

Retention of Public Toilet Provision - Station Approach, Sheringham	
Executive Summary	<p>The Station Approach Public Toilets, Sheringham were transferred to North Norfolk Railway in 2015. As part of this transfer North Norfolk Railway redeveloped the toilets and agreed to maintain them as Public Toilets for period of 10 years. The period comes to an end on the 31st March 2026.</p> <p>North Norfolk Railway, recognising the importance of these toilets to the wider tourist offering in Sheringham have offered to continue their provision as public toilets but have asked for contribution to reflect their additional financial cost in doing so.</p> <p>This paper set out the options available and recommends that the Council reaches a suitable agreement with North Norfolk Railway to retain public access to the toilets.</p>
Options considered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To do nothing, in which case North Norfolk Railway will most likely remove the public access to the toilets and use them to serve users of the station only. • To enter in an agreement with North Norfolk Railway to retain the toilets as public access throughout the year for the opening times specified in the report.
Consultation(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Norfolk Railway • Liz Withington
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That Cabinet resolve to enter into an agreement with North Norfolk Railway to retain public access to the Station Approach Toilets. • That Cabinet provides a steer on the period in years that they wish the agreement to run for. • That Cabinet authorises the Director of Service Delivery to negotiate with North Norfolk Railway on the exact terms of the agreement in order to secure the best value for money position possible. • That Cabinet delegate to the to the Director of Service Delivery and the Director for Resources, in consultation to with the Portfolio Holder for IT, Environmental & Waste Services and the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services the ability to enter into the agreement to retain the Station Approach Toilets for public use.
Reasons for recommendations	<p>To continue the provision of public access toilets in line with the areas of the Corporate Plan objectives relating to Investing in our Local Economy and Infrastructure and also A Strong, Responsible and Accountable Council.</p>
Background papers	None

Wards affected	Sheringham North
Cabinet member(s)	Cllr Callum Ringer
Contact Officer	Steve Hems, Director of Service Delivery steve.hems@north-norfolk.gov.uk

Links to key documents:	
Corporate Plan:	<p>INVESTING IN OUR LOCAL ECONOMY & INFRASTRUCTURE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing to promote North Norfolk's diverse tourism and visitor offer <p>A STRONG, RESPONSIBLE & ACCOUNTABLE COUNCIL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing service delivery arrangements so as to realise efficiencies without compromising service standards and outcomes Exploring opportunities to work further with stakeholders and partner organisations.
Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)	There is no direct budget provision made in respect of the Sheringham Station Approach Toilets however it is anticipated that savings associated with other public toilet provision within the Waste and Related Services Contract will cover a substantial part if not all of the costs of any agreement with North Norfolk Railway.
Council Policies & Strategies	Public Toilet Provision Strategy 2021

Corporate Governance:	
Is this a key decision	Yes
Has the public interest test been applied	This paper contains commercially sensitive information in relation to North Norfolk Railways cost of service provision for the public toilets. This has been included in a confidential appendix
Details of any previous decision(s) on this matter	Cabinet January 2015 Decision to transfer land to North Norfolk Railway.

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1. This report sets out the position in respect of the public toilets on Station Approach Sheringham and explores a number of options around their future retention as public toilets.

2. Introduction & Background

- 2.1. North Norfolk District Council operate a number of public toilets across the District. In Sheringham public toilets are provided at The Leas, Lusher Passage and East Prom. In addition, the north of the town has been served by a public toilet on Station Approach which has been provided for the last 10 years by North Norfolk Railway, prior to this the District Council provided the public toilet in this location,
- 2.2. Following negotiation in 2014 with North Norfolk Railway, North Norfolk District Council, at a Cabinet meeting in January 2015 agreed, under the terms of the Localism Act 2011, that North Norfolk Railway would take over the running of the toilets and Tourist Information Centre in Sheringham. North Norfolk Railway is a not-for-profit organisation, supported by a registered charity, whose remit is to restore and run historic trains.
- 2.3. The Council also made a grant contribution of £154,000 to North Norfolk Railway to replace the old toilet block and Tourist Information Centre with one more in keeping with the neighbouring buildings of the North Norfolk Railway station. North Norfolk Railway were able to lever in grant, to increase the scope of the project, from central government's Coastal Community Fund.
- 2.4. It was a condition of the agreement to transfer the land to North Norfolk Railway that they continue the provision of the Tourist Information Centre and the Public toilets for a period of time after the new facilities were opened.
- 2.5. In the case of the Tourist Information Centre this was for a period of five years. At the end of this term, North Norfolk Railway chose not to maintain the provision of the Tourist Information Centre.
- 2.6. The Public Toilets provision had to be provided for a ten-year period. This ten-year period ends on the 31st March 2026. There is no obligation on the part of North Norfolk Railway to continue to allow the public to access the toilet block beyond that date. It would be possible to change the access arrangements very easily so that they can only be accessed from inside the station only.
- 2.7. The Station Approach Toilets are located close to the Station Approach car park which is the largest of the North Norfolk District Council Car Parks in Sheringham. This car park is also on the main way into Sheringham Town being located at the north side of the town centre on the A149 and on the main route into town from the A148. This means that it is the first car park that visitors to the town will come across.
- 2.8. As visitors may well have travelled some distance it is not unusual that amongst the first things looked for will be the public toilets, in this case currently located on Station Approach. If these toilets were not available, the next nearest would be at Lushers Passage approximately 0.3 miles away or a 7-minute walk.

