PLANNING FOR PUBLIC TOILETS

PART 2. DISTRICT, MESO LEVEL: TOILET LOCATION

Part 2 provides an outline of key issues to take into account at the district level, in deciding where to locate the public toilets. A summary of points is given below. There is also a longer optional explanation of the issues in the second part of the paper. A PowerPoint accompanies and illustrates Part 2.

A toilet hierarchy at the city-wide level identifies the overall distribution, location, and frequency of toilet provision. Having built this up, the next stage is to take a particular district or local area where you have decided a toilet is needed, and to work out the specific location and detailed siting of that toilet block. In deciding where toilets should be located (to summarise) we need to look at geographical factors, and, as above, at the social and economic factors, the land uses and types of developments, and the transport routes and termini that generate need.

We also need to take into account some social factors too when thinking about the city-wide toilet strategy, in particular the difference between women's and men's toilet needs, and how this is related to the different ways in which women and men use the city. Women as a whole are more likely to need public toilets in downtown areas as they are the ones who are out and about in the day-time doing the shopping, travelling on public transport more than men, and often they are also accompanied by children, elderly relatives and the disabled. Yet there is less provision for women than men in many cities. This is partly because of existing under provision and because men have are more able to use a range of bars, clubs and pubs toilet facilities.

SUMMARY OF MESO LEVEL, DISTRICT TOILET LOCATION PRINCIPLES
Relate toilet positioning to:
Traffic, pedestrian flows, public transport termini, car parks
Generation of demand by local land uses and developments, e.g. retail
Consider topography, avoid steep slopes, hollows
Consider local micro-climate, heat/shadow, cold/windy etc.
Consider time planning factor, day and night, and opening hours
Consider the needs of all users, male and female
Make the toilet accessible to all, abled and disabled
Put the toilets in pride of place, not hidden away
Locate centrally and prominently
Avoid tree cover, bushes and screening
Avoid locations linked to crime, vandalism, sex, drugs
Apply all the normal principles of urban design and plan-making.

The Urban Design Agenda

In recent years there has been a renewal of interest in the field of urban design owing to increasing dissatisfaction with town planning across society. Urban design may be defined as the art of 'place making' of creating street environments that people feel happy within. In the past, urban design was somewhat peopleless, over-concerned with aesthetic issues, as the great designer looked 'down' (like God) on the blueprint on his drawing board. Yet traditional

urban design, which created grand squares, and splendid public buildings is to be valued as it embodied a spirit of civic pride. Nowadays the urban design agenda is more concerned with user needs, with the realities of moving around the streets and planning for everyday life. The concerns of disability and access groups, women and planning, crime and design, environmentalism, public toilets and community development are all found within the new urban design agenda, with toilets figuring in the agenda.

Within this new urban agenda, there is a need to 'think toilets': to consider the implications for toilet provision, of all new development that might generate increased pedestrian numbers, and to ensure that a new survey is undertaken of existing areas to identify areas of under-provision, changing demands, and (more rarely) duplication of provision.

But 'urban design' is not all 'good'. A desire to create 'exciting townscape' can result in a threatening environment with blind corners, irregular frontages, narrow alleyways, footpaths away from the houses, pedestrian underpasses, and often poorly lit, meandering routes: all of which offer havens for public urination and other street crime. Sticking public toilets in the middle of prestige urban design schemes may offend misplaced sensibilities. Likewise, one has to be wary of urban renewal policies that eradicate the 'clutter' of public toilets, old phone boxes, public benches, litter bins and street kiosks - all of which are essential, albeit poorly maintained.

In contrast, we would argue that public toilets should take pride of place and be put in the centre of city squares, and in prestige locations, as part of the urban townscape, as public architecture, in their own right, and not as something to be ashamed of. Giving toilets high visibility will reduce vandalism, sex, drugs and other anti-social behaviour. It will improve lighting and accessibility and make the toilets easier to find for everyone.

City streets should be 'legible' that is 'easy to read' so even complete strangers can easily work out where they are likely to find the local centre, and where toilets are likely to be found. Good street signs are also needed pointing the way to the toilets, showing when they are open and offering alternatives if closed. Designers need to be able to 'read' an urban area, to identify the key features, nodal points, edges, barriers and characteristics that affect pedestrian movement, and give it its character and overall ambience. An awareness of such hierarchies and divisions, and the relative extent of the catchment area of different central points might ensure that toilets are the more effectively located to 'catch' users by enabling them to find the toilets easily.

