

## **Changing Places in Frome and Mendip**

We would like to develop communities that are truly inclusive and accessible; town centres where everybody can spend time and feel a sense of belonging. Market days and community events should be times when everybody, regardless of their physical difficulties or caring responsibilities, can come together to enjoy public spaces. Public buildings, organisations and businesses should be forward-thinking and pro-active in catering for the needs of all their clients and customers. We envisage a district where there is joined-up thinking when it comes to the planning of new developments so that money and opportunities to achieve this are not wasted. We want to see Frome, and Mendip as a whole, become a destination of choice for an increasing number of people and ensure that more visitors can experience what the area has to offer.

### **What are Changing Places?**

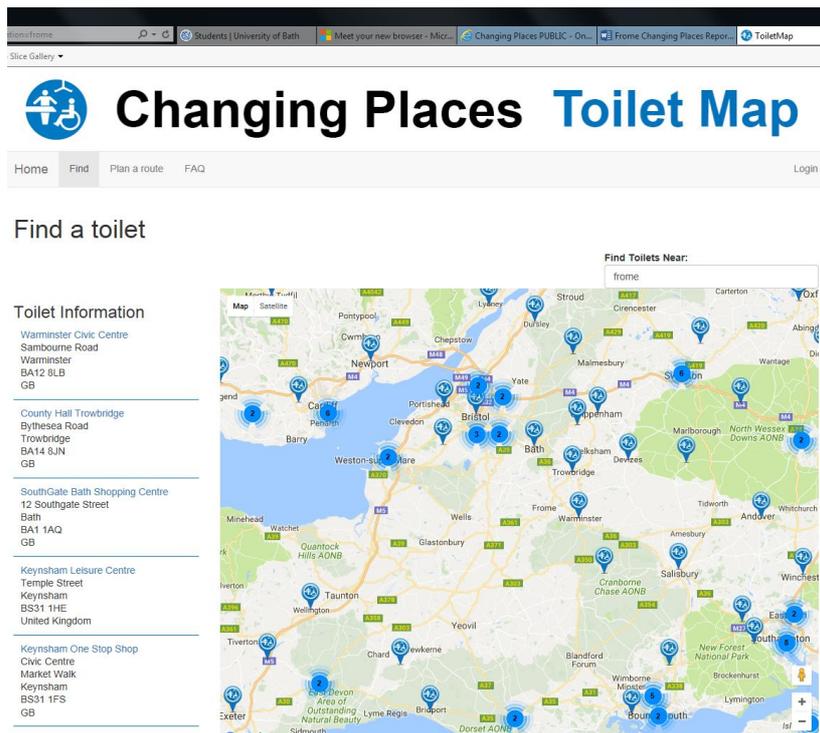
The standard disabled toilets in Market Yard are not accessible for those with more complex disabilities which mean they are unable to sit, stand or bear their weight independently.

Changing Places are toilet facilities with additional specialist equipment to make them fully-accessible, including a ceiling hoist and a height-adjustable changing bed. Hoists are used to lift somebody onto the toilet, if they are continent, or onto a changing bed to have their continence pads changed if they are not. This is important not only for the health and hygiene of the disabled person themselves but also for the health and safety of their carer(s).

Standard disabled toilets are too small, not only for the equipment, but also to enable two carers to assist somebody in the bathroom. People with physical disabilities, older people, those who have both short-term acquired impairments or longer term impairments due to accident or illness all require this kind of toilet. In addition, carers themselves may need to use the bathroom but be unable to leave the person they are caring for outside or unaccompanied. A portable privacy screen ensures that they are also able to use the toilet without putting the person they are caring for at risk.

Changing Places is a national consortium which started in 2006. It is made up of organisations such as Mencap, and promotes and advises on the development of these toilets. They have also developed a set of installation standards, which if met, mean the location of the facilities is publicised on their website.

Below is a map of current locations from the Changing Places website which clearly demonstrates the lack of suitable facilities in the area as a whole.



There are currently no public facilities of this kind in Frome, or in Mendip. While the Futures 4 centre has a toilet of this standard, it is not publicly accessible and is located far away from the town centre.

## Our Aims

- To develop a publicly accessible Changing Places in Frome town centre and other key locations around the town
- To identify ways in which Mendip District Council and Somerset County Council can work effectively together with local town councils and campaign groups across Mendip to develop and maintain these facilities in each key settlement
- To publicise and raise public awareness on the issue to foster public support and understanding of the need for these facilities
- To establish an official structure which will ensure a sustainable, consistent and ongoing strategy for the development of accessible toilets across the district in both existing and new developments

## Need

Over ¼ million people in the UK need Changing Places to be able to get out and about in their communities. (<http://www.changing-places.org/>) Research from Glastonbury and District Mencap in 2015 indicated there are over 7,700 people in Mendip who would benefit from these facilities. This is 7% of Mendip's population and excludes children and visitors. (Figures were taken from Somerset's Predictions for Care Needs which were based on 2011 census data. This includes 3308 people aged 18-64 predicted to have a moderate or severe personal

care disability and 4,429 people over 65 and unable to manage at least one activity on their own.)

