

Spending a penny in Edinburgh

✘ The City of Edinburgh Council is currently looking into alternative provision for public toilets to find out where people can 'spend a penny' in the future.

The capital has thirty public toilets and in February, the Transport, Infrastructure and Environment Committee looked at approving the closure of 15 of these facilities.

Nothing has been decided yet, but the Council is keen to gather information on condition, usage and alternative provision – so that the public are not caught short when they are out and about.

A recent Council survey with residents from around the city found that 40% were not aware of the public toilets in their local area.

More than half of all respondents (66%) had never used a public toilet in Edinburgh, while 62% said the lack of public loos would not stop them from coming into the city.

The Council is looking at a range of options for alternative provision, including using toilet facilities in existing Council buildings, such as the City Art Centre and libraries. There is also the possibility of income generated facilities.

Local businesses will also be contacted to get their views on offering public toilet facilities.

During the next few weeks, the Council will be contacting around 70 local businesses from different areas around the city. Views are being sought from restaurants, bars and hotels on offering public toilet facilities in the future.

Councillor Robert Aldridge, Environmental Leader, said: "Nothing has been decided yet on the closure of public toilets but the Council is keen to seek the views of local residents

and businesses to decide the best way forward. We are keen to offer alternative provision, so that enhanced facilities are provided. All that will change is that they will be in different locations. This is a positive thing, as good toilets already exist in public buildings and local businesses may be able to benefit from more potential customers and good publicity for their business. We are looking at a range of options at the moment, which will go to Committee in August 2011."

Perth and Kinross Council have been running the 'Comfort Scheme' with local businesses for the last six years.

One business which has benefited from the scheme is McKays Bar and Restaurant in Pitlochry. They have been signed up to the scheme for two years and on average see around 20 to 30 extra customers per day.

John Pierre, manager of the establishment, said: "I think we do benefit from the scheme, every day we have 200 to 300 people coming in just to use the toilet and around 10 per cent of these people stay and buy some drink or food. It does help us, especially during this financial crisis; you've got to take all the business opportunities you can. This is the second year we have been signed up to the scheme and it is very beneficial."

It is estimated the reduction in public toilets could generate around £400,000 in savings. Over the next three years the Council needs to make £90 million in savings, with £45 million in savings being made during 2011-12.

It is not a legal requirement for the Council to provide public toilets.

Just for the record – the photograph shows the lovely ladies loo in The Radisson on The Royal Mile, only for use by patrons of the hotel.