



Countdown to the grand opening: Noon 13 July 2024

Kilburn Grange Park Toilets Pilot

Summer 2024

Report and internal evaluation

KOVE and One Kilburn



One Kilburn

Executive Summary

Background

The project trialled opening toilets in Grange Park for ten weekend afternoons in summer 2024.

In 2023 the charity KOVE (Kilburn Older Voices Exchange) worked with One Kilburn to bring together statutory and community partners in Kilburn to address the lack of toilets. This built collaboration, particularly with Camden Environmental Services and Carlisle Support Services.

There are toilets with disabled access in the Playhut in Grange Park but they are not public toilets that can be used at any time because there are often play activities taking place.

Therefore, two cubicles in the changing rooms near the Kilburn High Road entrance were opened, staffed by a paid attendant at all times, and supported by a community market and KOVE volunteers.

There was no funding for the project. The attendant was generously provided free by Carlisle. Income was raised by the Kilburn Festival and KOVE bric-à-brac sales.

Evaluation

- There is high demand for toilets in Kilburn Grange Park – over 1,600 users.
- There was no anti-social behaviour. Nevertheless, this is an issue that needs to be constantly considered.
- The core partnerships worked well and parties closely involved built trust.
- The market did not generate significant income.
Running costs remain a long-term challenge.
- More marketing is needed to reach people affected by the loo leash.

Next steps

A community meeting in January 2025 agreed to run a similar project in 2025.

- KOVE will apply for funding, looking to build on last year including the cheerful community element seen in this video KOVE produced: <https://youtu.be/GLTBzRPjVv0>
- Carlisle will continue to supply pro bono an attendant and cleaning.
- The Playhut toilets will be open from end of February to end November, 10–1pm on Thursdays, 2–3pm Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays. This includes a disabled toilet.
- The aspiration remains that there should be a permanently open toilet in the park.

Main report

Introduction

This report assesses a ten-week pilot project opening toilets in Kilburn Grange Park. The toilet in the park's changing rooms located near the Kilburn High Road entrance was open to the public at weekends, and a single weekday, between 13 July and 15 September 2024. Initially the toilet was open from 12–4pm, extended to 5pm from Saturday 24 August.

Context

Lack of toilets impacts most on disadvantaged groups such as those with health conditions, older and disabled people, pregnant women, families with young children, risking increased social isolation.

The social injustice aspect is also evident as residents in nearby better-off neighbourhoods (Waterlow Park, Hampstead Heath, Queens Park) enjoy public toilets in their green spaces.

Kilburn Grange Park is owned and managed by Camden Council. There has been no public toilet in Kilburn Grange Park for more than two decades. The February 2023 iteration of the park Masterplan*, responding to demand during public consultation, identifies opening toilets as a priority area.

One Kilburn provided the networking opportunities, structure and support to make this project possible. The One Kilburn sub-group on toilets (Loos for Kilburn) first agreed to explore opening the toilets at a meeting in February 2023.

* <https://kilburngrangepark.commonplace.is/en-GB/proposals/kilburn-grange-park-masterplan-updates-feb-23/start>

Aims

The primary aims of the pilot were to:

- better understand the demand for toilets, including hours of peak demand
- better understand the level and impact of anti-social behaviour on a toilet in this park
- better understand what level of staffing is needed
- better understand the costs and potential income
- establish a market to reduce anti-social behaviour, create community and generate income
- develop and test partnership working
- enable people to use the park who would not otherwise be able to do so (the loo leash)

Project process

Having started with a Kilburn Toilet Hackathon in February 2023, discussions continued within One Kilburn and at KOVE. In May 2024 Camden Council agreed that KOVE lead this pilot project with input from the Camden Participation Team, Camden Environmental Services, Camden Property Services, Carlisle Support Services, Camden Parks and Kilburn State of Mind. The main project partners met online weekly to work together and review progress.

Preparatory work

- Carlisle, with support of Camden Property Services, upgraded the building to make it attractive to users and meet regulatory compliance. Carlisle also provided training for KOVE volunteers in safely managing anti-social behaviour.
- KOVE and the Environmental Services Team co-designed signs to promote the toilet, which became a prominent feature of the site and its environs.
- As the changing rooms are not accessible, a wheelchair accessible toilet was to be made available at the Playhut on request.
- KOVE planned and recruited stallholders to a mini-market.

