

## **ROWEN PUBLIC TOILETS: FUTURE OPTIONS**

### **BACKGROUND**

The public toilets in Rowen are owned by Conwy County Borough Council, (CCBC). Along with other public toilets in Conwy they were closed by the Council in September 2024 to cut costs. The Rowen toilets had been open daily from the beginning of April to the end of October.

CCBC advised that the annual costs of keeping the toilets open were around £2,500, broken down as follows:

Water	£33.63
Electricity	approx £500
Consumables	£455
Cleaning/opening and closing	approx £1500

Insurance and maintenance would be additional costs.

Although the toilets are owned by the County Council the Community Council had responsibility for the day to day management and CCBC would refund the costs to the Community Council at the end of each year.

All Community Councils whose public toilets were scheduled to be closed were offered the opportunity to take them over with three options for a contribution by CCBC: either 10% of the costs, or provision of the supplies or a £500 grant. Caerhun Community Council declined to take over the toilets and has consistently taken the view that they are unwilling to raise the precept in Ty'n y Groes, Llanbedr y Cennin and Talybont in order to pay for a facility in Rowen.

If no-one else takes over the toilets CCBC will either sell or demolish the building.

### **Survey of local residents**

Rowen Community Group delivered a short survey to all houses in Rowen to gauge whether there was support to keep the toilets open and to ask for suggestions on the way forward. Respondents could also reply online.

31 responses were received. 25 were in favour of keeping the toilets open. 6 were against.

Suggestions to keep the toilets open included charging for entry, asking for a contribution from the Community Council precept and identifying grants for financial support.

Respondents who did not support keeping the existing public toilets open suggested upgrading the toilet facilities in the Memorial Hall or the Chapel to make them available to the public.

If the toilets are not reopened there were concerns that the building would be an eyesore or a health hazard and that it would need to be either repurposed or demolished.

### **Information from other communities**

Local communities who run their own public toilets were contacted for information on how they do it and what their experience has been.

#### **Llangernyw**

Before taking over the toilets they wrote a business plan, set up a private company and formed a committee to run the toilets with a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. The Community Council bought the building for £1 and every year the committee receive £500 from CCBC and from the Community Council precept. Local support to keep the toilets open is very strong and the toilets are cleaned by volunteers. There is a donation box for people using the toilet. They have a lot of visitors to see the famous yew tree and the money from donations is used to buy cleaning supplies. The committee do fundraising events to raise the additional money required.

#### **Bro Machno**

The toilets are owned and run by the Community Council. When they took them over the County Council refurbished the building and installed solar panels. They charge a 30p entry fee payable by coins or contactless. The contactless device was installed with a grant from the Park Authority but has a monthly charge and due to low footfall they rarely receive a payout from it. The toilets are cleaned by volunteers. Despite the refurbishment the Community Council has had to pay several thousand pounds to maintain the building.

#### **Dolwyddelan**

The toilets are owned and managed by Dolwyddelan Community Council. The legal process to transfer ownership was very lengthy, although this was partly due to COVID. The toilets are open all year and costs for cleaning, materials and utilities are around £220/month or £2,640/year. The toilets are coin operated with a 30p charge. They have a card machine outside the disabled toilet but this has never worked. Installing a new card machine would cost around £250-750 and would be regulated by money laundering and credit control legislation, requiring the names of 3 councillors on the paperwork. Receipts from the coin machine are around £200/month and the shortfall is made up from the Community Council precept.

The key points from those who are successfully running their own public toilets are:

- Their Community Councils have all taken over ownership of the building and either run the toilets or provide financial support to volunteers to do this.
- Entry charges are unlikely to cover running costs and any shortfall has to come from the Community Council or fundraising.
- Taking over the toilets also means following a legal process and taking on legal obligations.
- Depending on the building there could be significant maintenance costs.

## **POSSIBLE OPTIONS**

### **Option A: Keep the existing toilets open**

Caerhun Community Council have said that they do not want to raise the precept to fund an amenity which will only benefit Rowen. If the community wanted to keep the toilets open without support from the Community Council this would involve:

Following a legal process to transfer ownership of the building and set up a committee to manage the toilets. This means at least 3 people would need to volunteer to take an active role in managing the toilets and be willing to sign up to the legal obligations. They would need to be supported by other volunteers.

Raising funds to run and maintain the building. There are grants which communities can apply for and it might be an option for example to apply for a grant to install solar panels. But any grant application would need to be backed up by a clear and sustainable business plan, and even with this it is unlikely that we would be able to secure grant funding to cover all the costs. Funds would need to be raised from events or other sources.

Rowen Community Group already raises funds through car boot sales to fund other community activities. It does not have the capacity to take on extra fundraising and ownership and management of the toilets.

Although there is support for the idea of keeping the public toilets open, it is not clear that there would be enough volunteers to back this up with sustained practical action. If the toilets were taken over from the Council without a truly sustainable business model it would fail at some point. This could leave things in a worse position than now if the toilets had to close and the new owners were left with the maintenance and disposal costs of the building.

**Recommendation:** Inform CCBC that the local community will not take over the public toilets.

### **Option B: Upgrade the toilet facilities at the Chapel**

Respondents to the public survey referred to plans to create a link building with coffee making facilities and accessible toilets at the Chapel. They asked if these could be taken forward with a heritage lottery fund grant to create a second community space and visitor centre with displays of our local history and sale of local crafts.

Although planning permission was given for the project it did not obtain the approval of the church authority, which owns the building, and the plans could not be taken further. Now, the dwindling number and demographic of the congregation, coupled with the restrictions imposed on the adaptation of listed buildings, mean that it is not feasible for the chapel to provide a public toilet facility.

### **Option C: Make toilet facilities in the Memorial Hall accessible to the public**

Respondents to the public survey have proposed that with some modifications to the Memorial Hall it would be possible to provide toilet facilities accessible to the public while retaining the security of the rest of the building.

This would incur some costs, but it may be possible to receive an annual grant of up to £500 from the County Council under the Community Toilet Scheme which rewards businesses for making their toilets open to the public.

**Recommendation:** Memorial Hall Committee to consider whether toilet facilities can be provided to the public. The Committee have confirmed that they are willing to consider this.

### **Option D: Make toilet facilities in the Ty Gwyn accessible to the public**

The Community Toilet Scheme is funded and managed by Conwy County Borough Council and allows the public to use toilet facilities in approved local businesses during their opening hours. The toilets can be used free of charge and without any expectation that users will make a purchase or use their services.

The owners of the Ty Gwyn have been given information about the Community Toilet Scheme and how to apply and they have confirmed that they will consider this.