

CHANGING PLACES PUBLIC CONVENIENCE INVESTMENT PROGRAMME JUNE 2022

Summary: This report follows the recent report considered by Cabinet on 29 November 2021 in respect of the Council's continued focus to improve the standard and quality of the District Council's public conveniences as a key element of the district's local infrastructure.

That report allocated a further £500,000 of investment in development and refurbishment of sites at Sheringham and North Walsham to include the provision of Changing Places facilities.

This report now provides an update in respect of the Council's successful £300k grant application, which was submitted last September to help support delivery of Changing Places facilities across the district, and seeks approval for the recommended scheme investments.

Options considered: Do nothing.

Explore transfer of public convenience provision to town and parish councils.

Continue the investment programme to make improvements to the quality of the public convenience portfolio.

Conclusions: In conclusion, it is recommended that the Cabinet agree to the officer proposals for the further Changing Places investments at the locations identified and that the capital budgets are updated to reflect the additional funding.

Recommendations: **It is recommended that Cabinet resolve to;**

- **Agree to the officer proposals for the further Changing Places investments at the locations identified;**
- **Agree to the recommended changes to the capital budget identified within section 10 the report; and**
- **Delegate authority to the Director for Resources to develop and agree governance and reporting arrangements with the Broads Authority and funding providers.**

Reasons for Recommendations: To allocate the grant funding awarded to various schemes across the district to continue with the Council's investment in Changing Places facilities.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information and which are not published elsewhere)

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Cabinet Member(s) Cllr Eric Seward	Ward(s) affected
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The District Council has made significant investment over recent years in its public convenience portfolio. A previous report brought to Cabinet in September 2018 secured initial capital funding of £600,000 for investment in the Council's public convenience facilities at Bacton, Walcott, Lushers Passage, Sheringham and in the proposed provision of new / replacement facilities in Wells and Fakenham. This has since been supplemented by further provision of £137,000 to give a total project budget of £737,000.
- 1.2 A further report considered by Cabinet on 29 November 2021 focused on a more strategic approach to the provision of these facilities and allocated a further £500,000 of investment in development and refurbishment of sites at The Leas, Sheringham and North Walsham to include the provision of Changing Places facilities.
- 1.3 Works completed and scheduled to date include;
- Refurbishment and re-modelling of the following facilities;
 - Lushers Passage, Sheringham
 - Coast Road, Bacton
 - Coast Road, Walcott
 - Significant upgrading, remodelling and provision of Changing Places facilities at the following locations;
 - North Norfolk Information Centre, Cromer (completed December 2019)
 - Stearmans Yard, Wells-next-the-Sea (scheduled for completion for summer 2022)
 - Queens Road, Fakenham (scheduled for completion for summer 2022)
- 1.4 At its meeting of October 2017 the Cabinet stated that it would wish to try to provide a Changing Place facility in each of the District's seven principal towns – either directly or in partnership with a private provider or the third sector, so as to meet this specialist need and increase the attraction of the District to all visitors.

