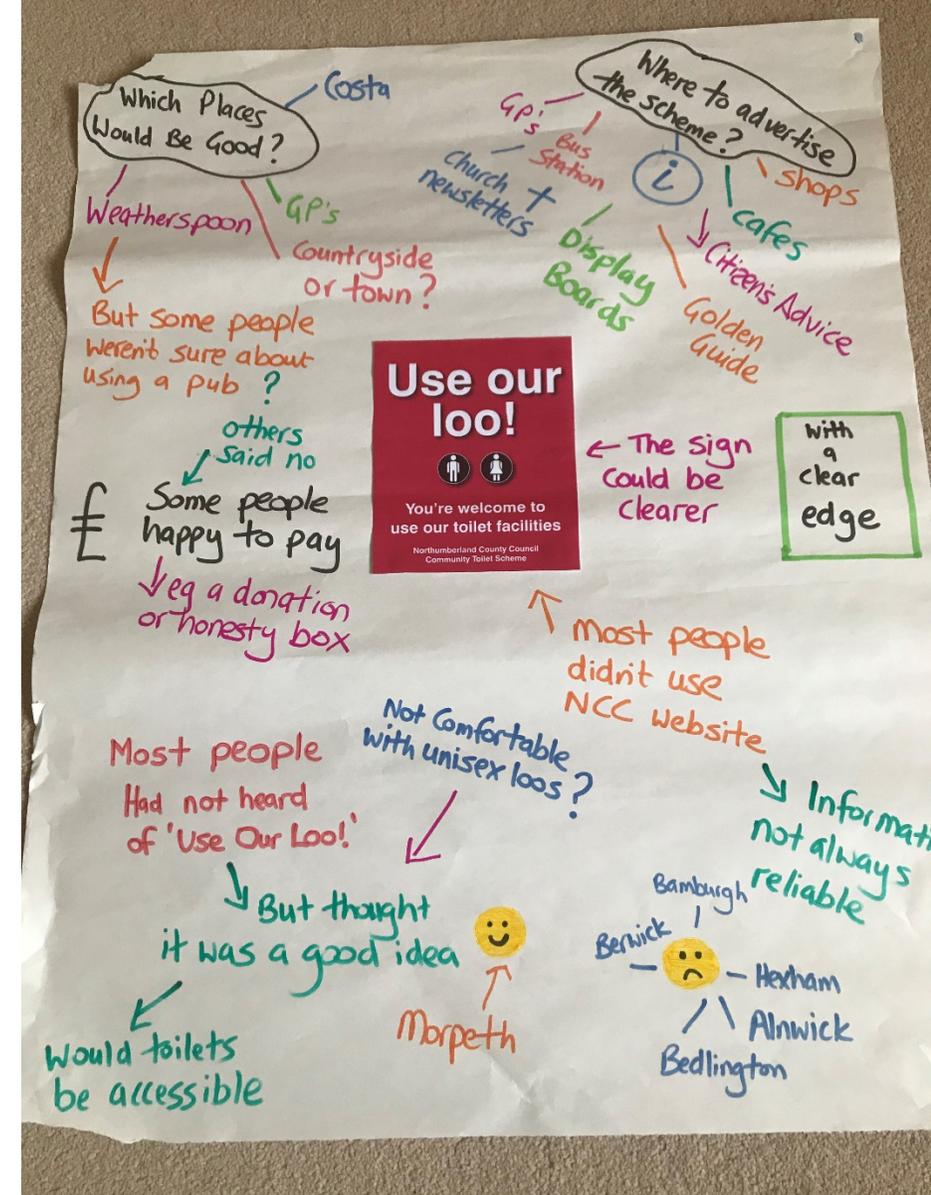


# Nowhere to go: Access to Public Toilets for People with Disabilities

8<sup>th</sup> May 2019

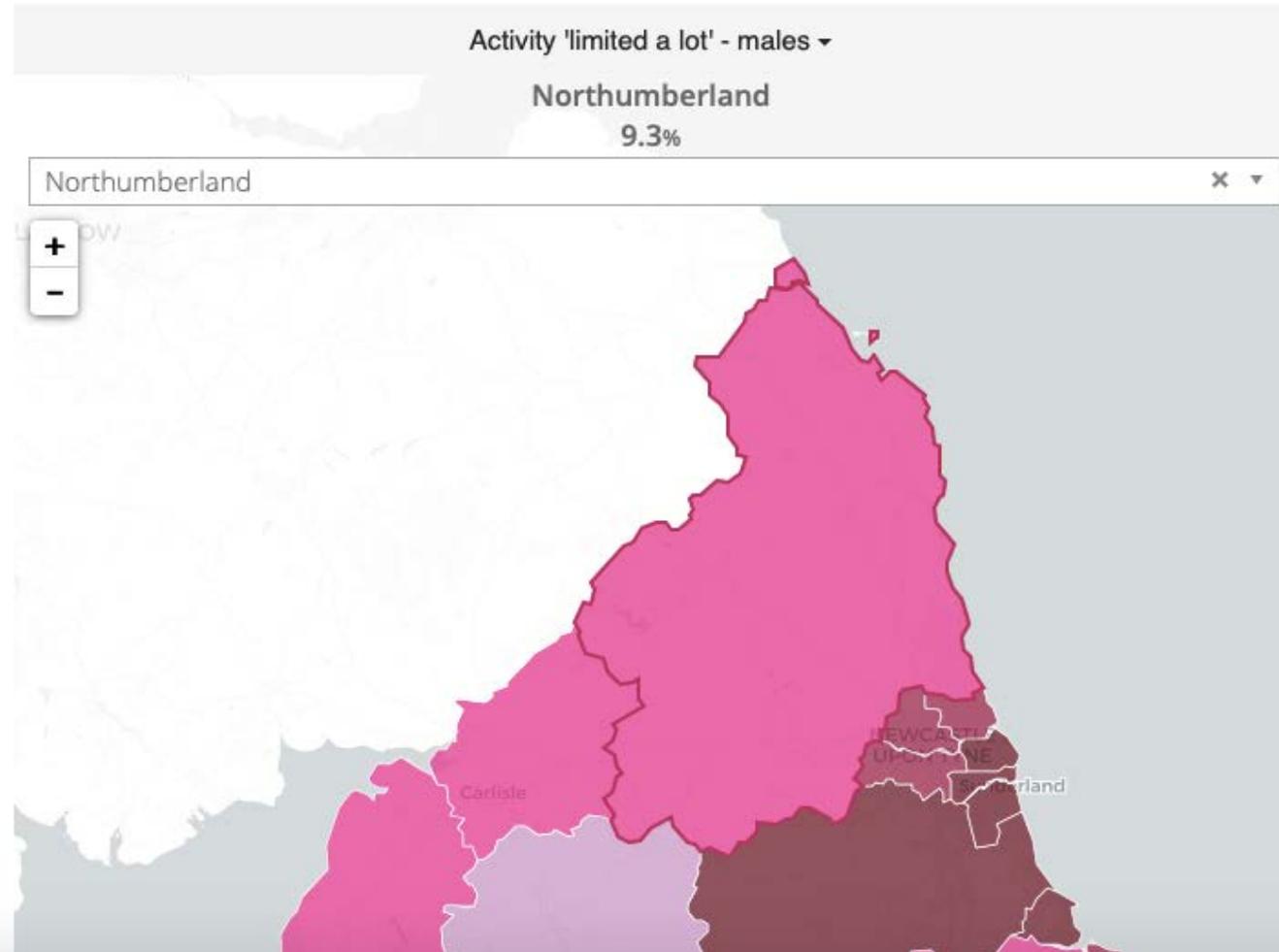


# Structure of Presentation

- Current contexts in Northumberland and nationally.
- The development of our co-production project – Nowhere to Go – with Carers Northumberland, other disability and carer groups, Northumberland County Council and others.
- Why Toilets Matter.
- Recommendations for organisations and local and national government.
- What's next for us
- Final thoughts from our partners and collaborators

# Current contexts in Northumberland

People reporting a disability that limited them a lot in their daily activities by sex, England and Wales, 2011



- 9% of people in Northumberland have a disability that limits their daily activities significantly.

# Current contexts in Northumberland

- By 2035, 30% of Northumberland's population is forecast to be over 65. (Northumberland County Council, Past Trends and Future Change, 2013).
- Carers Northumberland estimates currently there are 35,500 carers in the county.
- An ageing population means more people are living longer with chronic health conditions, placing greater pressure on ever dwindling resources.
- As a rural county, it faces particular challenges relating to transport, distance from facilities, communication networks, community cohesion, social isolation and mental health issues.



# Current contexts in Northumberland

- The importance of tourism to the local economy.
- Local authorities face difficult and challenging financial conditions.
- Declining state of existing public sector toilets (many of which were built before current standards for accessibility provision).