Project resourcing

Camden Council's public toilets contractor, Carlisle Support Services, agreed to deliver the crucial on-site support by providing an attendant. This was critical to the Camden Parks Department allowing the scheme go-ahead. The arrangement was also consistent with KOVE's preference, despite the organisation's commitment to voluntary action, that public toilets require regular attendance by qualified, paid personnel.

Carlisle extremely generously provided the entirety of its support free of charge, making this project possible. It should be noted that there was no local authority funding for adapting or maintaining the facility, nor for staffing this project. All partners, particularly KOVE, relied on their own existing resources or donations. Camden departments provided staff time free of charge. Camden Environmental Services were key partners in providing ideas and in devoting energy and time. They funded the printing of most of the signage on site.

The market

KOVE developed a mini-market alongside the toilet. One aim was financial – to test whether such an arrangement could be used to part-fund a toilet in the future. The other aim was social: to help increase activity in the park and establish a community atmosphere and presence to deter anti-social behaviour and misuse of the facility.

KOVE engaged and managed the small group of its members who volunteered to help with the set up and take down of the mini-market each weekend, while helping with surveys and raising awareness of the toilet among park users and visitors. At the heart of this was KOVE's own stall, selling bric-à-brac and encouraging campaign donations. This stall was run by the Chair.



First market customer, with Rahel

Project in numbers

The Carlisle attendant conducted a user count and invited users to complete a survey. 1,461 people were recorded as using the toilet. It's estimated that this figure under-represents the real total by 10% – the attendant had sometimes to concentrate on other tasks. Around 300 were children. More than twice as many men used the toilet as women.

Total recorded	Men	Women	Children	Undetermined	Unidentified
1,461	542	230	298	23	368

Evaluation

Analysis and recommendations from this project have been supported by a survey with 239 responses from toilet users; deliberative discussion among the protagonists during the operation; and at subsequent meetings and follow-up interviews with key partners conducted by Sasha Khan of One Kilburn.

▶ See Appendix 1 on page 11 for full user count breakdown, survey responses and interviewees

Key Themes

Overall satisfaction

97% of users found the changing room toilets 'good' or 'excellent'. 80% of people surveyed said they felt they could stay in the park longer when the toilet is open.

“Due to my cancer I need to use because of my condition”
(User survey respondent)



The grand opening in July

Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour was a primary concern going into the project with multiple incidents, some serious, reported in the park. It was widely believed that the toilets would be misused. These concerns contributed to the requirement for an attendant and a ban on lone working at the site.

During the project however, there was no misuse of the changing room toilet. This may reflect the limited daytime period when the toilets were open – no later than 5pm. But it is also consistent with reports from elsewhere that the presence of an attendant (backed up here by the organised community presence) acts as a deterrent to vandalism and misuse of toilets.

The one incident of anti-social behaviour took place during a temporary closure when the attendant had to deal with a problem in another part of London. A disappointed would-be user made prejudicial comments about the scheme and threatened to film members of the team. He returned later and on other occasions and used the toilet without comment.

The one-day closure led to a visit and complaint from the Black Lion pub. Volunteers signposted disappointed would-be users there, but the pub was unwilling to allow this volume of toilet users.

*“Public toilets mean less public urination.
Fosters a sense of dignity and self worth”*
(User survey respondent)

Finance and staffing

The delivery of the project was made possible by the in-kind support from Carlisle Support Services, who provided the following without charge in support of the project:

- An attendant
- Consumables (toilet paper, disposable hand towels)
- Physical changes required of the changing room building prior to opening, including redecoration, deep clean, privacy enhancements, new equipment
- Undertaking required tests, eg legionella

The cost of hiring an attendant through Carlisle is around £27 an hour, or £2,160 for ten summer weekends, open four hours a day.

The true cost including maintenance, repairs and consumables is higher.

The community market was developed to test whether pitch fees would contribute to running costs. The market continued throughout, with two or three stalls most days selling candles, caps, perfume, crocheted items, Somali clothes, second-hand clothes and an eco-products refill station. But despite the success of KOVE bric-à-brac sales, the commercial stalls made very little money.

Most traders were selling in public for the first time and were learning from the experience. Pitch income was therefore only £145.