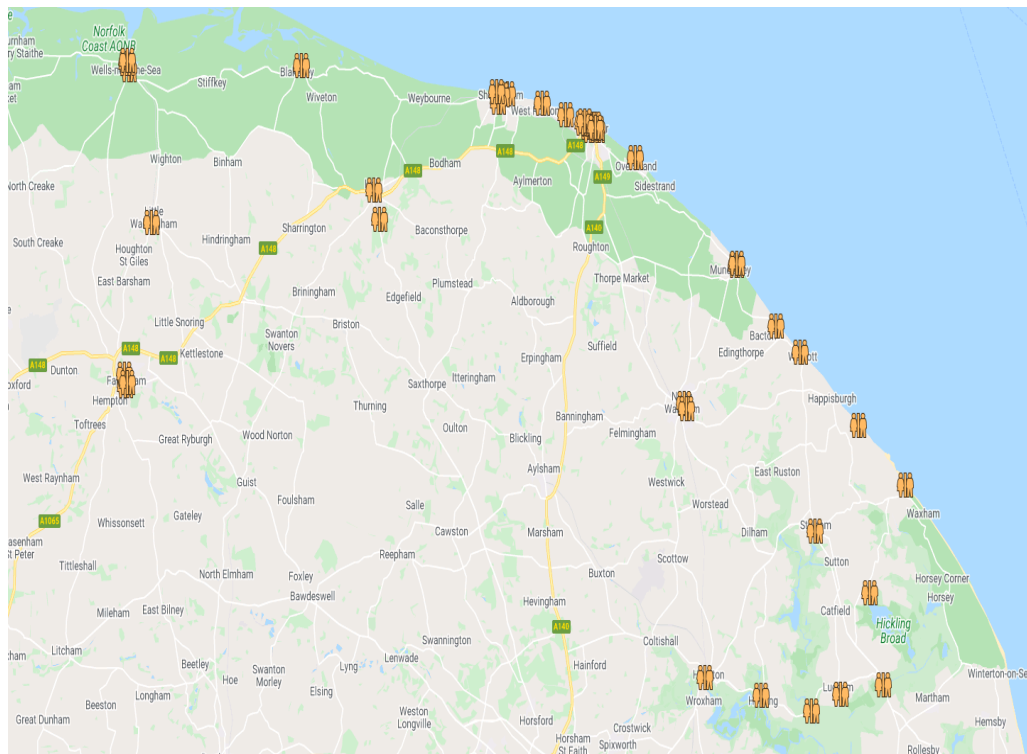
- 1.5 The subsequent report in September 2018 outlined the Council's intent in wishing to provide good quality public toilet facilities in locations across the District, recognising that such facilities are key local infrastructure and support the District's thriving tourism economy; building on the District's reputation as being a first class visitor destination.
- 1.6 This phase of investment will, by the end of this financial year, see the completion and delivery of three new Changing places facilities within the district, being located in Cromer, Wells-next-the-Sea and Fakenham.
- 1.7 This report looks to update members in respect of a recent grant award by the Government to help support the provision of Changing Places facilities and makes recommendations regarding further investment at the locations identified and updates to the capital programme to reflect the new funding stream.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council has consistently supported the provision of public toilets in the district, acknowledging the elderly demographic of the area, support for the tourism industry and the increasing demand for accessible facilities. Even though the provision of public conveniences is a non-statutory function for local authorities, the Council currently operates 38 public conveniences across the district at key resort and town centre locations, including the Broads. Of these, 35 are sited on Council owned property with 3 being on private land leased to the Council. These three are at East Runton, Pauls Lane, Overstrand and Hickling Staithe.
- 2.2 Whilst the Council sees the provision as important, even key to providing infrastructure to support our tourism, leisure and cultural activities, the cost to the Council is significant with the 2021/22 outturn being nearly £780,000. As a discretionary service this leaves the Council with a choice about its provision in the context of decreasing central government funding and budgetary pressures.
- 2.3 The provision of public toilet facilities in North Norfolk spans many decades with facilities in the Broad's villages, seaside resorts and several key market towns and has traditionally been widespread, supporting users of small independent shops as well as busy tourism locations. Many people feel that toilet provision is key to supporting and promoting outdoor activities such as walking, boating and other sporting recreation in a significantly rural area where other provision may be limited.
- 2.4 Many of the facilities are located in key locations such as car parks or high streets and have become an expected provision by many tourists and residents, particularly North Norfolk's aging population. This provision of public toilets, over some 60+ years, has resulted in an array of assets, many that no longer reflect current public expectation of service provision. Small buildings struggle to comply with current Disabled Disability Act (DDA) standards and despite ongoing refurbishments to update outdated sanitary wear and plumbing, high usage and vandalism makes ongoing maintenance frequent and costly.

- 2.5 Servicing remote and diverse facilities has its challenges, as does the operational issues of a managing facilities over a district spreading some 360 square miles (960 sq/km) and these costs are easy to evidence but, in several cases, where the Council has sought to rationalise or reduce provision, there has been very strong opposition to such proposals.
- 2.6 Maintenance of the provision, such as minor repairs and emergency response, is generally undertaken in-house as part of the Council's Asset Management programme by the Property Services Team. The small team of maintenance operatives is able to undertake works seven days a week when necessary which is very important during peak holiday periods when blockages and breakages can be frequent. Major refurbishments are contracted out but managed by the same team. On a day to day basis, NNDC manages a cleansing contract with Serco to undertake regular cleaning and reporting of maintenance issues.

