



Royal College of Art

Postgraduate Art and Design

James Cleverly,
Chair, Health and Public Services Committee
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

15 November 2010

Dr Paul Thompson
Rector and Vice-Provost

Schools:
Applied Art
Architecture and Design
Communications
Design for Production
Fashion and Textiles
Fine Art
Humanities

Helen Hamlyn Centre

Dear Mr Cleverly,

We recently received a copy of your invitation for views and information on 'London's public toilet provision since 2006' through Clara Greed, who participated in the previous review.

We would like to take this opportunity to respond based on the findings of TACT³, a 3-year research project that is looking for ways to help older people manage continence concerns. The work of the Royal College of Art's Helen Hamlyn Centre forms part of this project, where we're exploring the environmental barriers that both the public and professionals face in providing public toilets.

The following are our responses to the questions that you posed. We would be happy to discuss any of these points in further detail.

Yours truly,

Gail Knight

Research Associate, TACT³

Royal College of Art Helen Hamlyn Centre
Kensington Gore, London SW7 2EU
Tel: +44 (0)20 7590 4242
Fax: +44 (0)20 7590 4500
www.hhc.rca.ac.uk

Has the number of publicly accessible toilets in London increased since 2006?

There is a perception that there are not enough toilets because people do not know where they are, if they're open, and if they're accessible to them.

However it is difficult to estimate whether publicly accessible toilets in London have increased since 2006, because there's no authoritative data collected on this.

From the experiences of the TACT³ research project¹ we would estimate that those Boroughs that have begun a Community Toilet Scheme (CTS) have more publicly accessible toilets, having closed some public facilities but more than replaced them with CTS facilities (opening hours dependant).

However this assumes that there is adequate signage and information informing visitors and residents of the scheme. If not then the number of publicly accessible toilets will in effect have decreased.

Has the quality and accessibility of toilets improved since 2006?

In general, no. The findings of the Vivacity 2020 project² found that not one toilet had followed Building Regulations Approved Document M correctly.

What has been the impact of the Mayor's 'Open London' scheme, which encourages businesses to open their toilets to non-customers?

During our interviews for TACT³ of nearly 100 members of the public across the UK, 1 lady mentioned the Open London scheme. At the time (Oct 2009) it was possible to find the webpage through search engines such as Google, however it is becoming increasingly difficult, with so many other 'Open' schemes (Open House, Open Weekend, Open Gardens).

Information around the scheme is a huge problem. Apart from during the initial PR, the website is the only way to find out about participating schemes. There's no street level signage or publicity.

It is also unclear how Open London relates to the businesses included by Westminster in their SatLav text service³ and to borough Community Toilet Schemes. For example, what is the area that is covered by Open London?

¹ <http://www.hhc.rca.ac.uk/2439/all/1/Tact3.aspx>

² <http://eprints.ucl.ac.uk/4847/>

To use the example of the Open London participant Sainsbury's: are all Sainsbury's toilets open to the public? Or just inside Zone 1? Or Zone 2? Or Greater London? Are some councils also paying Sainsbury's to participate in their Community Toilet Schemes? Is this different for national businesses compared to franchises?

The Mayor of London recently commented that MacDonal's was part of Open London, however there's no evidence to support this and as these businesses are franchises it would seem more likely that individual owners would decide whether or not to participate, and to do so through a grant-paying Community Toilet Scheme.

What has been the impact of 'community toilet schemes' run by London boroughs?

During our initial interviews for TACT³ a few people mentioned the schemes or responded positively when they were mentioned.

The impression is that CTS have opened up a lot of 'publicly available' toilets.

However promotion of the schemes is very difficult. Councils that we spoke to struggle to get the businesses to display the stickers in a prominent place, if at all.

They appeal to small businesses because they benefit most from the grant, but the disadvantage of this is that the participants are unknown to outsiders and difficult to remember for locals. Publicity and the sharing of information about the schemes must improve. Some councils are producing maps which show participating businesses, and therefore distribution of this map is important.

Richmond's scheme includes some permanent wayfinding signs, which is a considerable expense, particularly when schemes are setting up, and gaining or losing businesses.

