



## **Blenheim Gardens Toilets – Feasibility and Design Options**

### **Background**

In approximately 2015, Minehead Town Council assumed responsibility for the town's public toilet facilities from West Somerset Council. At the point of transfer, the toilets were in a very poor condition. Since then, the Town Council has invested considerable funds to bring facilities up to a much higher standard through a programme of refurbishments.

The toilets within Blenheim Gardens were originally located in separate male and female toilet blocks at opposite ends of the gardens. Upon MTC taking the service over, the former gents' block was closed and a single unisex facility was created in the location of the former ladies' toilets. Although this approach was practical at the time, it has since created several operational issues:

- There are now only two available cubicles for the entire gardens.
- There are no official accessible toilet facilities.
- The current tucked away location is prone to antisocial behaviour and misuse, often leading to lengthy closures and costly repairs.

### **Needs**

The Council has maintained an earmarked reserve to fund toilet refurbishments, with £133,115.06 currently held. Unlike previous refurbishments, where a like for like approach was appropriate, the existing layout at Blenheim Gardens would not address the current challenges such as:

- Persistent antisocial behaviour
- Insufficient number of toilet facilities, and
- Ageing infrastructure (e.g., drainage blockages).

The condition of the facilities clearly requires significant investment. This presents an opportunity not only to refurbish but also to rethink the provision to better meet current and future needs.

Importantly, now that the Town Council has formally taken on the management of the gardens through the devolution process, the scope of potential solutions has broadened. We are no longer restricted to working within the footprint of the existing toilet blocks; alternative locations and configurations can be explored to achieve the best outcome for users.

One option under consideration is the repurposing of the storm shelter located on the northern boundary of the gardens. This shelter has suffered from years of under-maintenance and antisocial behaviour, and its internal condition is poor. Additionally, changes in user behaviour have made such structures increasingly problematic in public settings.

Exploring the feasibility of converting the storm shelter could bring several benefits:

- Provision of modern toilet facilities in a more visible and accessible location, reducing antisocial behaviour and making it easier for visitors unfamiliar with the gardens to find.
- Repurposing a currently underused structure, giving it a new lease of life.
- Improved infrastructure, including connection to nearby mains sewage in North Road, with new drainage designed to meet modern standards.

However, given the conservation area status of the site, several planning and infrastructure considerations need to be addressed before a decision can be made. This includes understanding:

- Planning constraints and requirements.
- The cost and feasibility of new infrastructure.
- The most practical internal configuration (e.g., male/female blocks vs. individual cubicles and the inclusion of accessible facilities).

### **Architectural Input**

To properly assess the viability of the project and prepare options for consideration, it is proposed to appoint a professional architect. The Clerk has already commissioned a measured survey under delegated authority (£400 + VAT), which will take place shortly.

Further professional input will be required as follows:

- Proposals – £500 + VAT
- Planning – £300 + VAT
- Building Regulations – £700 + VAT

All the above would need to be funded out of the toilet refurbishment budget.

Appointing an architect at this stage will ensure that:

- The site's potential is fully explored and that any proposals are viable in planning and technical terms.
- Multiple design options can be developed for Councillors to consider before committing to a final design.
- The space is planned to maximise functionality, accessibility and user experience.
- Help guide the 2026/27 budget setting process.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended the authority is delegated to the Clerk to:

1. Engage the architect to undertake all necessary stages of work (proposals, planning and building regulations), and to liaise with relevant stakeholders to establish the feasibility and viability of the storm shelter conversion project.

2. Commission the architect to prepare multiple design options for the proposed toilet provision, to be presented to Council for consideration and decision on the preferred design approach.

This will allow the Clerk to progress essential preparatory work to determine whether the project is deliverable, while ensuring that Councillors retain oversight and make the final decision on the design.

Ben Parker

Town Clerk

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