

## Overview of BWF Toilet Campaign

I have been asked to give you a brief history of the campaign for better toilet facilities. I will therefore be outlining the organisations and individuals who have been campaigning on this issue for the past few years, the issues which are raised for both the individual and the wider community as a result of the inadequate toilet provision with emphasis on how this affects women in particular.

The Womens Forum's campaign is one of many throughout the country and, in fact throughout the world started by individuals who wish to improve their access to clean, and safe toilet facilities.

The British Toilet Association has been campaigning for better public toilet provision for the past 7 years – the 'Loo of the Year' award has been running for nearly twenty.

The provision of adequate sanitation was identified as one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The report stated that 'sanitation is dignity'

In May 2002, UWE local researcher and campaigner Clara Greed, was invited to the Annual British Toilet Association Conference, as part of her campaign for better toilet facilities. She spoke about the importance of maintaining a global vision for public toilet provision, arguing that they are a missing link in achieving sustainable and accessible cities for all.

In June last year, moves began in the Transport Industry (primarily amongst bus drivers) who began to work together and, with their local councils to identify the toilet provision available 'on route' and how it could be improved particularly in terms of cleanliness and safety. Last September the International Transport Federation took on the campaign and in October a worldwide email and fax storm resulted in toilet and shower facilities being built for the use of women lorry drivers at Folkestone Harbour. The campaign continues to work to

- 2-

improve facilities at a local level and change legislation at a national level though progress is slow. For the transport workers it is an issue of dignity, public health and being 'Free to Pee'!

In November last year, the British Toilet Association published a survey on the use and availability of public toilets. It found that on average women take three times as long to use the toilet as men. We also use the toilet differently in that we use toilets as a place to socialise, repair our make-up and take a breather. It also explained that the lack of toilet facilities for women in municipal buildings (such as older theatres) was due to the fact that when they were built it was deemed unseemly for women to go to such places!

In Bristol we also have an aging population. Added to that 1:5 women and 1:10 men will suffer incontinence problems at some time in their lives.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> July this year Phil Woolas, MP spoke at a conference hosted by the British Toilet Association and the Keep Britain Tidy campaign. He also quoted the UN Millennium report which states that 'sanitation is dignity'.

In his analysis he stated that there are four aspects that make the provision of public toilets such an important issue.

1. The effect on tourism. Both the lack of provision and poorly maintained facilities can have a very negative impact and reduce the inclination of tourists to return.
2. The environmental problem which nearly every town with any night life wakes up to every morning. Where there is no provision, or it is difficult to access, people simply urinate in – or worse, foul – the street and this is true across the country.
3. The disabled or parents with young children and babies face particular problems when they cannot find a decent public toilet, one that is clean, accessible and safe to use. A sub-standard one is often worse than not having one at all. And that applies to around 1

- 3 -

in 6 of us if you take a snapshot of the population, and most of us at some time in our lives.

4. There are serious issues of public health and public safety from activities associated with public toilets, poor maintenance and the consequences of not having any facilities at all.

We clearly have problems in Bristol with public toilet provision. There are more toilets for men than for women (eg the weekend urinals on the centre and the urinals at Blackboy Hill). Many of you will be aware of the recent closures at Crow Lane, Henbury, Sea Mills Square and Avonmouth. However, we should also acknowledge that compared to neighbouring councils we are extremely lucky. In Bath there is no public toilet provision at all, in South Gloucestershire there are just 23 public toilet blocks. Nationally the last audit which was taken in 1999/2000 showed that in the previous ten years London had lost 43% of its public toilet provision – nationally the figure was 60%.

We therefore need to be clear why we should be getting involved with this campaign, its aims and the fact that the adequate provision of public toilets is not going to be solved overnight.

So why should we get involved? There are the issues of dignity, public health, and the effect on tourism not to mention the issue of equality of access.

Our purpose tonight therefore is to begin this process. To develop a women's perspective on public toilets, to share practical ideas about how we can improve the provision of toilets within Bristol, raise concerns and look at where we go from here. To decide whether we just wish to focus on provisions in Bristol or join the call for a change in legislation which will force the government, local councils and businesses to work together to improve public toilet provision throughout the country.

As the transport workers will tell you – this is about being 'Free to Pee'!