

**Submission  
No 37**

## **INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC TOILETS**

**Organisation:** Liverpool Plains Shire Council

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**Liverpool  
Plains**  
Shire Council

**Uploaded via NSW Parliament submission portal.**

**Portfolio Committee No 8. Customer Service inquiry into public toilets.**

**Submission from Liverpool Plains Shire Council**



## Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to Portfolio Committee No 8 Customer Service inquiry into public toilets.

Liverpool Plains Shire Council provides and maintains public amenities at more than 28 locations across the shire. These amenities are located at recreation grounds, public halls, libraries, stand-alone facilities, sports grounds and camping grounds. These amenities are used by residents and visitors, day and night, winter and summer. These public amenities meet an essential need of individuals wishing to participate in public life. These same amenities make it possible for our communities to stage public events, adding to the life and vitality of our region. Our public amenities are also available to people visiting or traveling through the Liverpool Plains.

The provision, and maintenance of our existing public amenities relies on the work of our cleaning crews, water services team, parks and gardens staff, and the property and assets team. The design and construction of public amenities into the future will reflect our commitment to designing services and facilities that allow people to fully participate in all aspects of public life and best meet the diverse site specific environmental and system requirements.

Liverpool Plains Shire Council's submission draws on the expertise of our staff, and feedback from community members in the preparation of our Inclusion Plan 2024 – 2026 and delivers the perspective of a regional council to this important public discussion. Please note that this submission has been prepared by staff and is not a council resolved submission.

Our submission concludes with 4 recommendations for the Committee's consideration. The recommendations are intended to guide the future provision of public amenities in NSW to better meet the needs of all citizens, and to improve the design and functionality of this category of critical public infrastructure.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Murphy

General Manager

## **PUBLIC TOILETS IN THE LIVERPOOL PLAINS SHIRE COUNCIL.**

Liverpool Plains Shire Council (LPSC) is home to approximately, 7,500 residents and covers an area of around 5,000 square kilometres. (For comparison, a little over 40% the size of Greater Sydney at 12,000 square kilometres.)

LPSC maintains more than 30 public amenities across the Shire. (APPENDIX A)

- 17 are physically accessible.
- 1 has an accessible cubicle with a step at entry.
- 1 is currently being upgraded to be physically accessible.
- 1 facility has a parent/baby change room.
- 2 have a baby change tables in the female bathroom.
- 1 facility has a Changing Place adjacent to the main building.
- 23 have access to town water supply.
- 7 are reliant on tank water supplies.
- 13 sites are connected to a sewage system.
- 15 have onsite septic systems.
- 1 utilises pit style waste management.

LPSC employs the equivalent of three full time cleaners. In order to complete the routine weekly cleaning schedule, our cleaning crew travels 850 kilometers each week. (Just shy of the 917 kilometers separating Sydney and Brisbane). When events or activities are scheduled at an LPSC venue, the cleaning crew provide pre and post cleaning services, increasing the distance traveled, the hours worked and the materials required. In 2024/2025 LPSC will invest more than \$220,000 in staff time and travel to ensure an acceptable level of hygiene and cleanliness.

In maintaining these facilities, LPSC is managing a range of water and waste management systems, town water, tank water, sewage, septic, and pit systems.

LPSC does not record data on the number of residents and visitors that use the public facilities, the purpose for their visits or an individual's requirements. A review of the activities at two LPSC managed facilities and traffic on the major transport routes within the shire paints a broad picture of patterns of usage.

Currabubula Recreation and Camping Ground is located at the northern edge of the shire, the village has a population of around 330. In 2024 the following events will take place at the Recreation Ground; monthly pony club events, bi-monthly team penning events, a multi-day pony club camp, a Quarterhorse Association event, a combined schools sports carnival, and 2 market days attracting over 5,000 visitors and raising more than \$10,000 for Currabubula Parents and Citizens Association. The Freedom Camping Ground generally attracts 7 – 12 vehicles per week. Community members visit the site to walk, exercise, and socialise with friends and family.

Quirindi has a population of 3,355. Quirindi's Longfield Oval is adjacent to the town's swimming pool, netball courts, and tennis courts. In 2024 Longfield Oval will accommodate, weekly high school sports afternoons, after hours training sessions for high school teams, a Junior Rugby Club Gala Day, a community service providing a fresh produce delivery for its clients, an outdoor cinema event, a community event and market day, an adventure sport activity for children, an evening touch football competition, junior, senior and veteran's cricket competitions, and seniors T20 cricket events. In addition, the facilities are used by walkers, joggers, dog walkers, and those enjoying the riverside location.

A review of the activities at these two locations demonstrates that the sites and facilities are accessed during the day, at nighttime, on weekends and weekdays. At times the water and waste management systems will need to accommodate high volumes of use. People at all stages of life, from the very young to those eligible for veteran's competitions will use these facilities. People will attend on their own, in family groups, as part of school groups, to compete in organised competitions, to support friends and family in competition, for short periods of time and for multiple day competitions.

