



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

London, 12th July 2011

***Toilet Talk: women's needs - forthcoming event on women and public toilets***

Public toilets do not meet women's needs: there's not enough, they are often unclean, feel unsafe and the locks don't work when you get there. Call it a gross public inconvenience – and that's just the queue.

Building designers often allocate equal space to toilets for men and women, but in this case being treated 'equally' disadvantages women. Women simply need more space and more time to go to the loo more often. And so one half of the population ends up waiting for the other half that is looking for, queuing for, and eventually using, the nearest public toilet.

Some all too familiar examples:

- Need the loo whilst out shopping? First locate the necessary facility, then take the escalator two floors plus a flight of stairs, with your shopping/children/elderly parent/all of the above...
- Interview? Meeting? Bit anxious? Where's the loo? Have you got time?
- At a show, do you go at the beginning or the end of the interval? Miss the second half or the interval drinks: you choose.
- How about public transport? Many toilets on trains are several carriages away, with the dreaded electronic doors. There are few WCs at London's underground stations and new developments aren't much better - no toilet facilities are planned for the new Crossrail stations.

Much as we love potty humour in Britain, it doesn't need to be like this, and *Toilet Talk* will show why. This event brings together experts to discuss the provision, accessibility and safety of public conveniences and how these, or the lack of them, affect women. We'll look at the British Standard on public toilets and talk about how to influence decision-makers to make improvements to their local facilities.

Join us for an afternoon of presentations and discussion followed by a reception. Speakers include:

- **Clara Greed** Professor of Inclusive Urban Planning, University of the West of England
- **Michelle Barkley** Technical Director, Chapman Taylor Architects; Committee Member, Code of Practice for the Provision of Public Toilets
- **Jo-Anne Bichard** Research Fellow, Royal College of Art, Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design
- **Georgia Wrighton** Project Manager, WDS; Lecturer in Planning, Kingston University

**WHEN AND WHERE**

**Monday 25th July 2011, 2.30-6.00pm at the Building Centre, 26 Store Street, London WC1E 7BT**

**Booking required.** Email [hcarty@wds.org.uk](mailto:hcarty@wds.org.uk) or telephone 020 7490 5210 (leave a brief message with your contact details if we aren't able to answer your call).

This event is free to attend, funded by an 'Awards for All' grant from the National Lottery.



The recent GLA report calls for better access to London's toilets, and the collation of information on their whereabouts for the public. However, councils are not required to provide public toilets, and as budgets have been cut more are closing - it seems that loos are a luxury, not a necessity. Yet inadequate toilet provision is one of the most obvious limits on women's access to public space, whether for work or leisure. It also undermines all the planning, design and maintenance that helps to make popular spaces pleasant, and working space fit for purpose.

Towns, cities and public spaces are supposed to be available for all, and in the UK, although equal rights for women are enforceable in law, gender is often overlooked as an issue of equality. The Gender Equality Duty, in force since 2007, requires more than the equal treatment of men and women. Public bodies are to promote and act to bring about gender equality, assessing the needs of both genders and creating services that meet men's and women's needs. This has yet to be challenged with regard to public buildings and spaces.

### **About WDS**

The Women's Design Service (WDS) works to ensure that the design and use of the built environment reflects the needs and aspirations of women. Set up 25 years ago WDS published *At Women's Convenience: a handbook on the design of women's public toilets* in 1990. Other successful projects have covered women's safety in parks; safe use of public transport (also featuring a film); cycling for women; and design of offices and workspaces. At present WDS is concluding a project that created Women's Design Groups in selected London boroughs. These groups provide a forum to discuss the planning and design of local neighbourhoods, how they can be improved, and how to bring those recommendations to the attention of local authorities, developers and policymakers who can do something about it.

Sadly, WDS is facing closure later this year due to lack of funds. This means our campaigning history and careful work may be lost to future generations. WDS' work shows how women are disadvantaged every day in our towns and cities. For example:

- Walk the children to school? Mind the lip on the kerb with the buggy.
- Taking baby to see the grandparents? Hope they can meet you and help get the buggy up the steps to go across the bridge over the railway.
- Want to perch on the sloping 'seat' on the train (designed to offer more room for standing passengers)? Only if you're 6 foot tall.

Why is it important to attend to such design flaws? Like other women's organisations, WDS tries to identify and remove barriers to women's full participation in a society that aims to treat women as equal to men. For women to be effective, useful and productive outside the home as well as in it means removing physical and social barriers to that participation. WDS is unique in that the specific barrier we focus on is the built environment, the buildings, spaces and places that we all use for work and leisure.

**More at [www.wds.org.uk](http://www.wds.org.uk)**

Press notice ENDS ### (947 words)

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