There should also be some monitoring of whether people are using each facility to establish whether the right businesses are participating in the scheme, resulting in a quality not (or as well as!) quantity approach.

A Community Toilet Scheme that residents and more importantly visitors (who won't know the area as well) are not aware of and do not use is not a valuable provision.

3

<http://www.westminster.gov.uk/services/environment/planning/majorprojects/thewestend/orb/orbsatlav/>

Has the provision of toilets on the public transport system increased?

Not aware of any data to ascertain this. However from personal experience the toilets at Canada Water have closed in the last 18 months.

Is there enough information about the location and availability of public toilets?

The Legible London sign system includes public toilets in its maps, which is an improvement. However it does not include information on access to them (e.g. if there are stairs and accessible alternatives), the facilities provided or their opening hours.

The other source of information about the location and availability of public toilets is on each council website (though not always), and even these do not necessarily include maps, facility information or opening hours. This also does not consider that people do not look at council websites when they need the toilet. In fact tourists, visitors and residents who are away from home are all unlikely to know which council they are in.

Open London and Community Toilet Schemes are a huge problem in this area. There is little or no information at street level about participating businesses, and none about the opening hours of businesses (and thus the availability and location of provision at different times of day).

What more could the Mayor do to improve provision or to ensure there is enough information about available toilets?

The TACT³ inclusive design research project has spoken to members of the public, providers and professionals involved in public toilet provision to identify both barriers to better public toilet provision and potential design improvements.

The current findings of the TACT³ research project suggest that there is a need for open data on publicly available toilets. This data could be used by designers, developers and the general public to create maps, apps, and other concepts that would help to not only find a toilet, but to find a toilet that is appropriate to the individual. This data could not only be used for digital concepts but also for maps in hard copy format for an ageing population and the digitally excluded.

TACT³ posted a suggestion for open data on public toilets on the London Datastore website⁴. As this is currently the most popular request outside of transport data, we feel that developers are equally keen to use the information.

We believe the Mayor could help considerably with this.

Whilst open local government data is being encouraged, there are many stumbling blocks to boroughs opening up their datasets, and it could take some years before all boroughs are set up for this. And even once a borough is releasing open data they do not necessarily include toilet data (despite the simplicity of the information). In fact nationally there's only one set of local toilet data on data.gov.uk.

Therefore the Mayor's involvement could accelerate this process by driving the release of toilet data irrespective of councils' own commitment to open data.

We propose that the Mayor:

- Commits to a project to see all boroughs release and maintain open toilet data.

This data must cover all publicly accessible toilets including Community Toilet Schemes. It must also be regularly maintained by the councils to ensure all data is up-to-date.

This is where a one-off project to collect current toilet information, either through the boroughs or the public, would fall short, much like the 'find your nearest' toilet map that was previously produced by the GLA, but no longer available on the website. As soon as one business in London either joins or leaves a CTS the information would be instantly out of date, unreliable, and worthless.

In order to gain council commitment the GLA may need to make a financial commitment to the project rather than waiting for individual borough commitment to open data in general. The London Heat Map is perhaps an example of precedent for this, and a far more complicated and costly project.

- Sets a standard format for open toilet data information.

Whilst any data is better than none, London has an opportunity here to set the standard for public toilet information, potentially on a national scale. Consistency between the data supplied by different boroughs will create seamless information on what is in reality a very fragmented provision.

And by establishing the types of information that would be most beneficial at this early stage (opening hours, type of facility, RADAR access, etc etc) we have a great

⁴ <http://data.london.gov.uk/suggestions-popular>



opportunity to create open data that would benefit the greatest number of people irrespective of personal needs or circumstances, leading to inclusive design solutions to finding publicly accessible toilets.

- Make the data publicly available via the London Datastore and data.gov.uk.
- Expand the project to involve other publicly accessible toilets, e.g. on the public transport network
- Lead by example by using open toilet data to:
 - publicise Open London,
 - include toilet information on maps of the city
 - support private and public projects that use the data, and
 - make use of the data via the London Ambassadors and printed information associated with London 2012.