

Nowhere to go

Views on the state of public toilet provision in the UK

June 2022

Survey findings from the Bathroom Manufacturers Association

Foreword

As manufacturers of sanitaryware, taps and basins, BMA members' brands are often the most visible in the UK's public and commercial washrooms. It's no surprise then that during the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, the association was one of the organisations contacted by concerned citizens about the lack of public conveniences.

As suppliers of fixtures and fittings, we were already aware that investment in local authority toilet facilities had declined for decades. What became apparent during the lockdowns was the level of reliance communities have on facilities operated by stores, cafes and other private enterprises. Closure of these facilities due to restrictions meant that people exercising in the community or carrying out essential tasks had 'nowhere to go'.

Further examination revealed that the availability of public conveniences was just one of several factors contributing to dissatisfaction with toilet provision in the public realm. BMA established a Public Washrooms Special Interest Group to explore these issues further. This fact file is a summary of that group's initial research.

Organisations like the British Toilet Association and the Royal Society for Public Health have made a compelling case for years for a more coherent Government policy on public toilet provision. We hope this fact file will help build on that case.

Thank you for reading.

Richard Braid
Chair of BMA's Public Washrooms Group

Tom Reynolds
BMA Chief Executive

The Public's Perception



What people think,
feel and do

In January 2022, the BMA commissioned Opinium to find out what the general public's overall view of the toilet provision in their area. A nationally representative sample of 2000 people were asked a series of questions. Here's what we learnt...

On a scale of 0 to 10, rank the public toilets in your area...



National average score
4.2 out of 10



39%
Score their local loos
lower than 3 out of 10

Respondents near
Sheffield
gave their toilets
the lowest rating
(3.3/10), just
behind
Cardiff
(3.4/10)



London
and
Norwich
had the best
rated public
loos, but only
4.6/10

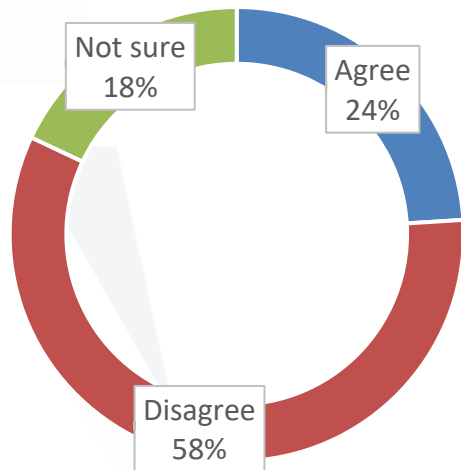
The Public's Perception



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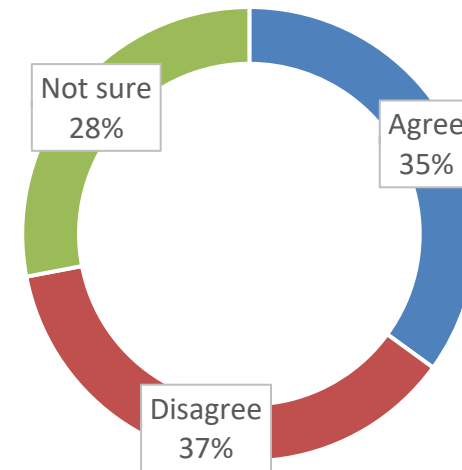
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There are enough public toilets in my area



■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Not sure

They are clean and well kept



■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Not sure

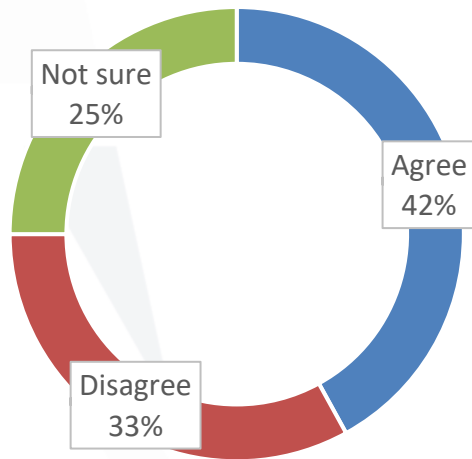
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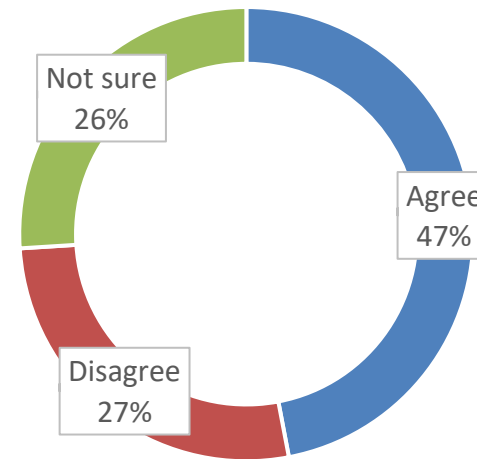
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They feel safe for me to use



