



## The Great Toilet Debate

Wed 17 Sept 2025 | The Architect, Design West, Bristol

### Informed Civic Debate

*Just the tonic for our polarised times.*

#### Guest Contributors:

- Alicia de Haldevang – *Committee Member, British Toilet Association*
- Kinny Chinangwa – *Disability Inc Manager, WECIL*
- Allison Herbert – *Chief Executive, Bath BID*
- Jacqui Greenland – *Head of Global Networks & Trans Advocate*
- Mike Cox – *Director, Childs Sulzmann Architects*
- Cllr Sibusiso Tshabalala – *Councillor for Central Bristol, Green Party*
- Olivia Sawyerr – *BSc Architecture Student, UWE: Bristol*
- British Association of Restaurants, Bars & Independents - *Online Testimony*

#### Perspectives:

**Alicia:** There is no legal statutory obligation for councils to provide toilets in the UK. This needs to change, as it represents a basic civil right. Access is critical for those with disabilities, children, & older people, but it affects everyone. Access to toilets = access to public life.

**Allison:** Bath attracts 6 million visitors every year. Research shows 'more toilets' is the No.1 ask of visitors & lack of toilet provision is now limiting wider economic spend. Bath BID trialled pay-to-access temporary toilets at Jane Austen Festival this year, with huge success.

**Jacqui:** Public toilets date back hundreds of years & were originally communal, with the Victorians segregating them. Access to toilets has always been political. In late C19/early C20 Britain, women were denied access ('the urinary leash'), US toilets were racially segregated under Jim Crow laws until the 1950s. Although access has changed, toilet design has evolved very little.

**Mike:** Toilets should always be designed with the user in mind. Childs Sulzmann worked on Watershed's infamous toilets, which took centre stage in 'online culture wars' but in 'real life' won the 'Loo of the Year Award'. In Japan, design quality promotes civic pride in infrastructure. Could it here?

**Sibusiso:** Communities need to make their voices heard, working with local plan & democratic mechanisms to leverage funding for toilets & community infrastructure. No participation = no power. Mobilisation is key.

**Olivia:** Olivia's dissertation mapped the reduction of public toilets in Bristol from 'peak toilet' in the 1970s. Why have toilets been left behind?

**BARBI:** Expecting hospitality to cover the funding gap costs a struggling sector hit hard by NI rises. The associated antisocial behaviour of non-customers & risks venue license & staff safety.

#### Public Discussion - Key Takeaways:

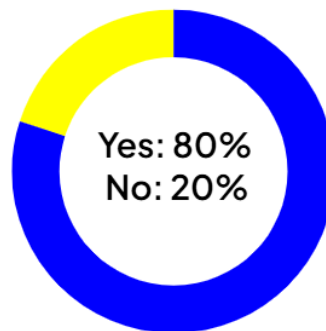
- 85% of council-run public toilets in central Bristol have closed (33 in 1970 to 5 in 2024).
- People want more, well-designed, better located, accessible toilets.



- Funding limitations were acknowledged, but shouldn't equate to a desert in provision. Public buildings (Arncliffe, Watershed etc) & the hospitality sector can help span the gap, but should be part-compensated towards costs.
- 80% of attendees would be willing to pay for public toilets at the point of use, if well maintained.
- 60% of people would be prepared to pay up to £1 to use a toilet.
- A balance of free-to-access & pay-to-use must always be available. Better wayfinding and a digital map would be useful.
- England has a problem when it comes to antisocial behaviour & vandalism of public toilets. We are an international outlier. It's our problem to solve. Could design quality create more civic pride in our infrastructure?
- Watershed toilets were accepted as an example of good toilets by all users in attendance.
- Politicians' refusal to engage with an 'embarrassing' issue & the associated personal PR consequences, has held back national legislation, that would give dignity to all.
- Toilets are essential for all, let's design them with this in mind.

#### Key Figures:

**Q.**  
Would you pay to use a toilet if there were no nearby free ones?



**Q.**  
How much would you pay to use a toilet in a public space if it was well maintained?

