

SALISBURY CITY COUNCIL

Report

Subject : Market Square Public Conveniences Direction Setting Paper
Committee : Full Council
Date : 14 July 2025
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1. Report Summary:

- 1.1. This report seeks clear direction from Full Council on a number of options for the future of any Market Square Public Conveniences.
- 1.2. The below-ground facilities have been closed since April 2025, as part of the 2025/26 budget approved by the Council in January 2025.

2. Background:

- 2.1. The male and female public toilets at Market Square have deteriorated significantly due to years of underinvestment. Despite costing in excess of £50,000 annually to operate and maintain, they generated less than £2,000 revenue in their last six months of operations.
- 2.2. These toilets had been linked to incidents of drug use, assault, and general anti-social behaviour.
- 2.3. There is considerable strength of feeling across the city on this subject. There have been representations made by organisations that closing the toilets will have had a negative impact on the economy of the city. In addition, Council members will also recall significant opposition in the face of the speculative plans made by officers to Wiltshire Council.
- 2.4. In light of these issues and the Council's decision to close the underground toilets, this report explores future options, including refurbishing the facilities, constructing new amenities, or repurposing the space for alternative uses. The continued use of the above ground accessibility toilet facility is assumed in all options.
- 2.5. Any future development must design out crime as much as is possible, whilst also making the cleaning of such facilities as quick and easy as possible; as the majority of operating costs came from the cleaning contract.

3. Key Considerations:

- **Public Safety and Confidence:** Anti-social behaviour, drug misuse, and assault have made the site feel unsafe, unappealing and unpopular.
- **Financial Viability:** High operational costs vs. minimal revenue. For comparison, during the last six months of operations, it would have been cheaper for this authority to have given each user of the toilets £10 rather than use the previously provided facilities.
- **Event Provisioning:** Peak usage occurs during markets and public events. The Council's direction of travel indicates increased size and volume of events to support the vibrancy of the city.
- **Accessibility:** Ensuring facilities are inclusive and accessible. Underground facilities immediately exclude a range of users.
- **Operational Resilience:** Any solution must withstand periods of high demand while maintaining cleanliness and safety.

4. Options:

4.1. Option 1: Maintain Disabled/All-Access Facility Only

Description: No change to the current running of the toilet facilities.

Pros	Cons
No additional cost to the public purse.	Inadequate capacity - Cannot meet demand during markets, weekends, or events.
Maintains presence - Ensures some level of city-centre provision.	Site issues remain - Location still prone to anti-social behaviour and poor perception.

4.2. Option 2: Refurbish Current Facilities

Description: Reopen the existing underground facilities with a full refurbishment of the facilities, fixtures and fittings: lighting, tiling, ventilation, security enhancements.

Estimated Cost: £150,000–£250,000

Pros	Cons
Enhanced user experience - Updated design improves cleanliness, lighting, and ventilation.	High capital cost - £150,000–£250,000 upfront investment required, with no current budget attached.
Retains location - Continues using a central and familiar site.	Accessibility concerns - Stairs or lifts still needed; underground location excludes some users.
Potentially cost-effective - Less than building new, while improving standards.	Persistent risk factors - Potential for repeat of past issues like drug use or vandalism.

4.3. **Option 3:** Build New Above-Ground Facility

Description: Construct a new above-ground facility with modern, accessible unisex cubicles (e.g. pod design or small building). Please note this option is subject to the approval of any submitted planning application.

Estimated Cost: £500,000–£1,000,000

Pros	Cons
Fully accessible - Unisex cubicles and step-free entry make it suitable for all.	Very high cost - £500,000–£1,000,000 estimated build cost, without budget identified.
Modern and hygienic - Cleanable materials and efficient layouts reduce maintenance burden.	Disruption to Market Square - Construction works could affect events and footfall.
Safer environment - Public visibility discourages misuse.	Long lead time - Design, challenges of obtaining planning consent, and building could take 1–2 years.
	Possible loss of Square space, impacting on Charter Market and events

4.4. **Option 4:** New Facility with Stage and Concession

Description: A multifunctional civic asset combining public toilets, a raised stage/performance area, and a concession (e.g. café or kiosk).

