Summary Notes of Community Meeting re

ROWEN PUBLIC TOILETS

**Held at**

**Rowen Memorial Hall**

Thursday 30th January 2020

**Present**: Cllr Goronwy Edwards, Dennis Oliver, Janet Haworth, Helen Hawkins, GJ, Lisa Brand, Dilys Phillips, Eileen Burtonwood, John Burtonwood, Kevin Slattery (Conwy Valley Ramblers Association), Charles Hawkins, Jim Hayward, Penny Wingfield, CMH, Gwynfor Evans, Susan, Rob Kenwell, Sue Kenwell, John Anderson, Ann Anderson, Oswald Jones, Judy Boddington, Cynthia Thomas, Ryan Thomas, Heddwen Roberts, Carol Miles, Michael Wingrove, Jimmy Logan, Pam Thomas, Annabel Meayers, Yvonne Townley, Helen, Sue Beaumont + 1.

**Apologies**: Steven Teale, Ann Williams, Mark Crane and Sean Brand.

**Introduction**

The meeting was chaired by Janet Haworth who welcomed and thanked everyone for coming. It was well attended with 34 people present. She explained that Steve Teale was very sorry that he was unable to attend the evening due to illness and that his preliminary document outlining his summary of findings was available to everyone. *(\*Secretary’s note: Document attached and available on-line).*

**Background**

Charles Hawkins gave some background to the meeting: The Committee was following up on open action points from the previous committee and the many comments made over the years in Community Group Meetings concerning the poor condition of the toilets, particularly the exterior. A request was made in 2018 *(\*By Peter McFadden)* to ERF to allow the community to paint the outside *(\* Permission was given for this last year once ERF had replaced the fascia boards, a date would be provided for that work detail. See GCRCG Minutes dated 4th April 2019).* The conversation developed further, Janet & Charles met with Steve T on site *(\*with prior helpful input from Cynthia)* and he explained that Conwy County currently has responsibility for a number of public toilets across the county. There are several options for the future of these toilets which range from closure to complete refurbishment and handing over to a community group. There would be opportunities for consultation with a community regarding future changes. Steve had welcomed the opportunity to talk with us all in Rowen and tonight’s meeting was scheduled to be the next stage in this process but instead would need to be a more general discussion.

Cllr Goronwy offered an explanation of the County Council budget setting process.

He also highlighted the following: -

1. The funding for Rowen Public Toilets will continue for the coming budget year under a joint agreement between the Conwy County Borough and Caerhun Community Councils. No commitment could be made beyond that until funding from the Welsh government was known.
2. Environment, Roads and Facilities (ERF) is responsible for a range of facilities (including toilets). This department will have to find £1 million in savings this year.
3. There will be community consultation regarding any changes to services.
4. The current annual operating costs for Rowen Public Toilets are £4.5k.
5. The County Council could upgrade the toilets to 21st century standards (if other funding can be found) and hand them over to other parties. He described how this has worked in the Valley and other areas eg with Community Councils or Community Groups.
6. From 1st April 2020 public toilets will be exempt from rates.
7. The Rowen Community needs to decide itself whether the toilets are important to us, what are our priorities?
8. Caerhun Community Council are unlikely to put extra money towards managing/owning toilets in Rowen in the future.
9. An annual subsidy of £500 can be given by County Council to any organisation that opens its facilities for use by the public.
10. As cabinet member for Tourism and the Economy, he made the case for funding possibly being available through the Snowdonia National Park Authority’s Carneddau project.
11. If ever the toilets closed the building would be demolished and might lead to more car parking space.

**Some Key Points Made**

* Walkers and Cyclists

Public toilets at the beginning and end of a route are very important.

The Conwy Valley Ramblers Association regularly walk from Rowen with an average of 15 people per walk. Accessible, free toilets give a very welcoming, positive attitude about a place. During winter they sometimes are able to use the hall facilities.

* Usage

It is important to know how much the toilets are actually used to help plan ahead.

Ryan reported that not as many people use these facilities now as say 4-5 years ago and certainly the village doesn’t get the coachloads of visitors it did in the past.

Toilet roll usage can give an informal indication of numbers.

Steve T indicated in earlier conversations that there are tools to objectively count users which could be installed in the Rowen toilets.

* Signage

It was noted that the road sign for the toilets is inaccurate as there is not a toilet for the disabled in the current block and they are not open all year.

* Considerations

We should consider the consequences of public toilets being unavailable in the village.

And do we want to be an open, welcoming village by providing these facilities?

* Risk

Many felt it inappropriate for a transient village committee to take responsibility for managing or owning public conveniences. It was also recognized that there would be a considerable financial burden going forwards.

* Other options within the village were suggested: Memorial Hall, Chapel, Pub, Campsite.
* Could the current structure be replaced by a single, low-maintenance, environmentally friendly toilet?
* The pub and campsite are unable to provide public toilets safely.

* Is it possible to make the memorial hall toilets “fit for purpose” eg with external access and appropriate security measures, whilst protecting hall users? Currently it is often used by walkers in the morning whilst the newspapers are being collected.
* The secretary emphasised that no decision was being made tonight; that the committee were simply facilitating a community discussion, to look at different options available to us and to try to understand what the village as a whole wanted in relation to public toilets.

It was important at this stage not to shut down any ideas too quickly but to consider the value in each suggestion along with the real challenges they may present.

Even though there is no immediate threat of closure, given the budgetary cuts the Councils are facing, it is important for us as a community to take the time to decide what we would like in the future regarding publicly accessible toilets and be prepared in advance for any future changes.

* Chapel update

Dilys reported that the plans to improve the Chapel buildings and facilities had been on hold but that they were being ‘resurrected’. However, permission would be needed from the owners, The Presbyterian Church in Wales, to authorize such expenditure. This might not be forthcoming given a congregation of 12 and thus the uncertainty about the future of the Chapel. Even if it did go ahead it might not be able to provide public toilets for general usage.

* There were some people who felt that the Community Group Committee weren’t listening to the community and were following their own agenda.
* There was a fear expressed that the very discussion of the future of the toilets could precipitate their closure. And strong feeling from a minority present that the Committee were interfering in matters that did not concern them.
* It was highlighted that grant-awarding bodies require a 25-30 year guarantee of lease for monies going towards building projects.
* Views expressed to committee members by those unable to attend:

Mark Crane supported keeping accessible toilets. He felt it would be a great shame if they were closed in the future because everything else has been shut and he didn’t want to see more things being lost from the village.

Another resident wants to see the toilets kept in the village and would be willing to volunteer on a management committee and rotas, if that was the outcome.

*\*Ann Williams asked that her views be recorded: Ann is a disabled lady living independently in the village and strongly supports retaining the toilets.*

**Straw Polls**

On the evening…

22 people (about 2/3 of those present) supported making a charge (20p) for use of the toilets.

It is recognized that this would not generate a substantial amount towards running costs.

32 people (the vast majority) supported the retention of the toilets on the proviso that it was owned and managed by an established, legal body.

There was overwhelming support for improving the appearance of the toilet block whilst recognizing that the interior is functional.

The Chair of GCRCG observed that knowing funding is secure for the coming year gives us space to consider the best way forward for the village. Another date can be arranged for Steven Teale to come and talk with Rowen community, if that would be appropriate.

The meeting was closed at 8:30pm with thanks again to everyone for coming.

***\*POST MEETING NOTE***

***The committee decided not to pursue further developments of the toilet block and have advised Steven Teale of the outcome of the meeting.***