■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Not sure

They provide adequate hand washing facilities



■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Not sure

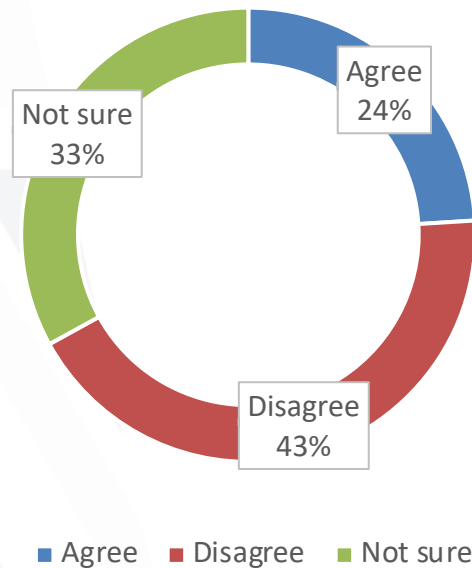
The Public's Perception



What people think,
feel and do

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There are enough facilities for disabled people



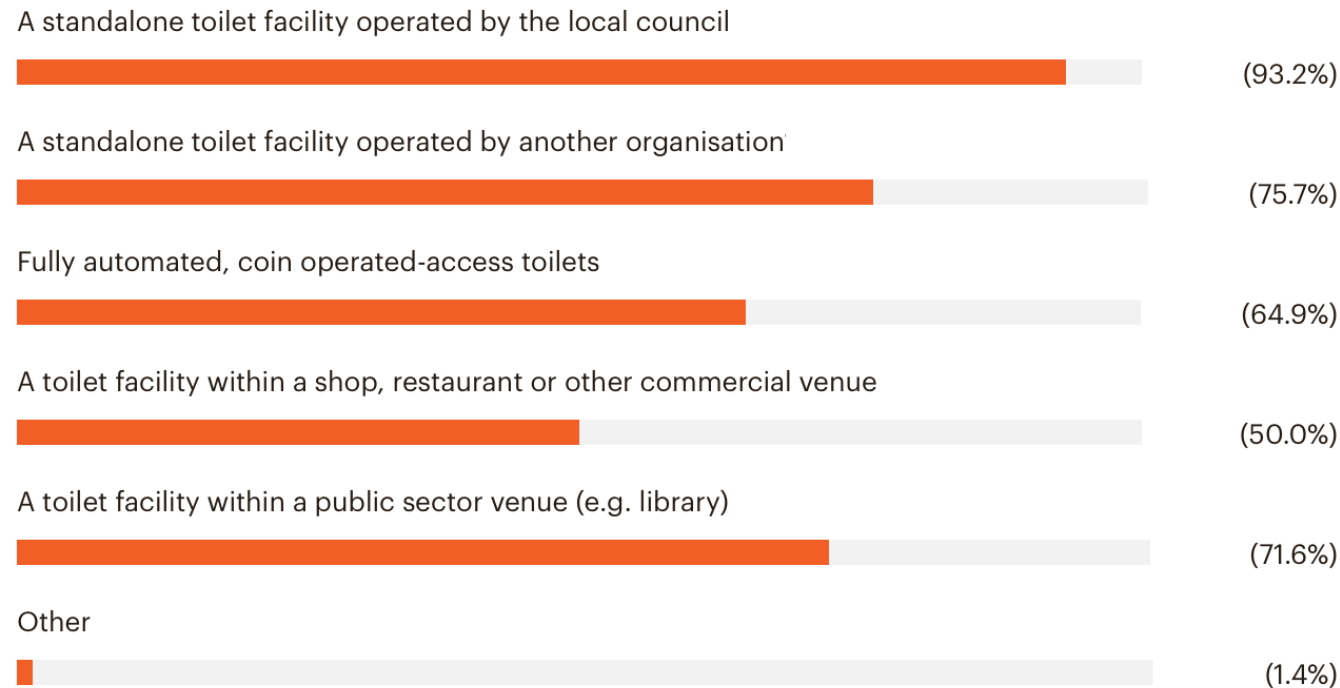
So....

