

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
TUESDAY 11th FEBRUARY, 2020
SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET/PRECEPT REPORT**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To enable Council to formally consider how best to proceed in relation to changing circumstances regarding public toilets in the Town.

2. CORPORATE POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The proposal potentially relates to priorities such as D1 (Representation), D3 (Consultation), C1 (Working Together), C5 (Community Assets), EN1 (Environment).

3. LEGAL AND RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Council will be aware of the issues which can arise from the transfer/acquisition of assets, associated matters/costs and encumbrances.

In the event that the Council does take on operation of the Guildhall units it will be necessary to ensure that transfer and contract arrangements are in situ and aligned to mobilisation requirements.

It is also acknowledged the recent alternative proposal from the current provider, West Devon Borough Council¹ is very much in its infancy.

4. RESOURCE ISSUES

The resource issues arising from this report vary according to the emergent scenario.

As such they include

- Potential to make a grant to make up an element of an evidenced shortfall in costs incurred by the Borough Council (if delivery continues to be via WDBC); or
- capital commitment, revenue commitment, staffing/capacity and contract management (if delivery of the Guildhall Toilet is to be by TTC).

¹ WD or WDBC

By way of shorthand a £6,000 increase in cost to the Town Council roughly approximates to a 1% increase in Council Tax.

5. COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

A survey was previously undertaken and distributed to 5,000 households in the Town. Discussions have taken place with Officers of the Borough Council regarding the basis upon which public conveniences are to be treated and two potential options have emerged (see below).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council, make budget provision for toilets on the basis previously agreed during the budget setting process and as included in the draft budget on the basis of delivering one or other option as identified in para 3.3 below.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The detailed background to this matter has been set out in previous reports – most especially February and March, 2019.
- 1.2 In short, the position was that WDBC had made a decision to close the toilets it operated in the Town and offered TTC the opportunity to take on the future operation and funding of same. The Town Council identified, in principle, two units for further investigation (Guildhall and Bedford Car Park).
- 1.3 Over the course of the past 9 months the Town Council has worked with WD, commissioned the necessary surveys, prepared applicable service level agreements and explored cost/operating issues. Having undertaken the necessary due diligence, it identified in mid-January that it could only proceed with the Guildhall Car Park facility and make a grant toward the re-opening of the Bus Station facility if required.

2. CURRENT SITUATION

- 2.1 Following notification to WDBC of the above position on 24th January WD indicated on 6th February it needed more time to consider the offer from TTC to proceed with the Guildhall toilets in order to seek to identify all options which might enable a more broadly based service to be provided in the future. To that end there may now be two potential options, namely:-

- a) The possibility that WDBC might be able, working with commercial partners and stakeholders including the Town Council, to find a way to keep the Bedford and Guildhall Car Park sets of public conveniences in the Town open^{2 3} (alongside work already being undertaken by WD to try and keep the Bus Station toilets open).
- b) In the alternative that (as above and previously anticipated), the Town Council assume the freehold of the Guildhall Toilets and fund and operate them going forward, also making a grant toward the WDBC Bus Station facility.

2.2 The possibility that there could be an option to safeguard all three units (a above refers) is particularly welcome. It is however acknowledged this is still at a formative stage of development by WDBC and time has now become a pressing factor in relation to either option for both authorities.

Public Opinion

- 2.3 A public survey was previously undertaken and 427 responses were received. By way of summary:
- Approx. 90% of respondents supported continued provision of toilets at public cost;
 - A similar % had used toilets in the town in the last 12 months;
 - The most used toilets were Guildhall Car Park (over 80%) followed by Bedford Car Park (@70%) and then the Bus Station @30%);
 - The bulk of usage was identified as occasional or weekly;
 - The public convenience identified as most important (with over 50% support from respondents) was Guildhall Car Park;
 - The public convenience identified as least important showed more or less level pegging between Bedford Car Park (@40.7%) and the Bus Station (40.9%);

² Their organisational requirement to do so being that it should be cost neutral to WDBC.

³ Accordingly, if such a solution could be found the Town Council could appropriately consider (subject to quantum) making up a shortfall if it supported a more broadly based service than could otherwise be secured.

- The two largest entries for the additional charge residents would be prepared to pay through Council tax for the service were
 - nothing - @39.6%; and
 - £0-£8 @40.6%
 - Whilst approximately 68% respondents would be prepared to use 'pay as you go' nearly 80% indicated a 20p price threshold;
 - Nearly 60% supported daytime only opening;
 - The majority of respondents were 45 years old plus.
- 2.4 The support for broadly based provision is therefore well evidenced and aligns most fully with the option being investigated by WDBC to try and keep all three units open.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Town Council faces a challenging financial year. It has provisionally budgeted to administer the Guildhall Car Park Toilet going forward following extensive investigations. To do this, amongst others, would require mobilisation by 31st March, the setting of an appropriate Precept and the co-ordination with extant public realm improvement contracts. Whilst it would be challenging to try and increase that sum (or operate to a different time frame) some degree of repurposing might be achievable.
- 3.2 The suggestion by WDBC that there might be an alternative way to secure all units being open to the public and delivered on a cost neutral basis to WD is to be welcomed.
- 3.3 To that end it is suggested that the Town Council agree the budget toward the cost of public conveniences in the Town on the basis that either one of two approaches might be progressed:

Preferably, in view of the number of units which could be retained:

- i) to consider making up an element of an evidenced and affordable shortfall that WD might incur (so as to be cost neutral to WD) by way of standing grant to secure the

continued future delivery by WD of the three sets of public conveniences in the Town;

or should that arrangement not be possible and WD be otherwise obliged to close one or more sets of toilets in the Town;

- ii) to fund the delivery of the Guildhall Public Conveniences by the Town Council, necessarily subject to the freehold transfer and WD contract cleaning/SLA being in place by 1st April, 2020 accompanied by confirmation from WDBC if this approach is to be required by 10th March⁴.

3.4 As indicated earlier this decision comes at a difficult time when Council budgets (capital and revenue) are already under extreme pressure, both now and for the foreseeable future. If unexpected other revenue costs should arise – either in this project or elsewhere, the Council does not have the ability, either from reserves or revenue, to fund that other than by way of recourse to the Council Tax payer.

3.5 However, if the partnership proposed by WD (option (i) above refers) does materialise it represents a welcome and creative opportunity to safeguard important community services, and grow a lasting and collaborative partnership across the tiers of local government.

**CARL HEARN
TOWN CLERK
FEBRUARY 2020**

⁴ To enable mobilisation