Strengths and challenges

Project strengths

The following were identified as strengths by those interviewed as part of the project:

① The community spirit and support for the project

Those interviewed as professional partners thought the support from within Camden Council and from the wider Kilburn community were key strengths of the project which underpinned its success. The KOVE Chair who managed their stall as part of the market said that members of the public often helped set up and take down the gazebos. She fed back positively about the response to what the project was trying to achieve.

“The reaction from the public was overall one of 100% appreciation, saying this is wonderful... the festival launch was brilliant”

Equally, this support from the community is underlined by the amount – almost £4,000 – of money raised from community sources, in support of the scheme. Moreover, although the community market wasn't profitable, there was a strong feeling that it added an important sense of community spirit during the pilot.

*“The market stalls were very friendly and community minded.
It made a good atmosphere and people supported and helped each other.
It was exactly what I wanted and hoped for, and exceeded my expectations”*

Specific praise also came for KOVE’s volunteers who were present during the opening hours, and identified as crucial to the success. The friendliness of the attendant contributed to the community feel – he was selected for this quality.

② The project management and delivery

Linked to the above, the project management and delivery was also identified by multiple people as a key strength. This included how fast the project was able to be delivered, with conversations around it beginning in March and delivery in July. Feedback also reflected the effectiveness of KOVE’s leadership and project management throughout.

*“Working with Michael went well, he was brilliant.
He took on a lot to deliver the project,
and he was very considerate”*

*“I attribute the main success to KOVE volunteers.
It can be so hard to maintain interest from volunteers,
but they managed and led their volunteers very well. That made
the trial a success. They really wanted to do it and do it well”*

Feedback from professional partners interviewed likewise identified the project team as working well. Meeting weekly and troubleshooting together meant that obstacles could be overcome with relative speed.

③ No anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents

As referenced earlier in this report, no ASB incidents were reported during the trial. This was seen as a key success by everyone: ASB had been one of the main concerns going into the project. Only 9 of 239 people surveyed who had used the toilets had concerns about safety. Relaxing security by staffing with volunteers rather than a paid attendant from noon to 1pm did not appear to make any difference to ASB.

User survey respondents were evenly split between preferring an attendant at all times and being happy with an attendant just visiting regularly to clean. But the fact that more men than women used the toilet suggests the some women might be more reluctant altogether.

Both a pro and a con is that alcohol drinkers in the park did not use the toilets at all. There had been an idea that by opening the toilets it might become easier engage with them, but it did not create an opportunity to pursue this.

④ How many used the toilet

The toilet was well-used and appreciated even on wet and cold days. (It was reported that the park was quieter than usual for that time of year). An average of 16 people an hour used the toilets (on average 2.4 people use the toilets at Piccadilly Circus!) Extending closing time from 4pm to 5pm significantly increased visitor numbers. There was comparatively low usage between noon and 1pm. High usage suggests people felt safe using the toilet and found them clean. 77% of those surveyed rated cleanliness as excellent and 22.5% good.



Lynda's donation loo!

We know from our outreach on site that even at the end of the pilot, about a quarter of people in the park, and presumably more in the wider community, were still not aware there were open toilets. Although this might reduce over time it highlights the need for signage (the removal of out of date notices would have assisted in this).

“I can get walking exercise easier as I know there is a toilet”

(User survey respondent)

*“I’ve got a small flat so I use the park often,
especially if my friends visit me, I bring them to the park for a picnic”*

(User survey respondent)

*“...I’d love to see something come of this. We proved that it works.
We had 1,500 visitors in ten weeks”*

(Professional partner)

Project challenges

The following were identified as challenges within the project, or learning on areas we could improve next time, by those interviewed as part of the project.

① Accessibility

The changing room opened during the trial was not wheelchair accessible, which meant that it could not be used by everyone. The Playhut has a fully wheelchair accessible toilet; however this was not included in signposting due to worries about the demand being managed by the Playhut volunteers.

While it is imperative to have an accessible toilet, it should be noted that during the 21 days opening there were no requests for this. Wheelchair users might use the park if they knew about them. It needs a strong publicity campaign to reach this group along with others who don't visit the park because of the loo leash.

“Not having the Playhut accessible toilet signposted... impacts on the learning – feedback from people with access needs is missing”
(Professional partner)

2 Funding

“The funding of this project and longer-term solutions is a major challenge. Parks cannot afford to run this toilet... There is also a question about if funding is secured – what happens when it runs out?”
(Professional partner)

The pilot was only viable because Carlisle Support Services waived their fees.