- 58% of Brits disagree that there are enough public toilets in their area
- Only 35% believe their public toilets are clean and well kept
- A third of Brits don't feel it is safe to use the public toilets in their area
- Even after the pandemic, only a quarter feel their local loos have adequate handwashing facilities
- Despite the Changing Places programme, 43% of Brits don't think there are enough toilet facilities for disabled people in their area

What counts as a public loo?

In April-May BMA conducted a more in-depth online survey, collecting a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. There were 74 respondents in the sample.

We asked respondents what they think should be counted as a public loo. Here were the responses...

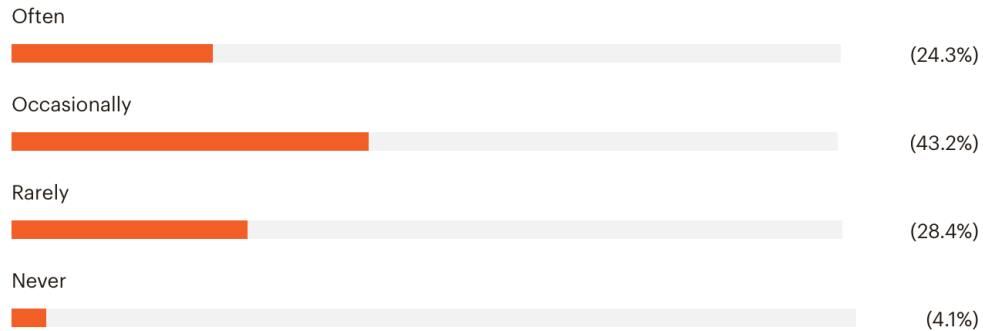


Most people regard “a public toilet” as a facility operated by the local council

Do you use public loos?

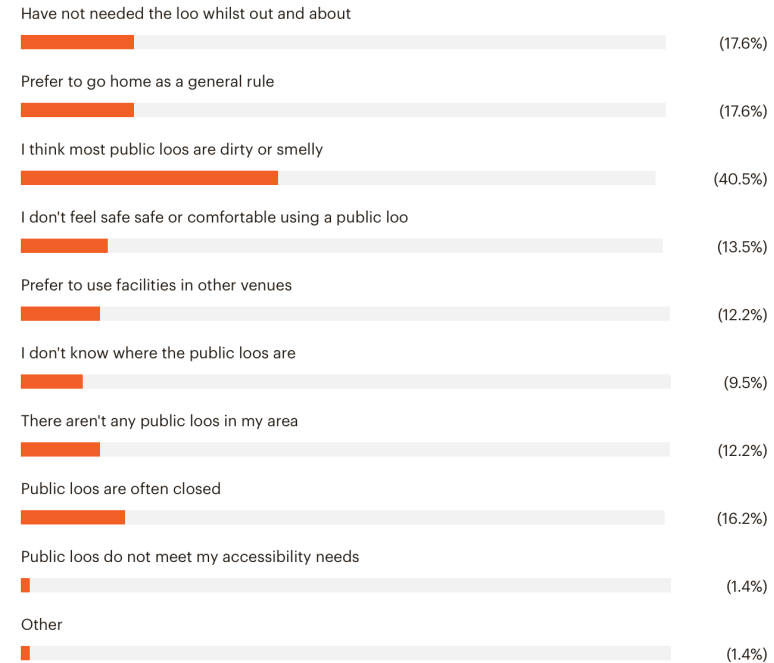
In the same survey, we asked whether respondents use public loos and, if not, why not?

Here were the responses...



Nearly a third of people rarely or never use public loos

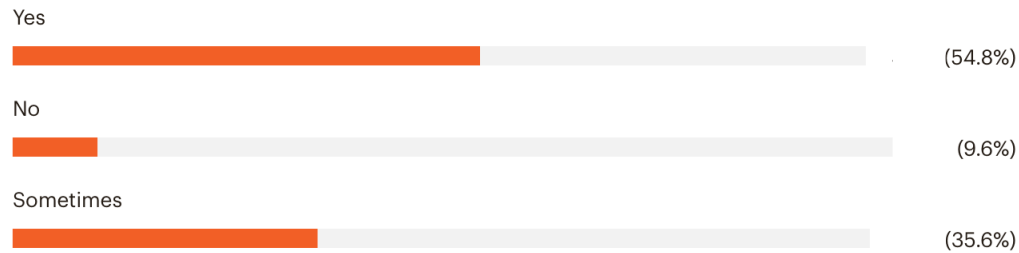
Why?...