## Lack of public-loo provision in village prompts concerns



## Harbour loos are 'disgusting and they smell like third-world toilets'



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### Northumberland public toilets 'horrifying' and sprouting mushrooms claims county councillor

16:00, 4 SEP 2014 | UPDATED 16:35, 4 SEP 2014 | BY ADAM LUKE

Coun Ian Swithenbank says staff were previously told not to spend money on toilets in Northumberland - but now a clean up is underway

The Journal Anytime

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# The issues in Northumberland are found across the UK

The Guardian website interface. The top navigation bar includes links for 'Search jobs', 'Dating', 'My account', 'Search', and 'UK edition'. The main navigation menu features 'News', 'Opinion', 'Sport', 'Culture', 'Lifestyle', and 'More'. Below the menu, there are links for 'The Guardian view', 'Columnists', 'Cartoons', 'Opinion videos', and 'Letters'. The main content area displays an opinion piece titled 'We need more public toilets. Too many people are squatting between parked cars' by Lezlie Lowe. The article is categorized under 'Opinion Infrastructure'. The date and time are 'Sun 8 Jul 2018 11:00 BST'. Social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Email are visible, along with a share count of 357. A sub-headline reads: 'If we are to improve health, happiness, and inclusivity, we must upgrade our crappy public toilet system'. The article image shows a row of public toilets. An advertisement on the right side of the page says 'Find your place today' and features a cartoon character riding a bicycle. A 'Screenshot' button is located at the bottom right of the article image.

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**Opinion**  
Infrastructure

## We need more public toilets. Too many people are squatting between parked cars

*Lezlie Lowe*

Sun 8 Jul 2018 11:00 BST

357

If we are to improve health, happiness, and inclusivity, we must upgrade our crappy public toilet system

Advertisement

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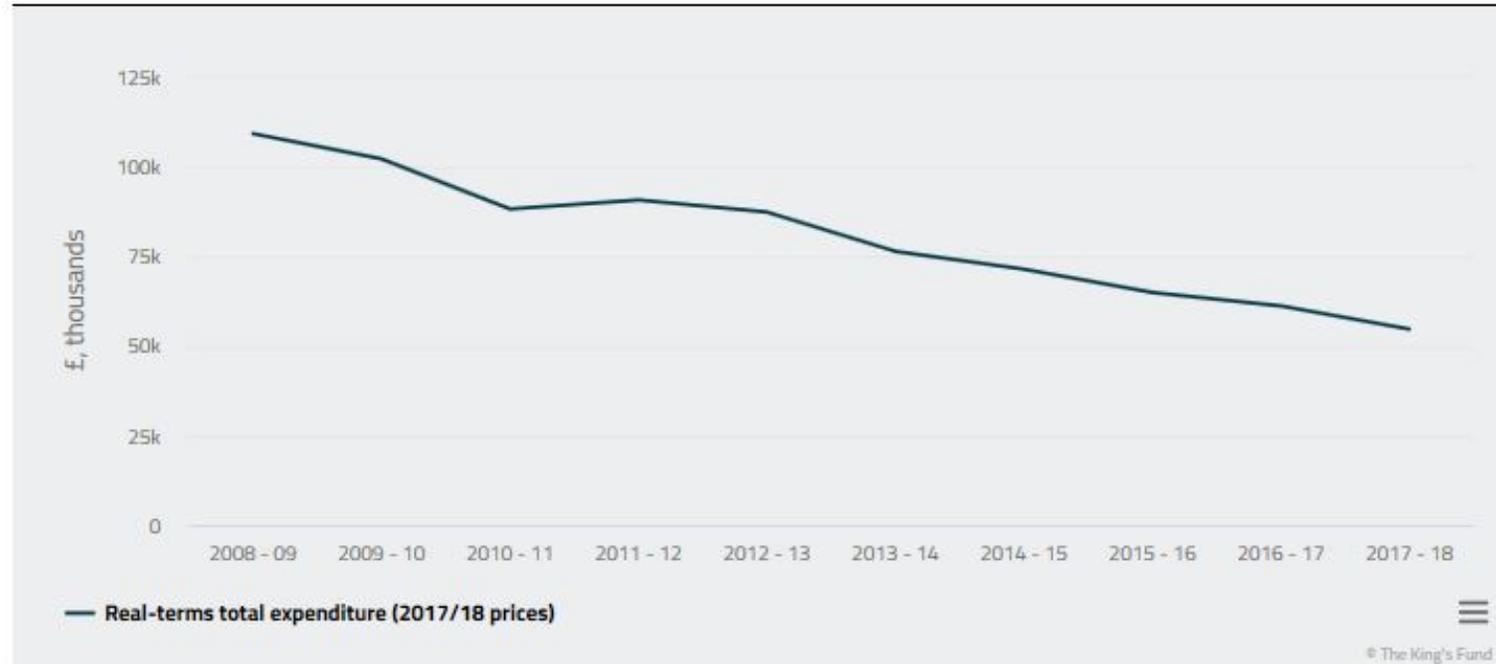
Screenshot