“There was no funding at all for this project, that is a hard thing for KOVE to do”
(Professional partner)

KOVE spent £4,907 developing and coordinating the project. A quarter of this sum came from the Kilburn Festival (Kilburn State of Mind and Friends of Kilburn Grange Park) who generously donated proceeds of £1,113. KOVE had made three unsuccessful funding bids in the early spring but then raised £2,632 over four months, mainly through bric-à-brac sales in the park and at other summer events such as Jester Festival, requiring a massive effort by the chair and a small team. Donations via Just Giving (mostly from two sources) were £107.

KOVE contributed £1,162 from reserves to cover the four month period in full.

The market did not generate enough income to contribute to running costs. The market potential was restricted by not being allowed to sell food or drink, or use electricity or gas and to avoid competing with the Playhut cafe.

The project's long-term sustainability depends on securing ongoing funding. Ward councillors had indicated they wanted to commit Community Investment Levy funds (CIL) but this would be a one-off payment for capital costs and unlikely to cover year-on-year cover running costs.

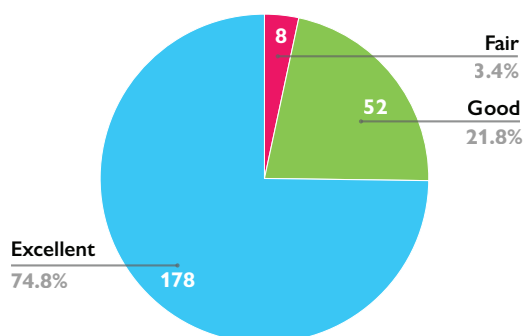
3 Community Engagement

While there was community interest, support and engagement did not always translate into support such as volunteering beyond KOVE's membership. Even within KOVE the reliance on a small number of key individuals highlights the need for broader community involvement.

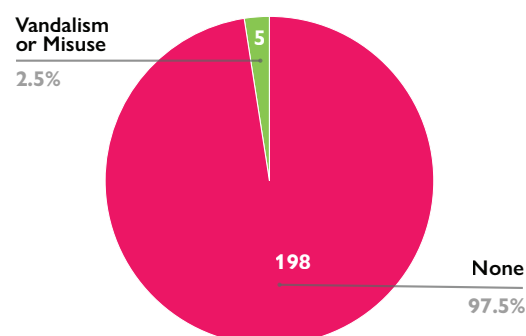
Appendix 1: The project in numbers

Below are key survey responses from people who used the toilet during the pilot

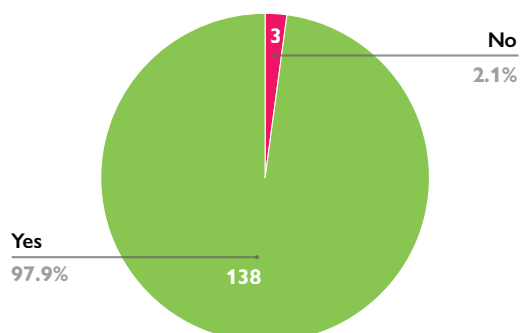
How clean is the toilet?



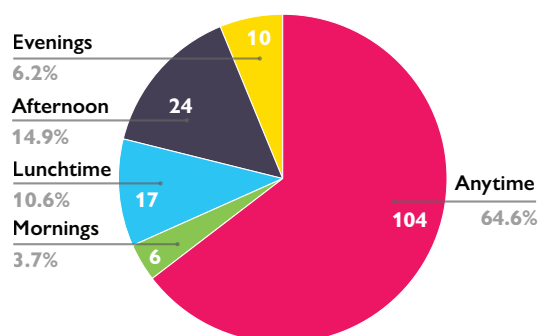
What issues have you found with the toilet?