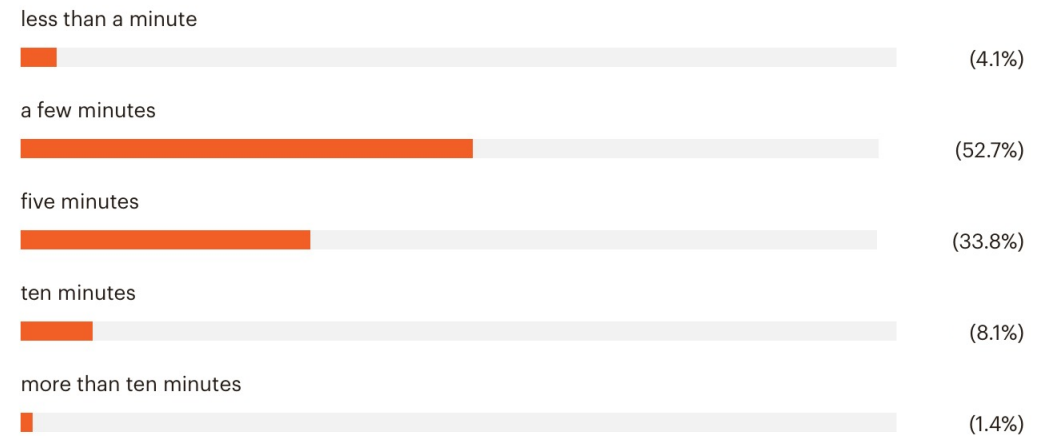
40% said because public loos are dirty or smelly while over a quarter said there simply aren't any or they're closed

They're important, and so is proximity

We asked respondents if they consider the condition of toilets when choosing to visit or revisit public or commercial venues. It was a resounding yes!



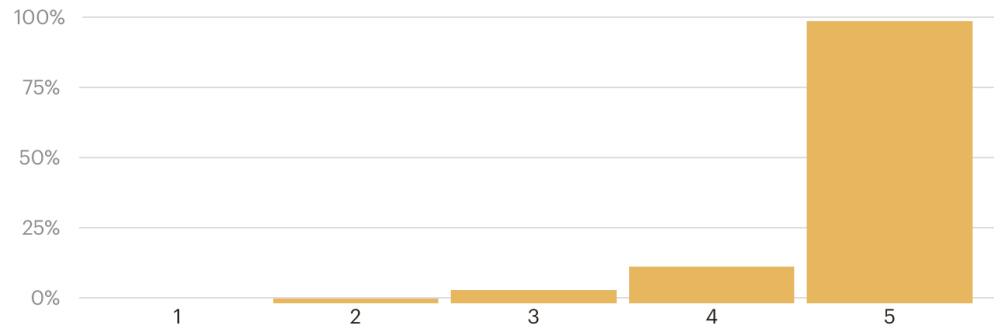
We asked respondents how long is it acceptable to walk to a public loo in a town centre or large venue. For most it is five minutes or less.



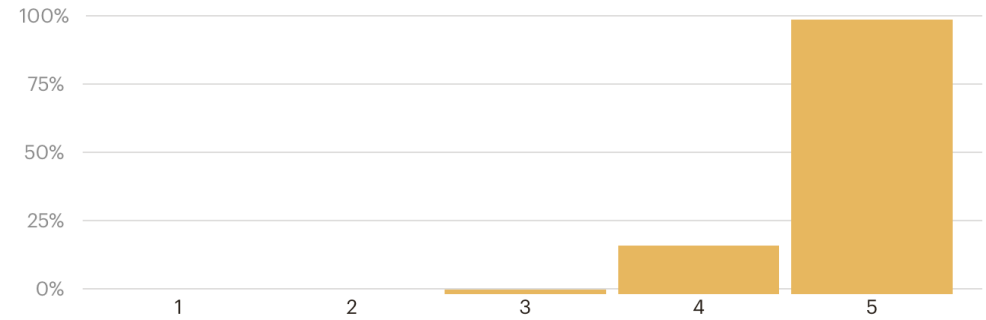
What's important to you, in your public loo?

