

Police warn against reopening public toilets

Police have warned Edinburgh Council against re-opening much-needed public toilets near the city centre over fears they would attract criminality and anti-social behaviour.

Toilets at Nicolson Square were one of ten which were closed in the capital in 2015 to save £300,000.

Councillors said the lack of facilities has become a “serious impediment” to many, and earlier this year called on officials to investigate the costs and work required to re-open some loos.

But an update to the Culture and Communities Committee this week said police have “significant concerns around any plan” to re-open the toilets at Nicolson Square.

The report stated: “They have highlighted that the toilets being open exacerbates anti-social behaviour and can result in additional criminality.

“Officers have also been working closely with the Friends of Nicolson Square, who have also expressed concerns about the reopening of the toilets.”

Operational services manager Gareth Barwell said at the meeting on Thursday he agreed with officers’ recommendation based on their feedback.

He said the toilets, off Nicolson Street, "are not nice".

Cllr Alex Staniforth, Greens, challenged the police position, saying: "This is the same argument the police make about toilets on Hunter Square.

"Doubtless, if you open a public toilet on a main public thoroughfare, you're making it more comfortable for people, more people will be present. I don't think that's a very good reason for not doing it.

"Could officers push back on Police Scotland on this argument a bit? Frankly, if our public spaces were completely empty there would be absolutely no criminal behaviour or anti-social activity within them. But that's not really what we want."

Mr Barwell said the council was "committed" to improving public conveniences.

He added: "I'll see if there are any design changes we can make as an interim to make them more welcoming, but I think long-term what we should be planning as a council is to relocate those facilities to somewhere that's more suitable and got more natural surveillance."

Cllr Hal Osler said: "We're always going to get to a stage where we're never going to have enough public toilets but we all do know there are many parts of the city that have none at all and we do need to encourage that general push out into other areas to have facilities made."

Cllr Lezley Marion Cameron said the city needs to do "so much better" on public toilets.

She added that Edinburgh's public toilets let the city down. She said : "I am getting impatient waiting for strategies and updates and so forth.

"This is such a fundamental basic necessity for visitors and everyone alike.

"I'm tired of having discussions about public toilets. We as elected members really need to get a grip of this.

"We need to be prioritising it and having more urgent action.

"We need public toilets right across the city – it's a matter of public health, dignity, safety- all of that. It's the one area that lets us down as a city."

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