Figure 1 – location of Council operated public conveniences



- 2.7 A draft Strategy document on the Council's Public Conveniences was presented to Cabinet in November 2021 and work in relation to this is currently being undertaken by a working party of the Overview and Scrutiny committee prior to reporting to Cabinet with recommendations. The Strategy provides a framework within which to make objective, informed decisions about the future direction of the service and the stock and makes a number of recommendations regarding further engagement with the public and collection of evidence to support decision making.
- 2.8 It provides the basis of a vision for service delivery and improvement, assesses the current situation and ambitions for the future in terms of service development and delivery and then considers a high-level implementation plan.

3. Changing Places provision

- 3.1 Where previously the Council have sought to keep DDA compliant facilities available through the RADAR key system, more recently there has been a drive for public provision of more inclusive [Changing Places facilities](#).
- 3.2 The Changing Places Consortium campaigns for public toilets for people with significant/or complex health conditions, that are spacious and clean, with suitable equipment including a changing bench (adult sized), mobile hoist, space for up to two carers and centrally placed toilet and screen.
- 3.3 According to the consortium, there are as many as 250,000 people nationwide who would benefit from this type of facility. Anecdotally, it would seem many people organise their holidays and trips out around the provision of such facilities.
- 3.4 The Council has an aspiration to provide one of these facilities in each resort and market town if possible, the first was opened as part of the Cromer NNIC refurbishment at the end of 2019.

4. Changing Places grant funding

- 4.1 On 29 July 2021 the government announced funding proposals for a £30m Changing Places Toilet (CPTs) investment programme. Local authorities (district councils and unitary authorities) were invited to lodge Expressions of Interest (EOIs) in this programme by 26th September 2021 to receive funding. Every local authority that opted in to this programme was able to receive capital funding equivalent to the average cost of installing at least one Changing Places toilet in their area (based on cost average assumption of £40k).
- 4.2 A Changing Places grant funding application was submitted on behalf of the authority in September 2021 and further information in respect of the grant funding can be accessed through the government's website [here](#).
- 4.3 The application was based on investment in a number of locations across the district, which led to a bid submission with a value of £600k. This was based on the maximum potential as per the bid of 10 locations with an estimated value of £60k each (please note that the funding is just to deliver Changing Places facilities and not for full refurbishments).
- 4.4 On 24 March 2022, the final allocations were announced and we were fortunate enough to be awarded £300k, which was 50% of our original bid but the eighth joint highest allocation nationally. The target is for this money to be spent by 31 March 2024.
- 4.5 Part of the bid submission included funding support for the following schemes;

Currently under construction

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|----|------------------------|------------|
| 1. | Fakenham - Queens Road | NNDC asset |
| 2. | Wells - Stearmans Yard | NNDC asset |

Budget approved – delivery 2022/23

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|----|---------------------------------|------------|
| 3. | Sheringham - The Lees | NNDC asset |
| 4. | North Walsham – Vicarage Street | NNDC asset |

- 4.6 The government is keen to see early delivery and drawdown of this funding, with the target date for completion being 31 March 2024. It is therefore recommended that as these schemes are already progressing, £240k of the grant (4 facilities @ £60k each) is allocated to these facilities which will free up some of the Council's own capital resources for further investment. The capital programme will need updating to reflect this revised funding position.
- 4.7 This would leave a grant funding balance of £60k available for other schemes. The original cabinet aspiration was to have one Changing Place facility on each of the seven main towns. Following delivery of the programme outlined above, of the seven originally identified this would still leave Stalham and Holt without this provision.
- 4.8 As part of the bid submission process authorities were encouraged to discuss and work with various stakeholders to see what might be possible to deliver in partnership with third and private sector bodies and further information regarding these initial discussions is provided below.

5. Additional work proposals - Stalham

- 5.1 As part of the original bid submission discussions were held with the Broads Authority regarding the provision of a Changing Place facility at the Museum of the Broads, located at The Pools, Staithe Road, Stalham.
- 5.2 The Broads Authority are currently working on delivery of a Lottery funded project [Water, Mills and Marshes](#) and as part of this they are doing a lot of work to improve access and opportunities for our local communities to the Broads. Specifically, they have been planning on the installation of Changing Places facilities around the Broads.
- 5.3 The Broads Authority were provisionally able to allocate match funding of £15k from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support the delivery in partnership with the district council of this facility and this has now been approved.
- 5.4 It is therefore recommended that 75% match funding is provided to this project from the grant balance based on a maximum assumed cost of £60k. It is proposed that the maximum contribution from the Council would be capped at £45k, which would then leave a remaining grant balance of £15k.
- 5.5 In respect of this proposal as the facility would be owned and operated by a partner the Council would not incur any ongoing liability in respect of annual revenue operating costs as these would be the responsibility of the Broads Authority.
- 5.6 The Council would need to investigate how this funding would be provided and discuss any governance arrangements in respect on grant draw down and claims with the funders.

