is not considered to be a viable option – since charging was introduced the numbers accessing the facilities has dropped considerably. The charge would have to increase significantly to make an impact on the cost of running the toilets.

To support the impact assessment process, a designated data capture exercise was undertaken with a sample of users of the facility on the 23.01.12. Specific impacts identified through this process have been detailed from page 6. The Negative Impact identified relate to Older People, Disabled People, Young People, Stallholders, Coach Excursions, shoppers, limited alternatives, and potential cross impacts upon the Dolphin Centre.

Further potential impacts specifically for Older People have been identified by Age UK these have been outlined on page 6- 7.

Potential negative Impacts were also identified through a consultation session held with carers on the 09.01.12

## Introduction

### Q.1 Is your strategy and the actions it proposes accessible to everyone within the community? Bear in mind any economic, social, environmental, physical, intellectual, cultural, linguistic, technological or other barriers.

This particular proposal relates to the closure of East Row Toilets, consequently the facility would no longer be available, however, there are other facilities within the town centre. Specific potential negative impacts have been identified with regard to the needs of Older People, Young Children utilising the facility and disabled people, detailed page x onwards.....

Issue	Yes	No	If yes, what evidence do you have to demonstrate this?	If no, what do you plan to do to remove barriers to access?
Equality Act 2010 Protected characteristics:				
Age		X		The East Row Toilets will not be available, however there are other facilities within the town centre eg Dolphin Centre and radar toilet adj to Shopmobility
Disability		X		As above
Gender reassignment		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Race		X		
Religion or belief		X		
Sex		X		
Sexual orientation		X		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Local Priorities:				

Issue	Yes	No	If yes, what evidence do you have to demonstrate this?	If no, what do you plan to do to remove barriers to access?
Geographical impacts		X		
Carers		X		
Young People leaving care		X		
Gypsies & Travellers		X		
Refugees & Asylum Seekers		X		
Unemployed or low income		X		
People with spent criminal convictions		X		

**Q.2 (a) For whatever reason, does your strategy and the actions it proposes treat any group differently from others?**

Yes	
No	X

**If you have answered 'yes', please specify those individuals or groups affected and whether the impact has the potential to be adverse.**

**(b) What needs to be done to prevent any potentially adverse impact?**

Consider alternative available facilities - Dolphin Centre and radar toilet. There is a risk however that the Dolphin Centre may not open on some Public holidays which would have a cumulative impact on available facilities. Also private commercial facilities (Cornmill) are not always open which again impacts on availability of toilets within the town centre.

Email | 02/12/2011

***Impacts received through consultation session held with carers on the 09.01.12***

"The elderly need to use the toilets more often, the Dolphin Centre may not be an option on a Bank Holiday in the future – Cornmill has restrictive opening hours, toilets do not open to 10 am and are closed by 3 pm, especially weekends. The Council should not rely on Commercial Businesses to provide toilets".

"The impact related to the fact that they haven't had access problems when using East Row in Terms of the provisions being in use by another individual when they have needed to access them fairly swiftly. Therefore, there was a concern that as there would be more limited provision there would therefore be a greater chance that facilities would not be as readily accessible as demand for the accessible toilets would increase".

***Negative Impacts identified through data capture at East Row Toilets on the 23.01.12***

"I need to go to the toilet at least twice, if they closed it would be a pity. A lot of people outside the town use the toilets, we will lose business if there's nowhere to go very handy"

It would be disastrous. People don't like going to the pubs and there's not as many toilets in the Dolphin.

"Trader from Barnard Castle, I need to go regularly and find it essential for my work. They are central and convenient. How will the elderly and disabled manage?"

"Disappointed if closed. You can use the Dolphin but to close the toilets is a disgrace. Always could say our facilities were better than abroad. If you want to keep business in Darlington keep the toilets open. Every town should have at least one public toilet".

"I'm a visitor so these are the only ones I know".

"I'm a visitor from Redcar, you would have to change all the signs for the nearest toilet, I can get off the bus and go straight to the toilet".

"It would have a dramatic impact. I'm diabetic, when you need to go you have to go. There's not a lot of places you can go. I travel from Barton."

" I regularly use them more central to the town".

"Don't come into Darlington but it's nice to know that I have somewhere safe that I can bring grandchildren. Having a toilet attendant is nice and they are clean".

"I'd be devastated as I have bladder problems, I need to go regular with them being central I'm more able to get to them. The Cornmill is far out".

"Means I'd have further to walk to go to Dolphin, these are more central" (Cross impact regarding potential higher usage at the Dolphin Centre and the proposal to close on a Bank Holiday)"

### **Negative Impacts – coach excursions, stallholders and shoppers.**

**Email 01/12/11** "I was reading about the Council's proposed cuts in the latest Town Crier and saw to my horror that there are thoughts of closing the public toilets in the town centre. I had hoped that the introduction of a 20p charge would do away with this idea, but apparently not. All I can hope is that the Council will have another think as I am sure it will inconvenience |(no pun intended!) stall holders and shoppers, but also those going on coach excursions, or even a fairly long bus journey. Please do reconsider this idea. If you are thinking this is my only suggestion, the majority of my ideas were included in a letter which was put into the box in Crown Street library! Thank you for your attention".

