

# **Health and Social Care Committee**

## **Public health implications of inadequate public toilet facilities**

PT 5 - Llanfrynach Community Council

### **The Story of Ty Bach Llanfrynach Loos**

1. Llanfrynach is a pretty village in the heart of the Brecon Beacons, which attracts hundreds of cyclists and walkers every year. When Powys County Council decided to close the public toilets, situated right opposite the church, it became a nasty inconvenience for visitors and residents alike. Even very respectable people were forced to use the back of the Church or local gardens – it was embarrassing and unhygienic.
2. A group of local residents decided to do something. PCC gave them a year to see if they could run the conveniences. Llanfrynach Community Council gave its backing and added the loos (at no extra cost) to their public liability insurance.
3. Local business helped get the whole thing going – The White Swan, Brecon Beacons Holiday Cottages and Llanfrynach and Cantref Women’s Institute and others gave money for paint etc and a local shop provided baskets for flowers.
4. Painting, decorating and scrubbing the loos took a few days. It was a great team effort. A lick of paint, a couple of plants, some nice photographs of the Beacons and a sign made by a resident, provided the finishing touches.
5. Money is needed on a regular basis for cleaning materials, loo paper, soap etc. But the main cost of keeping the conveniences open, that of paying a cleaner, is now gone. A team of fourteen volunteers are on a rota to clean the loos – so just a few minutes once a fortnight from each person ensures the Ty Bach is inspected and cleaned every day. More volunteers are on standby for when the others can’t make it. Because the loos are kept constantly fresh and clean the job is not at all onerous.
6. There is a secure collecting box outside the Ty Bach and an invitation for the public to make a donation to keep the conveniences open. People have responded by leaving much more than the odd penny in the box. Some have been very generous indeed. Written notes have been left saying how very much people appreciate the Ty Bach and how they admire the community spirit involved in keeping them open.

7. In 2011, year two of the venture, there was enough money in the kitty to twin both the Ladies and the Gents with two toilets in Burundi, Africa as part of the wonderful Toilet Twinning Scheme run by Cord and Tearfund which creates hygienic loos in places where 1 in 3 children die of disease caused by bad sanitation.

In April 2011 the team won the Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations Volunteer of the Year Award (group category). They were flushed with success!

In October 2011 Powys County Council transferred the freehold of the land and the loos to Llanfrynach Community Council and the volunteers have committed to keep up the good work.

Regular users of the Ty Bach are mostly walkers and cyclists who park their cars in the village before setting off for a trek into the Beacons. Some regular churchgoers say the fact they know they can use the facility, which is opposite the Church, makes all the difference to them being able to attend services. And of course local residents also use the loos when they are out for a walk.

The local pub, The White Swan, is glad that people who are not customers have a public convenience to use. The scheme which might have paid them money to open their toilets to the public would not have been totally suitable as they are shut at least two days a week and only open pub hours anyway.

Ty Bach Llanfrynach Loos was once a rather melancholy dismal but nevertheless useful structure in the middle of the village. Now it is an attractive building, a source of local pride and has engendered a great deal of community spirit. So far there are no signs of donor or volunteer fatigue.



## **Some of the team of about 18 volunteers who keep the Ty Bach open.**

In conclusion: We have not deliberately gathered evidence about what we have done, but some of the lessons we have learnt from our experience are:

1. People have told us that knowing there is decent toilet provision does make a difference to their being able to leave home, confident that they will not be facing a horrible embarrassing moment. In a rural setting the chance to enjoy a long walk or even a stroll round the village is a vital part of exercise and well-being. Having a proper public convenience does make all the difference to some people being able to participating in these things. We only have anecdotal evidence of this but it is quite substantial.
2. We cannot provide facilities for the disabled or for baby changing but this must be particularly true for both those groups of people.
3. When PCC closed the conveniences there was certainly increased fouling of certain areas of the village. It was not being able to help a group of a dozen walkers all standing bewildered (and with crossed legs) in front of the closed public conveniences which made us understand the demand and the problem and decide to take action.
4. In other areas of the Beacons where people park cars before setting off for walks and where there are no public conveniences, at certain time of year, there can be quite distressing evidence of people using the countryside as a toilet. They even bring their own loo paper and chuck it in the fields or woods.
5. Twinning our toilets with toilets in Africa – a third world country desperate for the provision of good hygienic sanitation – has been an odd juxtaposition with our own country where public conveniences are increasingly seen as a unnecessary expense.
6. We are lucky to have a group of people willing to commit to cleaning the Ty Bach. Not every community will have such a group. It is our view that the provision of hygienic and private public sanitation is too important to be left to the lucky chance that a community has a slightly off the wall but well-intentioned gang who will do the job.