Our own enquiries in our immediate area indicate there are 26 children and 23 adults in Frome who require hoisting in their bathrooms at home and therefore need this facility (Figures provided by Children with Disabilities team at Mendip District Council and Mendip Community Team Occupational Therapy). These figures do not take into account the families and carers who support these individuals. Being able to conduct every day activities, such as shopping, eating out and visiting the library in the town centre rather than having to travel further afield to towns who provide these facilities is important to them. Likewise the ability to move and care safely without risking their own physical well-being is really important. Neither do these figures include those who live in residential care facilities in the district, nor visitors to the region.

## **Benefits**

Having clean and accessible toilets should be the right of everyone. It will help foster inclusion in our local community and reduce isolation and exclusion felt by more severely disabled residents and their families or carers.

Changing Places location maps are widely used by people when making decisions about where visit and stay. Being on this map will attract more visitors and make the town and district a viable leisure destination for more people, increasing visitors and allowing them to stay longer.

The UK's 11.9 million disabled people are said to have disposable income collectively worth £80bn, disabled people are a sizeable economic force and should not be forgotten.

A CP toilet in Frome could become a flagship facilities in the district. The opening of new facilities receives a great deal of attention on social media sites, twitter and facebook. Frome should become a destination of choice for a wider range of people.

## **Locations**

### Town Centre

Having a facility in a central location, close to other amenities and car parking is a top priority.

### **Market Yard Toilet Block**

The families we have been spoken to identify this as a preferred location.

Establishing who occupies the second wing of this building, how often it is used, whether those services could be relocated, and whether development is feasible here is a key thing Mendip District Council could facilitate.

Alternatively, investigating the potential for expansion of this block would be another option.

### **Cheese and Grain** – as part of the proposed works or as part of a new development

We have discussed the potential of including a facility at the Cheese and Grain as part of the planned works soon to be undertaken.

We understand that there is not the space within the current planned development for the inclusion of a Changing Places facility and amending the architectural plans at this stage would cause delays that would jeopardise funding.

This would be a good venue for the facility because it is open in the evenings and weekends, not just in the day times. It is in a central location and there would be the advantage that it is staffed, possibly increasing security of the facility.

Mendip District Council could investigate the feasibility of this as a potential venue.

### **Other possible locations for a town centre facility**

1. A purpose built block in the area between Market Yard and the Library
2. The library building
3. Black Swan Arts building
4. Old toilet block in Cork Street car park

### Public Buildings and Spaces

1. Frome Leisure Centre – Despite input from locals, this large redevelopment does not include a hoist nor adequately accessible toileting facilities
2. Frome Hospital – Despite being a recent development, there is no facility here
3. Frome Medical Practice – No Changing Places here despite being a recent development

### Private Business and Attractions

1. Sainsbury's and Asda
2. The new cinema
3. Westway Shopping Centre
4. The Silk Mill
5. Saxonvale development
6. Longleat

### **Costs, Security and Maintenance**

Estimated equipment costs for a Changing Places toilet are between £12,000 - £15,000 including VAT. Other costs involved will depend on the venue such as building costs (if structural changes are required), maintenance costs (for equipment and cleaning) and any security costs.

The specialist equipment within the toilets means it is very important that it is secure. Where the facility is in a public block with no supervision, a key system, separate to the radar key scheme, is useful. The current disabled toilet in Market Yard is accessible by radar key but this does not appear to be working. On a trip to take photographs of provision as part of our research, I was kept waiting for 45 minutes. The occupants turned out to be people seeking shelter to drink and smoke inside the facility. It is important that the facilities are secured for the people who need them, preferably by a more secure key system.

Many places run a scheme whereby local families can apply for a key to the facility via their local social services. Keys are only provided where there is a verified need. A local business or institution with extended opening hours can act as key holders so

that visitors may access the facility should they need to. Ideally this would be very close, to save visitors a difficult walk when they need a bathroom, so the Cheese and Grain and the library for instance.

We need Mendip to help study and establish the feasibility, costs and best options for Frome (and other major settlements in the district) and, when funds are raised, to build or facilitate the building of a CP toilet and take responsibility for its ongoing maintenance.

Further information on Changing Places including the campaign, installation details and case studies can be found on their website <http://www.changing-places.org/>

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