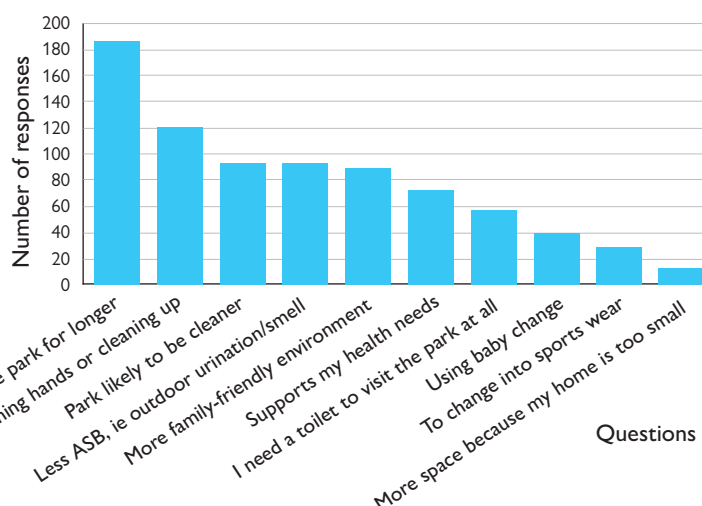
Would you visit the park more knowing you can use a toilet there? (Asked during the first five weeks)



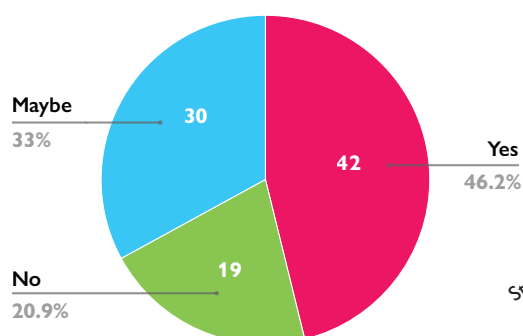
When are you most likely to need the toilet? (Asked during the first five weeks)



How does the toilet help you?



There are cafes, pubs and a theatre very near the park that welcome people using their toilets without buying anything. Would you use these to visit, or stay longer in the park? (Only asked during the last five weeks)



Main partners engaged with throughout the project

- KOVE
- Carlisle Support Services
- London Borough of Camden (Environment Services; Property Services; Parks)
- One Kilburn
- Market traders

Conclusions

- There is high demand for toilets in Kilburn Grange Park, as recognised in the Park Masterplan.
- The question of long-term funding remains unresolved and should be the focus of the next stage.
- Despite the high level of anti-social behaviour locally there was no trouble or misuse. Nevertheless, this is an issue that should be borne in mind recognising the contributions of an attendant and community involvement to the success of last summer's scheme.
- The core partnerships worked well and parties closely involved built trust and understanding.
- In ten weeks it is difficult to reach people who most need a toilet to enjoy the park. A longer period and more marketing is needed to reach this group.

We need to better understand:

- 1 Whether, if the other half of the Changing Rooms is now available, there is potential for a second set of toilets there.
Would a women-only space increase usage by women? What is the extra cost?
- 2 What hours can be safely opened? Could the toilets be open beyond 5pm so people can socialise with friends after work?
- 3 The true cost of operating the changing room and Playhut toilets
- 4 What level of staffing is needed? Is an attendant required at all times?
Does this change without a market?
- 5 The impact of wet weather on the community presence
- 6 The scope and potential for building a new toilet in the park.

Recommendations

- 1 **Explore** models and funding sources for sustainable running costs
- 2 **Test** different opening times using dynamic risk assessment
- 3 **Combine** use of the Playhut with changing rooms
See Appendix overleaf
- 4 **Explore** alternatives to the market, including community groups running stalls and interactive activities
- 5 **Consider** opening second half of changing rooms to improve take-up by women (cost dependent)

Other options

KOVE and One Kilburn are committed to re-establishing a sustainable public toilet in the park. There are three other options:

- **to continue** with part-time opening (currently under consideration)
- **to franchise** an arrangement with the tenant of the Playhut
- **to accept** that the park will not have toilets and approach local businesses to accommodate signposted park-users under the Community Toilet Scheme

The long-term solution could also require the construction of a new bank of toilets with consideration given to a compost toilet facility.

Appendix 2: February 2025

Playhut agreed contribution to toilet access

The toilets in the Playhut are accessible most of the time when the building is open. When they are not accessible there will be a sign on the door for safeguarding reasons.

The aim is that the toilets are guaranteed to be open
10–1pm on Thursdays, from end of February to end November;
noon–3pm Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays.

The building is often open at other times. Staff and volunteers always have the right to refuse entry – but so far they have not had to do so.

There will be a sign outside the toilets explaining this.

Report by One Kilburn and KOVE

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