3. Proposals and Options

- 3.1. Discussions have taken place with North Norfolk Railway, who recognise the importance of the toilets to the wider tourist offering of the town of Sheringham. On this basis they have offered to maintain the public access to the toilets but in recognition that this would be a significant additional burden in terms of costs requested that North Norfolk District Council meet the additional cost associated with increased opening times and usage. The pattern of opening means that the railway is closed most daytimes from November to March and does not run public trains on Mondays and Fridays for most of April, May, June September and October.
- 3.2. The Council offered to add these toilets to the cleansing contract delivered by Serco for the Public Toilets already provided by the Council as well as taking on the opening and closing responsibility. North Norfolk Railway have declined this offer as they wished to have control over the facilities themselves. They also wanted to ensure that the toilets were locked appropriately every day and so elected to undertake this via their staff.
- 3.3. North Norfolk Railway have stated that they will make the toilets available to the public every day except the 24,25 and 26th December, when they will be closed.
- 3.4. From April to October, they will be open between the hours of 10:00am to 5:00pm. From October to April, they will be open between the hours of 10:00am and 4:00pm.
- 3.5. The reason for these opening times is to minimise the cost of staffing provision and to limit the likelihood of vandalism occurring. These opening reflect the limited Station opening times set out in section 3.1 above.
- 3.6. In addition, the Railway have agreed to keep the toilets open late on the night of Sheringham Carnival and two other events per year. It is anticipated that these will be for the 1940's weekend and the Viking Festival. The two additional events will not be specified in the agreement to allow flexibility should events or priorities change in the future.
- 3.7. To reflect their estimated additional costs, North Norfolk Railway have asked for an annual contribution to meet their additional costs. The amount requested is set out in the purple pages to this report.
- 3.8. The annual contribution is subject to an annual increase linked to staff cost or CPI, whichever is the greatest. The exact details of this annual increase will be agreed as part of the agreement negotiations should the agreement progress.
- 3.9. North Norfolk Railway have proposed an initial term of ten years for the agreement. They have indicated that they would be willing to consider a longer term to provide certainty to the provision.
- 3.10. The Council operates a number of public toilets across the district and has invested significantly in recent years in maintaining and upgrading these facilities. In the last two years, one toilet block has been closed, and others have been transferred to other parties. This has provided some saving to the Council in terms of both repair and maintenance but also in respect of the cleansing costs within the Serco contract.

3.11. Whilst it is not possible to accurately assess the costs of operating the Sheringham Station Approach toilets, it is possible to undertake some comparison work based on costs for similar sized toilets which are located adjacent to car parks of approximate size. The most comparable toilet block is on the Meadow Car Park in Cromer, although it should be recognised that this block includes a Changing Places toilet which is not present at Station Approach.

3.12. Options

3.13. The Council could choose not to enter into an agreement with North Norfolk Railway.

3.14. In this case North Norfolk Railway would shut the public access to the toilets and only open them to their visitors. This would leave the top end of the town without a public toilet provision. It should be recognised that the National Rail Services Railway station is located nearby. Until recently busses arriving in Sheringham have also stopped on Station Approach and for the purposes of this paper it is assumed that difficulties with the travel hub will be resolved. It can therefore be seen that, in combination with the Council car park there is significant demand for public toilets in this area of Sheringham.