Estimated Cost: £750,000–£1,750,000

Pros	Cons
Multifunctional space - Combines toilets with performance and retail, increasing public value.	Most expensive option.
Supports event strategy - Aligns with council's goal to grow cultural and market events.	Complex to deliver - Design and operation require multi-party coordination.
Potential income stream - Café/kiosk concession could offset running costs.	Potential complaints - Noise or congestion issues may arise near residential or retail areas.
	loss of Square space, impacting on Charter Market and events.

4.5. **Option 5:** Repurpose Underground Space

Description: Close toilet use permanently and convert the space for alternative civic uses (e.g. market storage, trader utilities, archive storage).

Estimated Cost: circa £300,000

Pros	Cons
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Adds civic utility - Could be used for storage, market logistics, or archive space.	Costly conversion: around £300,000 needed to make it usable (e.g., waterproofing, lifts).
Reduces liabilities - Eliminates maintenance and risk linked to problem toilet site.	Toilet provision lost - No replacement included; increases pressure elsewhere.
Makes use of underutilised asset - Avoids leaving central real estate empty.	Limited public benefit - Use would primarily support traders or internal functions.

4.6. **Option 6:** Direct Users to Guildhall Toilets

Description: Use internal Guildhall toilets as public provision during business hours (when not in use for private functions).

It is important to note that bookings for private events are strong and expanding with circa 230 events in 2024/25, with all major categories, markets, conferences, weddings, and community/civic events, showing growing attendance.

Estimated Cost: £10,00-£15,000 for additional staff and cleaning costs

Pros	Cons
Zero capital investment - Utilises an existing internal facility.	Not always available - Conflicts with Guildhall bookings or private functions.
Quick to implement - Can be opened to the public immediately within business hours.	Restricted hours - No evening or early morning provision.
Sufficient for small events - Suitable when event scale is low and not time-intensive.	Poor visibility - Public may not know toilets are available or feel comfortable accessing them.
	Accessibility limitations and potentially higher Guildhall lift outage, servicing & repair costs if significant numbers of mobility-impaired public users.

4.7. **Option 7:** Retail, Licensee, and Restaurant Scheme

Description: The "Spend a Penny" or Community Toilet Scheme in the UK allows businesses, primarily cafes, restaurants, and shops, to offer their toilets to the public for free, even to those who are not customers. These businesses display a sticker to indicate their participation, and the public can use the facilities without needing to make a purchase. The local council often provides funding to participating businesses to cover the costs. Recent case study in Dereham - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr78n1kn2zjo>

Pros	Cons
Low-cost, high coverage - Uses business premises at a fraction of capital cost. Current budget provision for this project.	Inconsistent service - Hours vary by business; public may find access unpredictable.

Strengthens local partnerships - Encourages collaboration between council and traders.	Not fully accessible - Many toilets lack suitable facilities for disabled users or families.
Flexible and scalable - New businesses can be added over time; scheme can expand or contract easily.	Reliant on voluntary uptake - Coverage gaps possible if few businesses participate or drop out.

5. Event Toilet Provision

5.1. Large-scale events will require supplementary temporary toilets:

- **Cost Estimate:** £2,000–£15,000 per event
- **Guildhall Use:** Suitable for smaller events unless in conflict with bookings
- **Additional Cleaning Costs:** £500–£1,000 per month

By way of example, for this year's Fayre on the Square event, a dedicated block of toilets will be hired and used throughout the season. This will be provided by a national company, be of a better standard than the previous toilets and will be cleaned by the private provider of the facilities.

6. Recommendations

6.1. It is recommended that the Committee:

- 6.1.1. Considers the seven options outlined for the future provision of public toilets at Market Square.
- 6.1.2. Identifies one or more preferred options for work up of a clear and robust business case, feasibility assessment and community consultation, for decision-making in time for 2026/27 Budget-setting.
- 6.1.3. Requests officers to seek potential partnerships or external funding for infrastructure investment.

6. **Wards Affected:** All wards, due to city centre location and usage by residents and visitors city-wide.

7. **Background Papers:** None

8. Implications:

- 8.1. **Financial:** Potentially high capital expenditure depending on chosen option; opportunity for long-term savings or revenue generation.
- 8.2. **Personnel:** May require additional staffing or cleaning contracts for refurbished/new facilities.
- 8.3. **Environmental Impact:** Opportunity to build sustainable, water-efficient facilities.
- 8.4. **Equalities Impact:** Importance of inclusive, accessible design.