The Design Process

Good urban design is not only concerned with 'what' is designed but with 'how' it is done and with the needs and views of the general public as users of cities, and toilet users. The new urban design agenda's objectives include the importance of 'empowerment' in respect of user needs as well as designer and provider factors. From this concept of empowerment flows a range of other issues such as the importance of involving the community in the design process, social justice, social mix, access, diversity, equity, conviviality, creative thinking, sharing visions, and mutual learning, public participation, adopting a responsive approach. At all stages equality considerations should be 'mainstreamed' into the process, in terms of gender, disability and where appropriate race, religion and culture. These considerations should be taken into account in toilet user needs, data collection, survey, participation, and

testing of designs and feedback. Women's and men's toilet needs are not the same indeed they are often quite opposite and different from each other.

The Planning Process

Survey

Plan-making has three stages, namely, summarised as the initials, **SAP** = Survey -> Analysis -> Plan. Applying this approach to the development of toilet policy, the planner needs to 'survey' the existing situation of the area in question, identify problems, note lack of facilities, and future demand trends. When deciding how many toilets are needed, rather than blindly following given standards, a good urban designer will set up a survey and count how many women, men, women and people with disabilities are actually are out and about in the vicinity concerned (or in a comparable location in the case of new development). But, of course, minimum standards are important too for 'bad' local municipalities that are unwilling to provide toilets, but good ones will do better still.

An individual toilet provider's knowledge of the overall toilet situation in an area is often patchy. The local authority, for example, is just concerned with 'its' toilets and appeared ignorance as to whether there were toilets in bus stations, car parks and other off-street locations making the provision of a proper survey very difficult. Good toilet plan-making would include a survey of all sorts of public toilets in the area to build up a realistic strategy which take into account gaps, toilet clusters, toilet deserts, that is a total picture of the distribution of facilities, regardless of which organisation happened to provide them. To implement good working relationships would need to be made with both public and private providers, and as discussed, appropriate tax breaks and other incentives would

The toilet survey will reveal areas where previous location is now inappropriate because of changes in land use and transport patterns. It will also identify 'toilet hot spots' where new ones should be located, and 'under-toileted' areas which may be unrecognised, perhaps because recent development, or changes in the use of existing buildings has generated new demands. Where toilet closure has taken place, we should investigate previous locations as a good template for future locations, as there was probably some very good reason why the toilets in question were put there in the first place

Analysis

The toilet planner then analyses the situation and comes up with a range of alternative planning solutions that are put out for public reaction. The views of the public are taken into account in the final revisions and eventually 'the plan' is produced but even then it is subject to review and updating in the light of changing circumstances. To carry out such a process local authorities would have to monitor the toilet situation more rigorously. In contrast, some local authorities do not even have an up-to-date map of where their toilets were but their workers knew 'by heart'. It is incredible that such an important facility is not a high level component of the spatial planning strategy of every local authority but is so fragmented.

Plan

As to detailed toilet design, layout and final plan, a representative range of user and age groups would be consulted on design requirements rather than applying outdated minimal standards. This process alone would give the local community involved a sense of ownership and stewardship resulting in less likelihood of vandalism, particularly if schools, nightclubs and sporting organisations were involved in this process. Thus a collaborative approach would be adopted which would engender a sense of responsibility and ownership of 'their' public toilets among users, and would help reduce vandalism. This community based

approach a very different from the remote heavy-handed 'top down' approach currently found in many areas.

Inclusive Plan-Making

In order to develop a credible toilet strategy the following needs to be done:

- Identify transport links and movement patterns, nodal points, centres and interchanges and areas where the most pedestrians are likely to be found in the location

- Undertake a demographic analysis of the residents of the area

- Calculate the numbers of commuters, tourists and shopper numbers visiting the area, and undertake a male/female workforce breakdown for the toilet area in question.

- Identify main area magnet land uses and types of development in the vicinity

- Evaluate what toilet provision is there already

- Ask 'why' it is there, or why it has closed, and if the area it serves has changed

- Seek to retain what is in the right place by retrofitting and upgrading

- Identify locations for more toilets and consider surrounding constraints such as links to local amenities, residential areas, general ambience.

- As a high priority make sure the toilet location relates to transport route ways, car parking, pedestrian flows and footpaths, road safety, accessibility.