# The issues in Northumberland are found across the UK

- Almost 14 million people in the UK have some form of disability . Only approximately 1.2 million of those are wheelchair users.
- In 2014 there were 700,000 people caring for a person with dementia at home. It is estimated that this will increase to 1.3 million by 2025.
- 14 million people in the UK experience urinary incontinence and 6.5 million experience bowel incontinence.
- Research by the BBC estimated that local councils had stopped maintaining 673 public toilets between 2010 and 2018.



### Real-terms total expenditure on public conveniences in England (2017/18 prices)



Source: [Local authority revenue expenditure and financing collection](#), published by the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government

**A lav affair: do we care enough about public toilets? The Kings Fund**

# What we did (1): Working with Disabled people, carers and organisations that support them.

- The project began as a UG Politics project in a Community Placement Module with Carers Northumberland.
- Lack of appropriate accessible toilets was identified as an important reason a range of people did not leave their homes or limited their participation in social activities.
- With Carers Northumberland we obtained funding from the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account Co-Production fund (plus School of Geography, Politics and Sociology) to understand the issue further.
- We have worked with disability organisations, carers organisations, disabled people and carers via a number of focus groups, interviews and workshops.

Carers Northumberland  
Carers Trust  
In It Together

Adapt Tynedale  
Blind Ambition, Newcastle  
Central User Forum, Blyth  
BID Services, Morpeth

Berwick Ostomy Group  
Age UK, Ashington  
Alzheimer's Society,  
Ashington

# Why Toilets Matter

- The UN asserts that access to clean, usable, appropriate and safe toilet facilities is an important human right.
- In simple terms, if you are not sure whether you or someone you care for will be able to access a suitable toilet you will not leave home, or will narrow the range of places you visit.



The implications of doing so are very significant for:

- Health and well-being
- Equality
- Social inclusion
- Private and public decency
- Economic inactivity

# Why Toilets Matter

- The specific issues people can have vary a great deal, so providing accessible toilets involves more than making it suitable for wheelchair users.
- Changing Places Toilets are making a real difference for people with complex needs, but many more are needed.
- The issues are not just about the material environment.
- Social attitudes can mean people are uncomfortable around talking about toilet needs.
- People also question someone's right to use accessible toilets.
- All of this creates a challenging social context for disabled people and their carers.



## Karen's story

Karen has early onset dementia. She likes to be active, enjoys coastal walks and a pub lunch. Her sister Maggie goes out with her as Karen gets easily confused. Last time they were out Maggie lost Karen for 20 minutes – this was very stressful for both sisters. Karen had used a toilet in a café but had got lost coming out and had wandered through a back door to the carpark. Simple, clear signage not only showing the way to the toilet but also out would have made a real difference. Maggie says she has been in other toilets where there are bright yellow laminated signs.



# Sarah and Dan's story

Sarah looks after her son Dan who has autism. He is 20 and likes to be independent, but going to the toilet when they are away from home can cause problems for both Dan and Sarah. Dan is disturbed by the noise of automated hand driers. Having an alternative to a hand drier such as paper towels makes a real difference to him. Dan does not like to use accessible toilets with a sign depicting a wheelchair as he does not use one – alternative or additional signage would be useful, such as a “not all disabilities are visible” sign. Sarah has to wait outside while Dan uses the toilet as she worries he is vulnerable. A large accessible or family toilet cubicle works best, because Dan can have privacy but she can still be around to offer support.