A score of 1 is not important, a score of 5 is very important

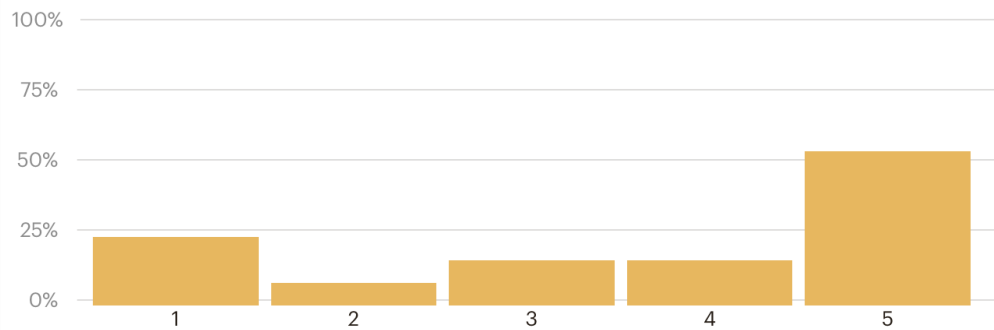
Clean and well maintained



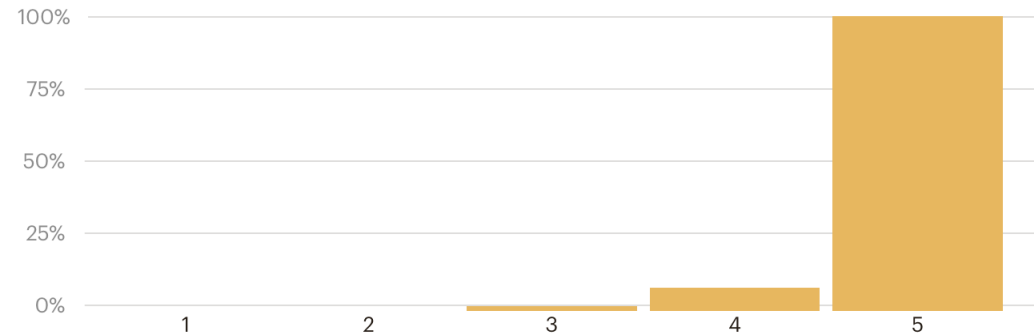
All equipment working



Baby changing facilities



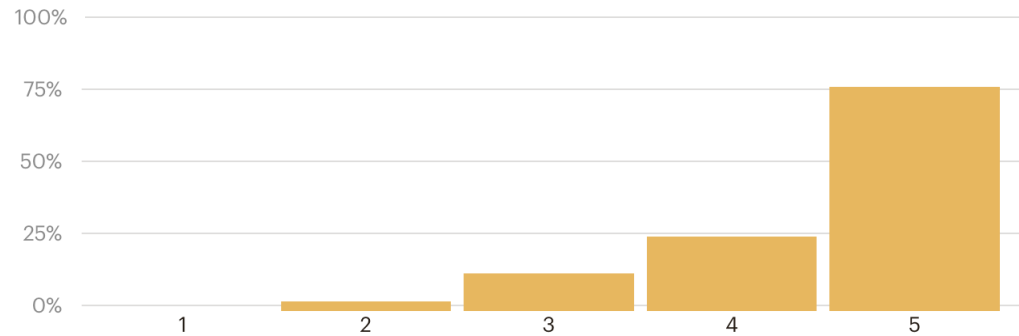
That they feel safe all the time



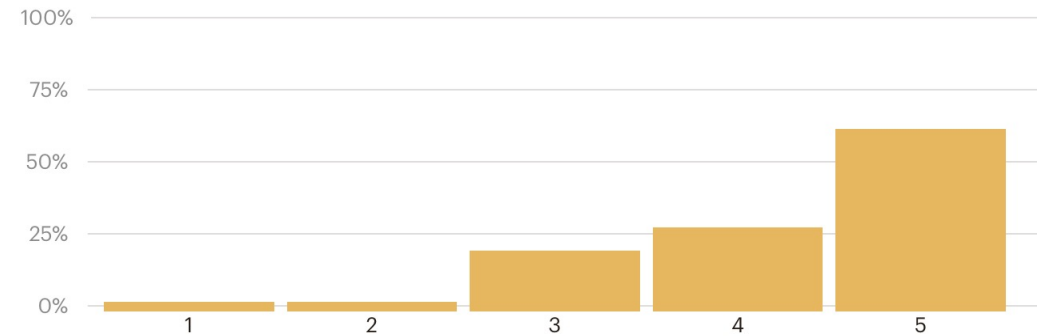
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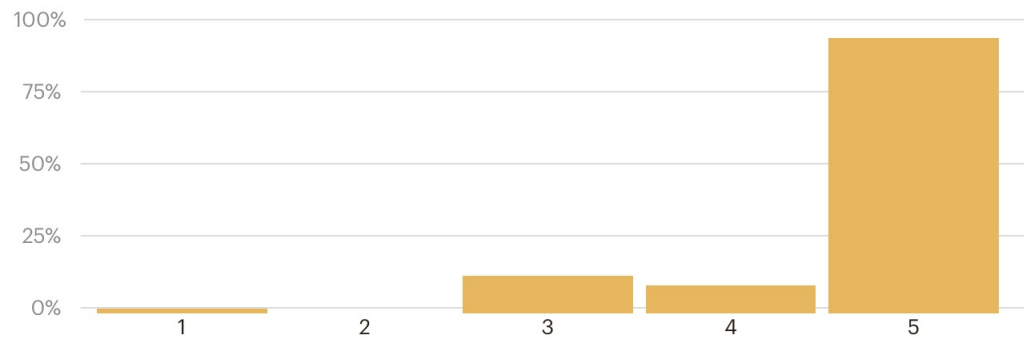
A pleasant or neutral smell