- Identify cultural, historical, heritage factors that might enhance situation
- Mark social locations, positive or negative, social or criminal.
- Appraise property values, proposals for the area, major new adjacent developments.
- Involve fully the local community, and representative user groups
- Decide on location and move to specific standards and design stage
- Consult men and women equally
- Consult disabled, ethnic minorities, heavily represented age groups locally

Such a policy making process would not be onerous for the planning authority who already produce similar plans on all sorts of other developments.

MESO LEVEL FURTHER DESCRIPTION OF PRINCIPLES
(Optional material explaining each principle more fully)

Pride of Place

To summarise good toilet siting principles, public toilets should be proudly placed out in the open and not hidden but thoughtfully designed. Toilets should be located in central public thoroughfares and squares, in open well lit areas and people should be proud of them as an important townscape statement in their own right. Toilet designers should consider the way in

which the toilet block complements or clashes with surrounding buildings, whether it completes a vista, fills in a gap or creates an out of place eyesore. Toilets should be subject to the same design controls, especially in urban conservation and regeneration areas as any other sort of building, and their location should be included on all statutory planning documents, local plans and development plans in accordance with the changes in planning legislation. Liaison with the town planning, environmental and architectural departments of the area in question are a requirement of good toilet planning. This is particularly important in conservation areas.

Architectural Style

As to architectural design, the restoration of previously closed toilets alone will result in a chronological mixture of architectural styles. Toilet architecture should be 'great architecture' designed in the same way as an other worthy, important building. It should not be seen as a temporary construction that is of no importance. Toilets should be designed to be accessible not as fortresses aimed at discouraging people from using them.

Access and Siting

Toilets should not be located on steep slopes, or rendered inaccessible by steps and excessive ramps. Ideally all toilets should be positioned, 'at grade', that is on the level, not down steps or only accessible through vandalised lifts, or up urine-soaked steps, or on a slope (see PowerPoint). Ramps should be provided where there is no alternative. Handrails and gentle steps should also be provided as well, for those who cannot cope with ramps, such as people with arthritis. Ramps must be built according to the required standards). Good access for the disabled should not begin at the ramp but run right through the urban area so that people can penetrate and make their way through to the toilets. There also seems to be some confusion as to who it is for as it is only open office hours.

An important urban design principle is that townscape should be readily legible and permeable so that people can easily make out the layout and the main routeways without confusion or fear. Otherwise people experience disorientation, get lost and spend ages looking for the toilets. Of course good signage is vital, but people like to 'know' that if they see a particular type of area they are likely to find a toilet there. The footpaths to the toilets should be part of the pedestrian routeway system for the local area. The toilets should not be seen as a nuisance hidden down a dead end. Increased foot flow past the toilets is likely to reduce loitering and increase overall surveillance and integration with other 'normal' land uses. Good footpath links should be ensured from toilets to tourist coach pickup points, bus stops, pedestrian crossings, and car parking. Toilets should not be placed on dangerous traffic islands. This may require rerouting the traffic rather than closing the toilet.

To enable people to get to the toilet paths and pavements should be at least 2000 mm wide to facilitate two laden pushchairs to pass easily and for families to walk along together. Paths that suddenly narrow to less than 500mm or are covered in muddy puddles and broken paving stones. It is bad practice to put the community's recycling bins and paper chaser skips alongside the public toilets as this impedes pedestrian access to the toilets, plus the inevitable flock of traffic cones, generates a bad image and in the case of bottle banks appears to 'encourage' vandalism, resulting in smashed bottles being strewed all over the surrounding paths and car parks. A particularly worrying trend is putting recycling skips alongside APCs (Automatic Public Conveniences) as if to denote this is clearly the section for rubbish containers. The public oblige accordingly by adding to the pile dropping cans, fast food wrappers and other rubbish alongside, creating an ideal 'earthbox' spot for street urination.

Indeed the Gents is locked, or they won't/can't pay for the APC, the 'helpful' solution adopted by many men is street urination on the toilet walls or adjacent skips. Once a creature of habit knows where its earthbox is it will return to the same spot again and re-establish its territory markings.

Attention should be paid to micro-climatic issues. Windy locations should be avoided. Natural ventilation might be improved by careful siting in relation to predominant wind direction. Beware of frosty hollows because of freezing pipes. Consider likely problems of too much direct sunlight in terms of smells and hygiene. At the same time, a toilet's entrance should not face or back on to Mecca. Moslems in Accrington in Lancashire asked that the public toilets on their new housing estate should face away from Mecca and that the toilet bowls should not be towards or away from Mecca.