**Letter 09/01/12** "I am appalled to read your proposal in the town crier re the closure of the toilets in the town, I'm sure many people like me who are disabled and pensioners have to use these in-between bus transfers in Tubwell Row or maybe using the market for daily shopping. I have no problem paying for this facility".

### **Negative Impacts identified Older People and Young Children**

#### **04/01/2012 Email**

"Whilst I appreciate that the financial decisions made by Central Government have a direct impact upon Darlington Borough Council and that you have no alternative to finding savings I would like to voice my opposition to the proposed closure of these facilities. If this closure goes ahead then the only public toilets available will be those inside the Cornmill Centre which would provide much fewer facilities to the public. Access to the public toilets is of major importance to many people and particularly to the older amongst us as well as parents with young children. In addition, visitors to the town (who I assume are important to the Council) may not be aware of the Cornmill facilities. I would ask you to reconsider this proposal. PS A potential source of added revenue would be to ensure that people who put out several bags of garden waste with the weekly domestic waste are charged for its removal. If I can be bothered to compost and /or use the civic amenity site why shouldn't they?"

#### **05/12/2011 Email**

"I am writing to urge you not to close the public toilets under the market as these are the only public toilets in the town centre. I recently read in the local paper that it is the councils intention to close the public toilets in the market place. I wish to complain bitterly about this decision as it will, in my opinion, cause problems for many people. I am a pensioner and unfortunately in keeping with many older people, the human bladder does not function in the same way it did when I was younger. Hence the phrase "hang on a bit longer" has no meaning and the new phrase "if you gotta go-you gotta go" is all enveloping and panic ensues (trust me-it does). I live rurally 10 miles from Darlington and if I use the local bus service (which is in danger of being cut, but that's another issue) I have to wait a minimum of 2 hours for the next one. In the past the market place toilet has proved to be a gift from God as I don't possess a 2 hour bladder. Local shops don't like you using their toilets unless you're a customer, and this will soon be stopped once hordes of people start trying that alternative.

Apart from older people suffering, what about people coming in by coach or car from further afield or pregnant women? You are in effect encouraging visitors to the town to go elsewhere as if enough inconveniences (no pun intended) are put in their way due to lack of facilities within the town. I can't believe that a central toilet in a main market place, which is the one area you would seek one out is being closed. Yes it may save money in the short term, but it is an essential to the

human body as is food and drink which are readily available throughout the town. What are people supposed to do, stand and wet themselves or worse? Sometimes non-profit making facilities have to be supplied for the general good of the people. I therefore implore you to reconsider what I believe is a calamitous decision"

#### **19/12/2011 Email**

Much as I appreciate the financial bind the council is in, a town without public toilets really has taken a step backwards, especially given the increasing numbers of elderly people. The recesses of my mind recall an obscure French law making cafe toilets compulsorily available to anyone (or is this a folk myth?). Either way, there must be alternative provision in place either in the form of self-cleaning automatic loos (rather intimidating for some) or a well-publicised arrangement with local places of refreshment. The latter is of course fraught with pitfalls including the vision of coach loads of old ladies piling into the Pennyweight. Or maybe the lack of a Tourist Bureau has already discouraged many potential tourists? Best of luck,

#### **Comment Box**

The high street is in decline and Darlington is no exception, public toilets are essential. Easy access for elderly and disabled people is needed when visiting town centre.

I am writing to urge you not to close the public toilets under the market as these are the only public toilets in the town centre.

#### **Comment Box – Limited Alternatives**

East Row Toilets - Are you really going to leave us without this fundamental facility? The Cornmill loos are often closed, in my experience, or there's a queue! It will be terrible for visitor/commuters - it's bad enough already. If you must do this - please provide all council tax payers with a list of places whose proprietors agree to let the public use their facilities without obligation, including opening hours and whereabouts. Darlington doesn't even have a bus station to offer facilities for visitors. We don't all have barrage balloon bladders!

Not everyone has the confidence or money to go into cafes or public houses to use their toilets - DBC should provide a public toilet in the town centre

#### **Impacts received from Age UK Darlington on the 27.01.12, relating to this specific proposal.**

Age UK Darlington would like to stress that it is absolutely vital that the council understand the important role that public toilets play in enabling many older people to get out and about in their neighbourhood. A 2006 Help the Aged study found



that 52 per cent of respondents agreed that the lack of public toilets in their area stopped them from going out as often as they would like. This evidence suggests that lack of public toilets is a significant factor in the isolation of some older people.

Town centres routinely lose out on valuable business because they ignore the needs of older people. As people age, they are more likely to suffer from incontinence or take medication that means that they need to go to the toilet more frequently. There are more than 2.5 million people in the UK who suffer from urinary incontinence.

The British Toilet Association (BTA) estimates that in excess of 40 per cent of public toilets in the UK have been closed in the past ten years.

