

**BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL  
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING  
15<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

LJ/2022

8<sup>th</sup> March 2022

REPORT TO TOWN COUNCILLORS

AGENDA ITEM 15 – PUBLIC TOILETS

AIM

1. To review the waiving of fees to the public toilets in Listley Street and/ or consider amending the opening times.

BACKGROUND

2. In November 2020 the Town Council agreed to waive the fees for the use of the public toilets in Listley Street, Town Council minute 0149/2021 dated 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020 refers.
3. The toilet blocks at Fox Corner and Innage Lane still require contactless payment as the doors are electronic and activated by payment.
4. Prior to August 2018 the Listley Street toilets were accessed via cash payment. From August 2018 until December 2021 access was gained solely by contactless card payment.
5. The disabled toilet is accessed by the use of a radar key (and so remains free of charge).
6. The toilets (all 3 blocks) are opened, closed and cleaned daily under contract. The contract was renewed in July 2021. While the contract price was reduced from July 2021 by some £5k, the new contract saw the Town Council take on direct responsibility for the payment of the utilities.
7. The main body of this report discusses the Listley Street toilets only.

DISCUSSION/ COMMENT

8. The model of delivery of the cleaning and maintenance contract has likely changed in recent year for a number of reasons including: contractor cleaning companies being unwilling to take on the hugely variable costs of utilities or the upkeep of the buildings at a fixed price (other than minor wear and tear repairs) as they are often the target of vandalism.

9. Changes to payment methods have arisen in part because prior to 2018 the cash boxes were the target for opportunist thieves. Damage to the cash boxes created periods where payment was not possible until repairs had been made and the counting of cash is a relatively labour-intensive task. The repairs required following theft or attempted theft in turn incurred additional expenditure. Moving to contactless payment (via a set of paddle gates) ensured that payment was made and banked immediately and that there was no incentive to damage the building in seek of ready cash. The implementation of the contactless payment scheme had its own setbacks in that on occasion that people did not want to pay they forced the paddle gates that at times caused damage and the paddle gates being temporarily unusable (during these periods income was lost). Furthermore, there were some complaints that not all would have a method of contactless payment.
10. With revenues not particularly high and the prospect of the removal of the need to pay business rates on public toilets from April 2021 the Council made the decision to move to free to use toilets at Listley Street. The first year of this coincided with the emergence of Covid 19 and the resultant lockdowns; a period when public toilets were lightly used. This may have contributed to the extremely low levels of vandalism.
11. Since the middle of 2021 the use of the public toilets has increased and with it we have noticed that the toilets appear to be subject to varying levels of vandalism, from leaving taps running, emptying fully toilet roll holders, litter, attempted fires and smashing of windows and doors. Much of the vandalism occurs after 4pm
12. With access being completely free there is a view that building can be used as a meeting point (it is dry, warm and has lighting) by small or large groups. It is likely that the access by contactless card provided some deterrent to entering for the purpose of loitering.
13. Reinstating the paddle gates will provide some income to the Town Council to support the service costs. In addition, the physical barrier that payment being required produces might deter entrance unless for the use of the toilets. But this would not deter all vandalism and it would likely not see some damage to the paddle gates borne out of frustration of having to pay or petty vandalism (this occurred when the paddle gates were operating).
14. A change in the opening hours to more core hours might remove the risk of petty vandalism. Currently the toilets are open from 8am to 7pm. If they were to open from 9am to 4pm then they would be inaccessible during the times that they are most often adjudged to be subject to vandalism (late afternoon/ early evening). Being open from 9am to 4pm would still provide a facility during the core shopping hours and when most in demand.

## FINANCIALS

15. The Cost of maintain the toilets is significant and the Council only receives minimal income from the toilets at Fox Corner and Innage Lane.
16. The cost of utilities is increasing significantly.
17. Public toilets are now free of business rates, when they were last paid the annual cost was just over £6,000.
18. The Town Council has recently increased the precept by 6.5% and applying a charge to the Listley Street toilets might look to restrict upward pressure on the precept in future years.

## OPTIONS

19. Options include:

- a. Maintain the current position with the toilets being free to use and open from 8am to 4pm.
- b. Reinststate the paddle doors with access being available subject to contactless payment (20 pence currently).
- c. Reinststate the paddle doors with access being available subject to contactless payment (and increase the cost to contribute sufficiently to cover repairs and increasing utility costs).
- d. Change the opening hours to be from 9am to 4pm and keep the toilets free of charge.
- e. Change the opening hours and reinststate the paddle doors with access being available subject to contactless payment (20 pence).

## RECOMMENDATION(s)

20. It is recommended that the Town Council RESOLVES to:

Reinststate the paddle doors (at the earliest opportunity) with access being available subject to contactless payment (and increase the cost to contribute sufficiently to cover repairs and increasing utility costs).

Lee Jakeman  
Town Clerk