6. Additional work proposals - Holt

- 6.1 Discussions were also held with Holt Town Council as they had an aspiration to deliver a Changing Places facility at their public convenience at Church Street. However for a number of reasons, including excessive budget costs and accessibility (best practice recommends parking provision immediately adjacent to Changing Places facilities which was not feasible at this location) this option is no longer being considered.
- 6.2 Dialogue has however been ongoing with the Town Council regarding trying to identify an alternative location and the current site under investigation is the public convenience block on the Albert Street car park.
- 6.3 This would address the issue of accessibility and car parking and the Property Services team are currently investigating how it might be possible to remodel the facilities to support the provision of a Changing Places unit at this location.
- 6.4 Should these investigations demonstrate this to be a viable solution it is recommended that the balance of the grant funding (£15k) be allocated to this scheme with the Council funding the additional £45k for these improvements directly. Should there be any underspends from the other grant funded facilities then these could be redirected to this scheme to reduce the Council's direct investment.

7. Additional work proposals – other discussions

- 7.1 There were further discussions held with other stakeholders in relation to the Changing Places grant funding but unfortunately the allocation which has been made is not sufficient to support all of the proposals.
- 7.2 Pensthorpe Natural Park expressed an interest but unfortunately they had no match funding ability and no detailed development plans. The Council is also developing facilities at the present time in Fakenham so this option is not recommended at the present time.
- 7.3 Similarly Cromer Town Council were keen to consider the development of a Changing Places facility within North Lodge Park but without car parking provision this raises similar challenges to the Church Road proposal in Holt.
- 7.4 The District Council has also already delivered a Changing Places facility within Cromer at the North Norfolk Information Centre. Officers feel that if there is to be any further provision within the town then at the present time this would be best located on Runton Road car park where the Town Council currently provide a mobile unit to support the carnival during the summer. There is the potential for consideration to be given to this proposal as part of the proposed Levelling Up bid for Cromer.
- 7.5 It is worth noting that a second round of Changing Places funding has been proposed by the Government although the timescales for this are not yet known. There would therefore be a further opportunity for the Council to bid for additional funding and then some of the other schemes which have not been funded through this phase could potentially be given further consideration should a second bid be successful. This would however also need to be balanced against any future investment considerations which the

District Council may have in respect of high footfall tourist areas such as Mundesley and Sea Palling.

8. Corporate Plan Objectives

- 8.1 There are two elements of the Corporate Plan supported by this report, the first directly supports Objective 7 under the 'Quality of Life' theme which includes the following;

Public convenience investment programme to include a Changing Places facility in each of our seven principal settlements

7.1. Maintain the quality and accessibility of public conveniences, ensuring they are suitable to the needs of the community and visitors to the area.

- 8.2 The second comes under Objective 1 of the 'Financial Sustainability and Growth' theme which includes the following;

Continuously reviewing our service delivery arrangements, fees and charges to ensure that we deliver value for money

1.2 Develop a public convenience policy to identify ways in which the current £600k a year spend on the provision of public conveniences (to serve users of town centres, recreational and visitor attractions) can be funded, so that good quality provision can be maintained whilst providing council tax payers with value for money.

- 8.3 Agreeing to the proposals outlined within this report will further increase the Changing Places facilities within the District and allocations at Stalham and Holt will help achieve the aspiration to deliver one such facility within each of the seven main towns.

9. Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 9.1 While this continued improvement programme represents a significant amount to invest in a non-statutory service there is an expectation from residents and visitors alike that there is good provision of public conveniences across the District.

- 9.2 However, this level of investment will see a significant improvement to the highlighted facilities, enhancing the Council's reputation and ambition as a quality tourism destination of choice and significantly increasing accessibility across a number of our towns.

