

08 DEC 2017

Mr Sadiq Khan,  
Mayor of London,  
City Hall,  
The Queen's Walk,  
London SE1 2AA

Dear Mr Khan,

### Public Toilet Facilities in London

I note with interest the report in the Evening Standard (Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> November) regarding your plans for the introduction of more gender-neutral lavatories in London. May I suggest that before taking this much needed, but rather controversial, action you review current toilet provision in the Capital.

Over recent years more & more public toilets have been closed and are either derelict or have been converted to nail bars, convenience stores, media studios or wine bars. Consequently the lack of public facilities is shocking, a Canadian urologist with whom I recently had professional contact described the toilet situation in London as "a complete disgrace". On walking holidays in the West Country, the Yorkshire Dales, the Lake District & Northumberland I find toilets, clean, free and open, in many villages. I contrast, London, a major tourist destination and one of the richest capital cities in the World, fails miserably on this count.

Given the shortage of public conveniences one would hope that those still in use would be clearly signed. The reverse is frequently the case. I give a few examples. There is nothing above ground to indicate the presence of toilets in Piccadilly underground station although notice boards on which this information could be displayed exist over each entrance to the station. At Green Park station a *tiny* finger post at the entrance to the park is the only indication above ground of the presence of toilets in the station. The few toilets on the underground system are in general very poorly signposted. As far as I can ascertain the only toilet at Earls Court station, a major interchange of District & Piccadilly lines, is a tiny unisex cubicle no larger than a telephone kiosk. At Green Park station, a major interchange of Piccadilly, Victoria & Jubilee lines, there is only one small sign in the station located over the exit where the toilet exists. A similar situation prevails in Piccadilly station. The Piccadilly toilets were closed for at least four months not so long ago!

There are toilets in Bayswater road at one of the entrances to Kensington Gardens, unfortunately they are screened by vegetation and invisible to people in the gardens. However there is nothing in the gardens to indicate their presence although notice boards suitable for displaying this information are in place.

The toilets in Covent Garden at the rear of St Paul's Church are very poorly signed as are those in Trafalgar Square.

In contrast, toilets no longer in use frequently remain prominently signposted. Some years ago I drew the attention of Richmond Council to a sign in Rocks Lane, Barnes directing those in need, *including the disabled*, to toilets that had long been closed. Toilets at the north end of Lambs' Conduit Street, closed since 1986 still have

large "Ladies" & "Gents" signs readable from 50 yards away. Thirty years later, in 2016 I drew this matter to the attention of Camden Council and London University, each said that the other was responsible and neither took action. Reported proposals to convert these toilets into a noodle bar appear to have fallen by the wayside, the premises remain derelict with their misleading signs still in place. Former toilets at the north end of Kentish Town Road have been converted into a wine bar called "Ladies & Gents" and display a large black on white sign bearing that inscription at the head of the original white tiled stairwell.

Derelict toilets in Kensington Gore and behind Great Portland Street station proudly bear the inscription "Ladies & Gentlemen" in four different European languages.

I raise the matter of charges for the use of public toilets, ideally these facilities should be free as indeed some still are. However others charge 20p 30p or 50p, if charging is necessary because of the financial situation in which councils find themselves there should be a common capital-wide charge.

Finally I mention the half hearted attempt to get owners of commercial premises to allow members of the public to access their toilets. Only once have I seen a sign in a shop window indicating toilets available to the general public. In contrast intimidating "toilets for customers only" signs remain all too common.

To the elderly and less mobile members of society easy access to toilets is a matter of some importance. Many are no doubt discouraged from visiting London and contributing to the economy of the Capital by the lack of these facilities.

I did raise the matter of toilet provision in London with your predecessors some years ago only to be told that toilets were a matter for individual councils and therefore no concern of the Mayor of London. I suggest that this response is entirely inadequate, there should be a capital-wide policy for dealing with this important matter. Access to toilets when out and about is a basic human need.

I conclude on a more positive note. Recently I observed in Camden Town a local map on a bus shelter marking in different colours the whereabouts of public toilets, and commercial toilets available to the public. Would it not be a good idea to roll this system out across the Capital?

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Dr. Stephen D. Robinson.

Dr. Stephen D. Robinson