



WEST MALLING PARISH COUNCIL

9 High Street, West Malling, Kent ME19 6QH

Telephone: 01732 870872

email: clerk@westmallingpc.org

website: www.westmallingpc.org

Clerk to the Parish Council: Claire Christmas

9th March 2022

Mr Styles
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Gibson Drive
Kings Hill
West Malling
Kent

Dear Mr Styles

Thank you for your letter to West Malling Parish Council dated 17th February, regarding the future of West Malling Public Toilets asking for my Council's current view.

The Council considered your letter at its full council meeting on Monday 7th March.

My members were pleased that it was agreed at a site meeting with 2 Borough Councillors and Parish Councillors Stapleton and Dean, that the existing site is no longer appropriate. Mrs Dean therefore made £5,000 available from her KCC Member's Fund to reopen the toilets whilst an alternative site and future funding were discussed with the Borough Council. It is disappointing that no further action progress been taken by TMBC in the last five months in this respect. My Council is keen to progress negotiations and urges the Borough Council to engage with us.

The Council members were unanimous in holding to the following views.

The Parish Council believes that

- a. the particular nature of West Malling's economic and civic role as the Borough's largest retail and business centre outside of Tonbridge economically and socially means that it is appropriate for Public Conveniences to be funded from the Borough Council Tax and not by the 1,100 households in the Parish. We have Civic Parades on St George's Day, the Remembrance Day Parade, and national events such as the Jubilees and Royal weddings have been celebrated within the closed High Street. The Winter Festival, Farmers' Market and Charity Markets also take place in the High Street. These events attract between 400 and over 3,000 people each.
- b. closure of the Public Toilets does result in discrimination towards people within the protected characteristics, the elderly, disabled and women in particular. There are no toilets in St Mary's Church and several residents have sadly reported their inability to attend church services as a result. In addition, the personal feedback from Malling

residents of several surrounding villages, is attached. These demonstrate that many people have a range of medical conditions including pregnancy, diabetes, bladder and kidney problems, endometriosis, crohns disease, and antibiotic intolerance, which all require more frequent use of toilets. Many residents reported the closure of the toilets therefore meant their shopping, exercise and trips to meet friends were more restricted or ceased , and that they became less confident, and more lonely as a result.

- c. for some people the closure presented particular problems because of their daily schedules. School children reported needing the toilets after an hour's journey on the bus coming home from Tonbridge at the end of the day. The owner of a bus company commented that toilets were no longer available for drivers' use during their stand still times, which for several bus routes are commonly in West Malling. The High Street bus layby is a pick up/setting down point early and late during the day. The owner of the Farmers' Market was particularly concerned that stall holders are setting up in the High Street from 7am when no other facilities are available, and hygiene is essential for food producers in particular. Our street cleaner and other outdoor workers were also forced to seek facilities elsewhere which involved long detours during the day.
- d. the reduction in people coming to West Malling resulted in several businesses reporting that their customers numbers had reduced. A number of people said that increased public urination in the street and car parks which they had seen meant they were no longer comfortable in West Malling.

With regard to alternative premises, the only alternative 24/7 toilet is at Parkfoot garage, a 15 minutes walk away. Manor Park public toilets have limited opening hours and the car park is charged. Discussions through the Chamber of Commerce regarding shops making their facilities available resulted in no offers being made. The point was frequently put that small independent shops do not have space to accommodate the general public. Many residents are reluctant to ask for permission to use the toilets, particularly in pubs and betting shops. There are no toilets in the church currently. The Borough Council's assessment of alternative toilets in other premises was incomplete, on its own admission, and incorrectly records that there are toilets at the church.

My Councillors do not wish to undo the arrangements made with other Councils on toilet provision and closure. West Malling Parish Council does however believe that for the reasons given above, West Malling's particular needs and limited Council Tax base, justifies levying the charge to all residents of the Borough. We therefore ask for the Borough Council to fulfil the resolution of the Street Scene and Environment Advisory Board of 11th Feb 2019 which states

" If the Parish/Town Council do not accept responsibility for the future operation of the toilets, the Borough Council will work in partnership with the Parish/Town Council to help identify suitable alternative publicly accessible toilets in the near vicinity."

Yours sincerely,

Claire Christmas
Clerk to West Malling Parish Council