10. Financial and Resource Implications

- 10.1 The capital amendments and additional funding requirements are outlined below;

(a) To switch £240k of the current NNDC budget provision for the following facilities to take advantage of the new grant allocation and help support early drawdown of the funding;

- Fakenham - Queens Road
- Wells - Stearmans Yard

- Sheringham - The Lees
- North Walsham – Vicarage Street

(b) To make a new partnership allocation of £45k, to be funded from the new grant provision, to the Broads Authority

(c) To establish a new £60k budget to support the provision of a new Changing places facility at Albert Street in Holt, with £15k to be funded from the balance of the grant and the remaining £45k to come from the Capital Projects Reserve

10.2 As £240k of the funding represents a switch between NNDC's resources and the new grant allocation there is no change to the overall budget total in respect of this. The £45k allocation to Stalham and the £60k allocation to Holt do however represent additional budget provision (£105k) with £60k of this being funded from the balance of the grant and £45k coming from the Capital Projects Reserve.

10.3 The cost of operating the Council's public toilets is split across revenue budgets managed by Property Services; which cover general maintenance and running costs including repairs and utilities and a separate budget, forming part of the waste contract, which is assigned for daily cleansing. In addition, there have been several capital investment programmes approved for refurbishments over previous years.

10.4 It is important to note that, in addition to the capital investment costs the provision of Changing Places facilities will increase the revenue operating costs of the facilities. This is due to the fact that Changing Places facilities do not remove the requirement for us to provide disabled facilities so these are in addition to this.

10.5 There are therefore additional costs in respect of cleansing, repairs and maintenance, rates, annual service costs for the lift equipment etc for each new facility. This will all need to be considered when the 2023/24 budget is set to ensure that adequate budget is available to maintain and operate the facilities in the future.

10.6 There is a resource impact in terms of the Property Service team who will need to manage the contracts and delivery of any new provision and this will need to be balanced against other competing priorities and work pressures.

11. Legal Implications

11.1 There are not considered to be any legal implications as a direct result of this report of these proposals at the current time.

11.2 Consideration will need to be given to a funding agreement to cover the arrangements with the Broads Authority and the legal team will be engaged to support with that at the appropriate time.

11.3 The Council would need to investigate how this funding would be provided and discuss any governance arrangements in respect on grant draw down and claims with the funders. It is recommended that delegated authority is provided to the Director for Resources to agree any arrangements as required.

12. Risks

- 12.1 A detailed risk register will be completed as part of the project governance proposals along with the necessary project documentation which will be discussed and agreed with the Corporate Delivery Unit (CDU) once proposals have been agreed.
- 12.2 There is a risk that the Council is not able to spend the grant money but 31 March 2024 and therefore has to return some of it but it is felt this is very small given that two schemes are already progressing and a further two are currently being tendered.
13. Reputationally there is a risk of not delivering in Stalham and Holt which could attract negative comments and press coverage given the aspiration to deliver these facilities within each of the main towns but the recommendations contained within this report and new funding stream would address that.

14. Sustainability

- 14.1 The sustainability of the facilities in terms of their operation, cleansing and fit out will be considered as part of the works specification for the improvement and will be undertaken by the Property Services team in conjunction with key officers and architects.

15. Climate / Carbon impact

- 15.1 The Property team will engage with the Climate and Environmental Policy Manager to ensure that any opportunity to improve the carbon impact of these facilities is taken as part of these improvement works.

16. Equality and Diversity

- 16.1 The inclusion of additional Changing Places facilities impacts positively in terms of equality and diversity and these aspects will be further considered as part of the overall design of the works as well for each facility.

17. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

- 17.1 As with other similar improvement schemes as part of the design process the Council will engage with the police to ensure they have no concerns in relation to anti-social behaviour.

18. Conclusion and Recommendations

- 18.1 In conclusion, it is recommended that the Cabinet agree to the officer proposals for the further Changing Places investments at the locations identified and that the capital budgets are updated to reflect the additional funding.

It is recommended that Cabinet resolve to;

- **Agree to the officer proposals for the further Changing Places investments at the locations identified;**

- **Agree to the recommended changes to the capital budget identified within section 10 the report; and**
- **Delegate authority to the Director for Resources to develop and agree governance and reporting arrangements with the Broads Authority and funding providers.**