# What we Did (2): Working with Local Authorities

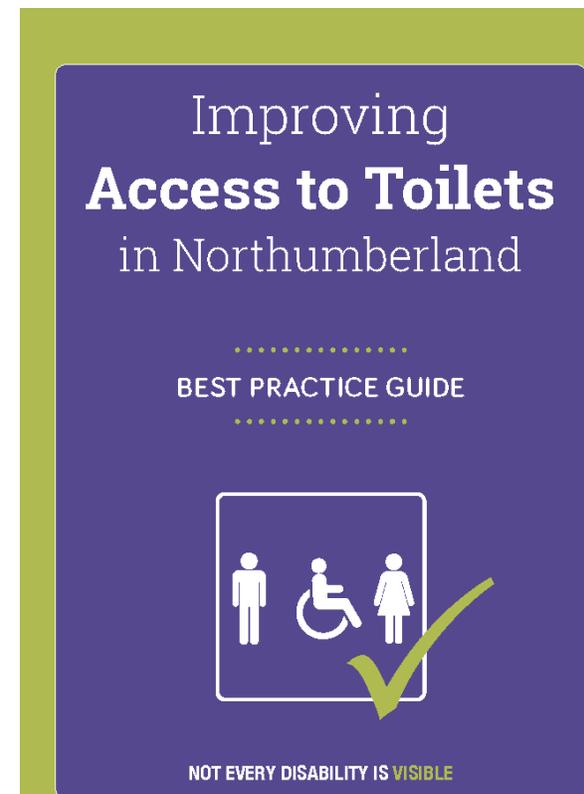


- In 2008, The House of Commons' Communities and Local Government Committee recommended that all local authorities should be required to develop a strategy on the provision of public toilets in their area.
- In 2018, the Welsh Government placed a duty on all local authorities in Wales to “prepare and publish a local toilets strategy for its area”.
- Working with partners in the public, voluntary and commercial sectors, local authorities have the power to develop local toilets strategies that will support improved access to toilets in their areas.
- The financial constraints that have led to the closure of many council-owned public toilets over the last few years, make it even more important that local authorities work with other people to ensure access for all to their communities.
- Northumberland County Council is working with us to improve their community toilet scheme and develop a Northumberland Community Toilet Strategy.
- This has involved workshops with Town and Parish Councillors and others.

# Recommendations emerging from our collaborations

## For toilet providers

- Easy, low-cost improvements to existing toilet facilities can make them more accessible for disabled people and their carers.
- Putting information about toilets on a shop or cafe website, including information on the size of the toilet, its facilities and photographs, makes it much easier for people to know whether they would be able to use the facilities. It also makes people feel that they are welcome and confident they can contact the business to ask further questions.
- Raising awareness of 'hidden' disabilities through staff training can help to ensure that people feel comfortable and are treated with dignity when they need to access toilets in unfamiliar places.
- Joining the national 'Use our Loos' scheme, or a local community toilets scheme, can increase the number of toilets available locally.



# Recommendations emerging from our collaborations

## **For Local Government**

- Working with partners in the public, voluntary and commercial sectors, local authorities should develop local toilets strategies that will support improved access to toilets in their areas.
- Reviewing the condition of existing local authority facilities and gathering information about other public and customer toilets in an area provides a useful benchmark for future decision-making.
- Agreeing on simple strategic goals and on how to assess progress over time can promote stakeholder confidence and make it easier to deliver the strategy. Key goals might include: improving the quality of existing toilets; filling 'gaps' where there is limited or no access to appropriate toilets; and raising awareness of the importance of accessible toilets.
- Linking a local toilets strategy to other local strategies, including local development planning and health and social care, can help to ensure that public and private investment in an area improves toilet provision in the medium and long-term. This might include, for example, requiring Changing Places toilets in large new buildings.

# Recommendations emerging from our collaborations

## **Recommendations for national government**

- Requiring all local authorities to develop local toilets strategies (as the Welsh Government has done and as a House of Commons' Committee recommended in 2008) would help to improve toilet provision across the country as well as promoting the collection and pooling of information.
- Increasing the number of Changing Places toilets, for example, by providing funding and requiring large new buildings to include them, would help to remove a significant barrier to social inclusion for more than 250,000 people and their carers.

# What Next for Us?

- We continue to work with Carers Northumberland and Northumberland County Council, but are also now speaking with Newcastle City Council to connect with their initiatives such as making the city Dementia Friendly.
- We are connecting up with other organisations and researchers working on accessibility design and planning issues. We have a workshop in a couple of weeks bringing these groups together to look at next stages.
- We are looking at more sustainable funding pathways to grow the project activity; while retaining the co-production ethos.

Final thoughts from our  
partners and collaborators