Crime Prevention Considerations

All these improvements should reduce the chances of criminal behaviour, because of increased visibility and natural surveillance. Toilet coverage by CCTV surveillance should be provided as part of the overall town centre management strategy where necessary but, of course, there should be someone on the other end actually watching and ready to respond as otherwise the public soon lose faith in such devices. There should be no blind corners, dark alleyways or tall bushes screening the toilets. Short prickly bushes around the walls may discourage graffiti and vandalism but they can also catch litter on their spikes so as with everything else there is a need for careful management. Good lighting both outside and inside the toilet is essential.

The toilets should be surrounded on all sides by clear paving or tarmac. Where there has to be a boundary demarcation, the use of open railings or spacer bricks is preferable to high hedges or solid walls. Entrances, as indicated, should face on to the main street and not be put around the back. Particularly in the case of the Ladies, there should be some sort of internal circulation zone so that women do not have to come straight out on to the street and so they do not have to wait uneasily on the pavement, and so they do not have to leave their pushchair, toddler, dog, bicycle and/or suitcase in public view while go to the loo.

Overall, attention should be given to the visual perceptions of people entering and exiting the building. Factors to consider include views in and out, issues of privacy, visibility and surveillance. Can users see who is lurking outside? Many women are wary of exiting APCS straight on to the street, and the inclusion of a spy hole would enable them to see if anyone is lurking outside, as found in some Far East toilet doors, would be a good idea.

Will users be dazzled by the sun on exiting, or will they face the grim prospect of fighting their way through dark undergrowth? Is the toilet block overlooked by surrounding buildings so that neighbours can see what is going on and keep an eye on the place? There is no ideal location or design that will solve crime. Maurice Broady, a sociologist disquieted by the apparently magical powers attributed to design stated, 'architectural design like music to a film, is complementary to human activity, it does not shape it' (Broady,1968). Likewise an impression that the toilet 'belongs' to the community and is under surveillance will improve the situation.

Signage

Ideally there should be a natural flow of pedestrian movement as people find toilets where they traditionally and intuitively expect them to be located, and others in doubt follow the

crowd. To avoid uncertainty, especially for overseas tourists, there should be adequate signage. This should say where the toilets are and how far, where the nearest available one is in the event of the one found being closed and what the opening hours are, and where alternatives and the nearest 24 hour toilet is located. A list of facilities available and extent of accessibility should also be included in respect of the needs of women, the disabled and those with pushchairs and babies. Signage should include internationally understood toilet symbols, and several languages in cosmopolitan areas. Whilst some local authorities now provide Braille signs these may be difficult to locate if up on a wall with no sensory or tactile trail provided to guide users to the facilities in the first place.

Parking and Traffic Control

At least three short term parking facilities should be provided for those specifically using the toilet with a redeemable voucher from the attendant for 10 minutes use. This may entail rerouting access roads and why not if it increases the chances of traffic passing close to the toilet block thus increasing natural surveillance. There are too many public toilets down side roads where traffic seldom passes. Pedestrians access to the facilities should be facilitated by zebra crossings or other traffic control means, particularly when toilets are located on traffic islands or on busy main roads. Busy road intersections are good locations in terms of personal safety, but it should be remembered they are potentially dangerous locations in terms of road safety. Safety rails to prevent users especially children rushing out into the traffic should be installed. This is important where toilet doors open directly on to the road as in the case of APCs.

Liaison with highways and road safety representatives is an essential as part of the overall design process. Many a traffic calming scheme and 'red route' no-stopping designation has neutered the toilets. Toilets should be integrated into the modern street pattern and into traffic management policy. Nowadays traffic engineers are very fond of introducing artificial barriers by means of speed bumps and chicanes so some additional space for toilet parking even on main roads can hardly be the cause of objection. On the outside walls of the toilet bicycle racks should be provided on the basis as of half as many spaces as there are cubicles. Covered 'parking places' for pushchairs (baby buggies, strollers) should be incorporated where possible as is the case in some parts of London. All facilities should ideally have attendants, as a building and its contents cannot defend itself.

A space should be left for dogs to be tethered while the owners partakes of the facilities. A dog water bowl should be provided or in the event of an unmanned toilet a self-filling ground level dog watering device should be provided. Disabled toilets should provide enough space for a guide dog (seeing dog) to accompany its owner into the toilet. A water fountain might also be provided prominently on the outside of the building. In larger facilities provision should be made to enable people with wheelchairs, pushchairs and luggage to access the toilet block fully with at least 1500 turning space on all main aisles and access points. A receptacle for 'sharps', for drug addicts should be included as the lesser of two evils.

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