A survey carried out by Help the Aged in 2006 found that 82 per cent of respondents felt that public toilet provision in their areas did not meet their needs. A report produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government under the previous government highlighted a number of reasons for this decline, but did little to change the situation. This situation is set to become even worse. The BTA estimates that more than 1,000 public toilets could face closure in the next 12 months. There is no statutory requirement on local authorities to provide public toilets. In the current climate of local authority budget cuts, many local authorities are reviewing their public toilet facilities with the intention of making savings. Community toilet schemes (where local businesses offer their facilities in return for a financial incentive) can be a workable alternative, provided that they meet the needs of older people. See the Age UK 'Pride of Place' Report for further information on the link below: - [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Pride%20of%20Place\\_How%20councillors%20can%20improve%20neighbourhoods%20for%20older%20people.pdf?dtrk=true](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/Pride%20of%20Place_How%20councillors%20can%20improve%20neighbourhoods%20for%20older%20people.pdf?dtrk=true)

***Specific comments identified from users of the facility during the impact assessment process – 23.01. 2012***

"A lot of people outside the town use the toilets we will lose business".

"If you want to keep business in Darlington keep the toilets open. Every town should have at least one public toilet".

"I need to go at least twice if they close it would be a pity....very handy" A number of people said they used the facilities regularly.

"They're better than they were..., I don't mind paying. I live outside Darlington I'm usually in town 2/3 hours, I would probably be ok".

"It would be disastrous, people don't like going to the pubs and there's not as many toilets in the Dolphin".

"They're clean, suitable why get rid of them, put up the price a bit another 20p or 10p, I'm a visitor so these are the only ones I know".

"I'm a visitor from Redcar, you would have to change all the signs for the nearest toilet, I can get off the bus and go straight to the toilet".

Detailed below are a specific comment relating to the proposal raised on through the online forum

"There are hardly any public toilet facilities in the town already without closing the toilets at East Row. So this idea could only cause more problems at the Dolphin Centre toilets. Keep them open for the good of the shoppers!"

"It's disgusting, we aren't going to have any toilets in town. No wonder the town is going to rack and ruin, people wont come to Darlington. You pay a lot more in other towns".

"Toilets are okay, willing to pay 20p if I can have the convenience"

"They're not as clean as they were. Not as nice since the change"

"I don't mind paying. Think they are essential to the town. I'm a trader from Barnard Castle. Think they're wonderful".

01/12/2011 Phone "I feel these are a necessity for older members of the community"

25/01/2012 Letter "I also think it is appalling for you to consider closing the public toilets in the town, even though you introduced a charge"

01/12/2011 Letter "I am appalled to read your proposal in the Town Crier re the closure of the toilets in the town, I'm sure many people like me who are disabled and pensioners have to use these in between bus transfers in Tubwell Row or maybe using the market for almost daily shopping. I have no problem paying for this facility"

20/11/2011 Forum "There are hardly any public toilet facilities in the town already without closing the toilets at East Row. So this idea could only cause more problems at the Dolphin Centre toilets. But why should the savings for the year

2013/2014 be double that of 2012/2013 same toilets or are there other plans no yet disclosed? Keep them open for the good of the shoppers!"

**Comment Box**

People come into Darlington to spend money and they should have decent toilet facilities to go to for free. The toilets in the market place are a disgrace to Darlington, nobody's are as bad as that.

The toilets in the town are a disgrace. Nowhere I go do I see toilets as bad as ours.

I won't pay for the use of a public toilet.

**Q.3 (a) Does your strategy promote equality? (e.g. does it contain actions that demonstrate a consideration of community cohesion and the needs of the members of Darlington's diverse communities)**

This specific proposal relates to the closure of a service provision.

Yes	
No	

**If you have answered 'yes', please give examples of how equality is promoted.**

**Q.4 In the past three years, have you consulted with any of the following groups regarding the development of your strategy?**

Group	Yes	No	If yes, please summarise evidence (Who? When? What were the outcomes?)	If no, are you satisfied that the strategy has no impact on this group?
Age	x		<p>This specific proposal is part of the corporate consultation undertaken on the Medium Term Financial Plan: Consultation events have taken place as part of the 2011/2012 MTFP budget consultation events, these include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public consultation events specifically targeted for disabled, young people and older people</li> <li>• Town Crier publications</li> <li>• Online forums</li> <li>• Talking Together Events</li> <li>• Attendance at local community groups and action groups (i.e. DAD)</li> </ul> <p>A specific potential impact was received relating to this proposal following a designated session with carers on the MTFP proposals. The proposal will have an impact however there are other facilities within the town centre e.g. Dolphin Centre and radar toilet adj to Shopmobility</p>	
Disability	x		As above	
Gender reassignment	x		As above	
Pregnancy and Maternity	x		As above	
Race	x		As above	
Religion or belief	x		As above	

<b>Group</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>If yes, please summarise evidence (Who? When? What were the outcomes?)</b>	<b>If no, are you satisfied that the strategy has no impact on this group?</b>
Sex	x		As above	
Sexual orientation	x		As above	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	<b>x</b>		As above	
Geographical impacts	x		As above	
Carers	x		As above	
Young people leaving care	x		As above	
Gypsies & Travellers	x		As above	
Refugees & asylum seekers	x		As above	
Unemployed or low waged	x		As above	
People with spent criminal convictions	x		As above	