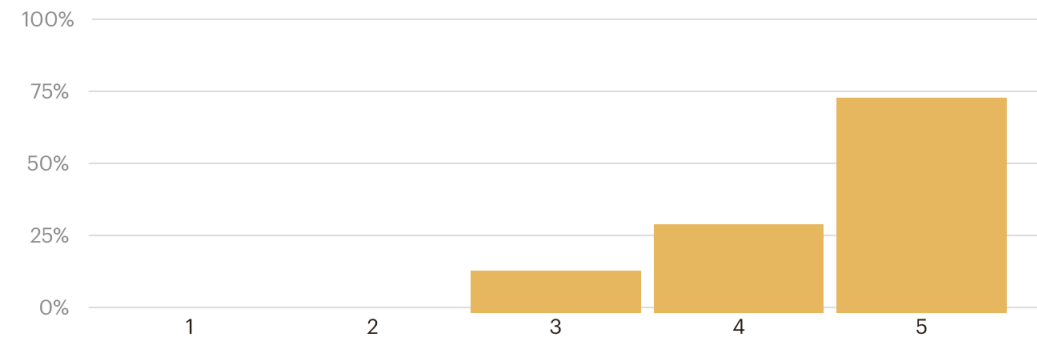
Free from graffiti and damage



Easily used for people with disability



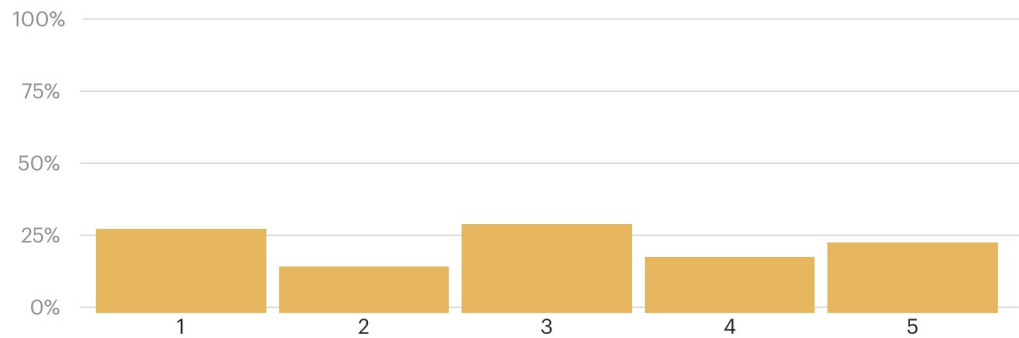
Conveniently located



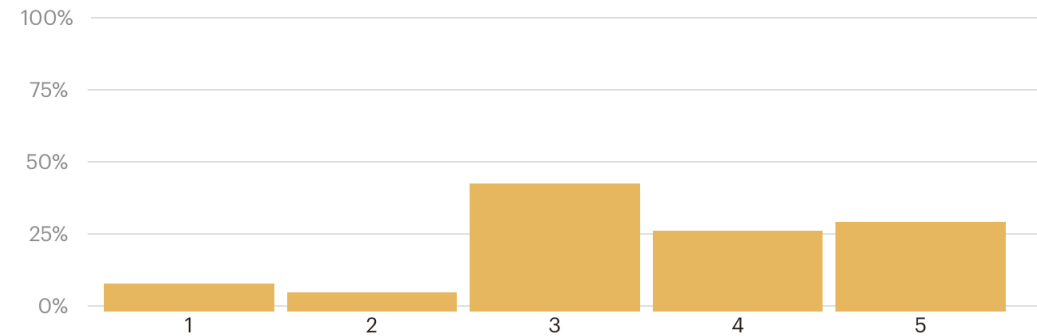
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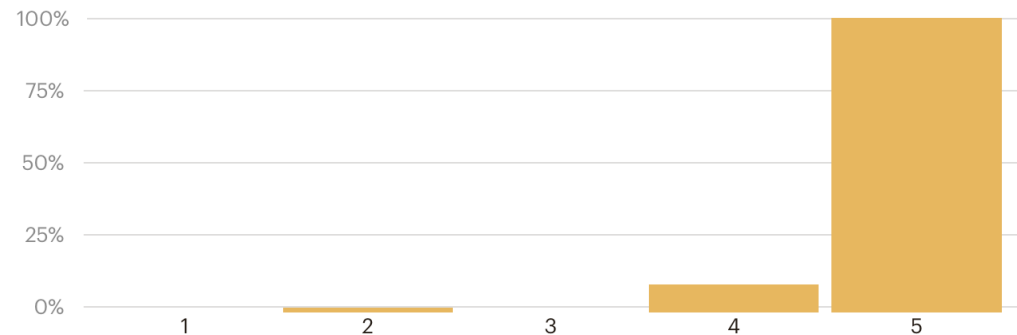
Not part of a commercial enterprise



Don't have a queue



Adequate handwashing facilities



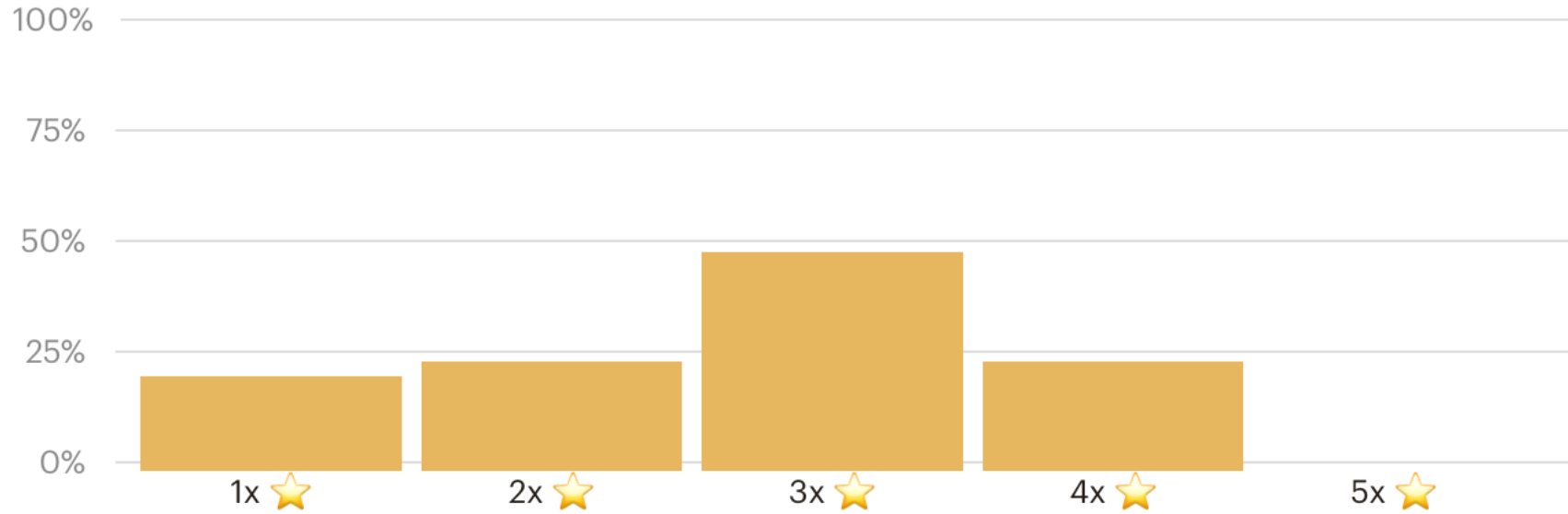
Importance factors ranked

A score of 1 is not important, a score of 5 is very important

=1	That they feel safe all the time	4.9
=1	Adequate handwashing facilities	4.9
=3	Clean and well maintained	4.8
=3	All equipment working	4.8
5	Easily used for people with disability	4.6
=6	A pleasant or neutral smell	4.5
=6	Conveniently located	4.5
8	Free from graffiti and damage	4.2
9	Baby changing facilities	3.6
10	Don't have a queue	3.5
11	<u>Not</u> part of a commercial enterprise	2.9