3.15. To enter into an agreement with North Norfolk Railway to secure the current toilets as public access.

3.16. This option would involve the Council making an annual payment to North Norfolk Railway to cover their additional costs of maintaining the toilets given that this is beyond their business operating times and involves a much greater usage profile than if they were to operate them for their visitors only.

4. Corporate Priorities

4.1. The Corporate Plan sets out a number of relevant to the proposal.

4.2. Under the priority relating to Investing in our Local Economy and Infrastructure this proposal would contribute to the objective relation to:

- Continuing to promote North Norfolk's diverse tourism and visitor offer.

4.3. Under the priority relating to A Strong, Responsible and Accountable Council the proposal would support two of the objectives stated:

- Reviewing service delivery arrangements so as to realise efficiencies without compromising service standards and outcomes
- Exploring opportunities to work further with stakeholders and partner organisations.

5. Financial and Resource Implications

5.1. There is an additional cost associated with retaining the Station Approach Toilets for public access. This cost will mostly be met through savings delivered through the reduction in public toilet cleansing costs elsewhere in the district. Any shortfall in costs will have to be met through reserves although

other sources of funding will be investigated in order to make this cost neutral to the budget.

- 5.2. There are no staffing implications as North Norfolk Railway will be responsible for all staffing costs and other costs of compliance.

Comments from the S151 Officer:

The S151 Officer (or member of the Finance team on their behalf) will complete this section.

If the option to retain the provision is chosen, this will involve council expenditure and entering into a legally binding agreement with NNR, creating long term contractual commitments. This will require clear information as to costs and contract duration and the legal department may be approached in this regard.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. The Council will need to enter into a legally binding agreement with North Norfolk Railway should the recommendations be agreed. Any such agreement is likely to extend beyond vesting day to a successor authority.

Comments from the Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer (or member of the Legal team on behalf of the MO) will complete this section. They will outline any legal advice provided.

If the option to retain provision is chosen, this will involve council expenditure and entering into a legally binding agreement with NNR, creating long term contractual commitments. This will require clear information as to costs and contract duration, and the legal department can assist with issues relating to drafting of agreements.

7. Risks

- 7.1. The savings identified through savings within the cleansing contract from the closure/transfer of other toilet blocks may not fully cover the costs associated with recommendation. It is anticipated that any shortfall in funding could be found through the short term use of reserves whilst other suitable sources of funding re identified.

8. Net ZeroTarget

- 8.1. The recommendation does not impact on the overall carbon position as it merely continues the use of the toilets as public toilets beyond the term of the original agreement with North Norfolk Railway.

8.2. It could be argued that the slightly reduced opening times offered by North Norfolk Railway would see a commensurate reduction in carbon etc as the usage will reduce and therefore elements such as water use from flushing, hand washing and electricity from lights and hand drying will be reduced as well. Users may just walk to another public toilet in the town if the facilities are not open thereby shunting use to another facility.

8.3. It is not clear whether funding the provision in part will mean that some of the carbon will come within scope of the Councils responsibility having solely been that of the North Norfolk Railway previously. Any such change is likely to be relatively small.

9. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

9.1. There are not considered to be any adverse impacts on any protected characteristics resulting from this proposal

10. Community Safety issues

10.1. There are not anticipated to be any adverse impacts on community safety issues resulting from the proposal

Conclusion and Recommendations

The provision of public toilets at the north end of the town centre supports the visitor economy as many of those arriving to the town, either by car or public transport, will do so in this location. The agreement made between North Norfolk District Council and North Norfolk Railway in 2016, which saw the continued provision of public toilets in Station Approach, ends on the 31st March 2026. North Norfolk Railway recognise the importance of these public toilets to the wider tourist offering in Sheringham and have offered to continue to provide them as public conveniences. This is subject to North Norfolk District Council contributing the additional costs of such provision to North Norfolk Railway.

It is therefore recommended:

- **That Cabinet resolve to enter into an agreement with North Norfolk Railway to retain public access to the Station Approach Toilets.**
- **That Cabinet provide a steer on the period in years that they wish the agreement to run for.**
- **That Cabinet authorise the Director of Service Delivery to negotiate with North Norfolk Railway on the exact terms of the agreement in order to secure the best value for money position possible.**
- **That Cabinet delegate to the to the Director of Service Delivery and the Director for Resources, in consultation to with the Portfolio Holder for IT, Environmental & Waste Services and the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Estates & Property Services the ability to enter into the agreement to retain the Station Approach Toilets for public use.**