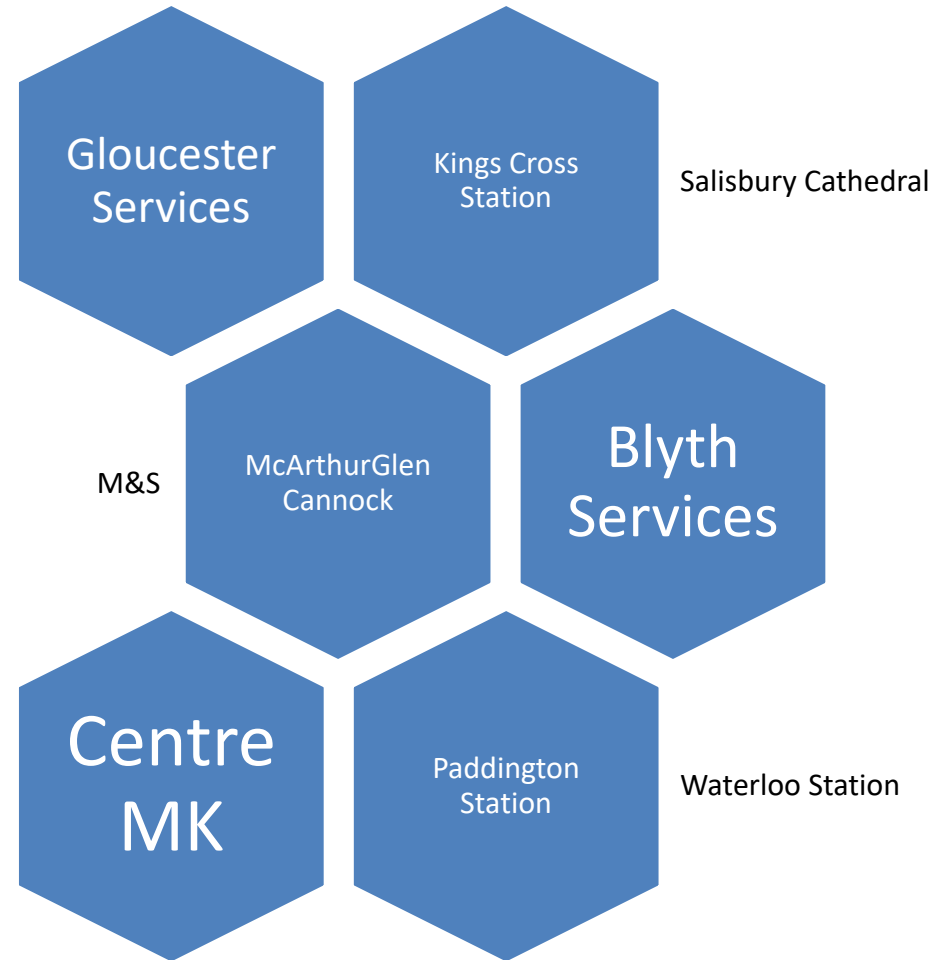
How would you rate the public loos in your area?

1 to 5 Star Rating



That's a marginally better rating than our findings with Opinium but still poor

It's not all bad. Examples of great loos...



Respondents' Comments

My personal experience is most public toilets outside of public venues are misused i.e vandalism, drug taking etc or are closed.

All stand-alone council owned public toilets should be free - am happy for my taxes to pay towards maintenance if it means tourists to the country can use them freely and don't come away thinking we're all tight!

I hate that there is a queue for the ladies, but no queue for the gents
No paper towels for hand drying - hate the dryers

My main gripes are the lack of them and having to use shops, having to pay for them, not being well maintained or clean

Cost cutting by local authorities have closed the ones local to myself

Public funding cuts to public toilets are unacceptable

It annoys me when facilities are broken every time you visit (obviously not been repaired)

They are often closed too early in the afternoon - those in my town close at 5pm

Graffiti & damage are not the same thing..... graffiti can make a dull public toilet more interesting, damage is different.

Conveniences need to be just that if they're to attract visitors to local areas

Smelly. Feel dirty even if they're not. Mirrors often rusty. Damp. Dark. Old. Cold.

Thank you for reading

BMA welcomes a dialogue on the issues outlined in this fact file.

Contact tom.reynolds@bathroom-association.org.uk