Two popular highways, the Kamilaroi and the New England cross the shire. It is estimated that each day these highways carry at least 3,000 and 4,000 vehicles respectively. While agri-tourism is an emerging sector in the Liverpool Plains, for the majority of travelers, the Liverpool Plains is not the destination. LPSC contributes to the network of public amenities available to these travelers and absorbs the costs of providing these services; communities and businesses beyond our local borders are the main beneficiaries of the economic benefit of the visitor economy.

King Park in Willow Tree, provides a case study of the challenges faced by local councils in the management of public amenities on popular highways. Located at the junction of the New England and Kamilaroi Highways, King Park offers accessible toilets utilising a septic waste system. In August of 2023, the septic system failed and council closed the amenities to protect the health and safety of patrons. Council approached 19 businesses, in order to locate a contractor to replace and upgrade the septic system. To accommodate the needs of travelers, Council hired portaloos while the work was completed. In April 2024, the public amenities were reopened. The cost to council for the hire of the portaloos and the system upgrade was more than \$135,000.

For the groups hiring LPSC managed facilities, LPSC charges a fee based on partial cost recovery. Like many local governments, LPSC absorbs the total cost of providing these services and facilities to support the volunteer sector deliver the majority of social, sporting and entertainment options available to residents. In the commercial sector an increase in patronage will generate additional revenue. For local government increased patronage requires the investment of additional resources, however it does not generate surplus revenue.

As evidenced in Appendix A, LPSC manages public amenities in main shopping strips, sporting complexes, purpose-built facilities, and remote locations. The sites range from fully serviced, to locations reliant on onsite water sources and management of waste. The amenities at these sites range from a basic domestic toilet and hand basin in a lockable cubicle, to larger cubicles that are physically accessible and include baby change facilities. 17 of these sites offer at least one cubicle that complies with the industry code for accessibility.

From a design and maintenance perspective, there is a growing understanding that public amenities must be constructed to manage and treat, urine, faeces, menstrual blood, bile, flushing water, anal cleansing water, toilet paper and other bodily fluids. Australian Building industry codes, now require a minimum of one unisex sanitary cubicle in new public buildings.

In 2024, LPSC met with community members and organisations to talk about LPSC's Inclusion Plan. "Loo leash" is a term used to describe the limitations on a person's movement away from home, due to a lack of suitable toileting options. From these conversations, we learnt many things about the length of the "loos leash" for many of our residents. Signage is often difficult to see, accessible toilets are not open at all hours of the day, single sex cubicles do not cater for parents and carers when they are assisting a child or person of another sex, steps to accessible toilets restrict people's independence, poor lighting is a challenge for

people using amenities at night time, and for some the separation of accessible amenities reduces their sense of safety. It became evident during these conversations, that the industry standards for accessibility did not meet the needs of many of community members and residents. In the Liverpool Plains, one in five people need mobility assistance, one in three are aged over 60, one in ten have arthritis, and one in ten have provided care in the last two weeks. For many in our community, the “loo leash” is very restrictive. To achieve LPSC’s objective to design for universal inclusion, LPSC will be required to go beyond the industry standards for accessibility.

In conversations with staff responsible for designing, constructing, and maintaining LPSC’s public amenities the following challenges have been raised. The design of pedestals makes cleaning floors difficult, toilet paper regularly blocks pipes and requires constant topping up, water systems are often challenged to meet the refill requirements in times of high usage, during times of drought water must be trucked to amenities reliant on tank water, the distance between amenities means not all sites can be cleaned daily, stainless steel is easier to clean, but less comfortable for patrons, many travelers are not familiar with using septic systems this increases the risk of system and maintenance costs, and the cost of upgrading amenities is beyond the reach of LPSC’s recurrent budget.

The public amenities offering the longest “loo leash” to residents are located at Quirindi’s Library and Community Hub and the Nancy Gray Pavilion. These amenities are components of infrastructure upgrades completed in the last five years and funded through the State Library of NSW’s Infrastructure Fund, Stronger Country Community Fund, and the NSW Crown Lands. A conservative estimate of the costs of upgrading all public amenities to a universally inclusive standard, (i.e. parent change room, level access and unisex accessible cubicle) is \$1.2million. As there is no single funding program dedicated to upgrading public amenities, LPSC will need to rely on a patchwork of funding programs to achieve the objective of universal inclusion. Until that time, many residents of the Liverpool Plains will remain on a restricted “loo leash”.



## Recommendations

That the NSW Government;

- 1) Review the compliance requirements of public amenities to reflect the principles of universal inclusion.
- 2) Introduce a funding program to support regional councils to upgrade all public amenities to reflect the principles of universal inclusion.
- 3) Review the provision of public amenities on major transport routes, and deliver financial assistance to local governments providing these essential services.
- 4) Initiate a partnership project with local governments to investigate design and construction options that are less reliant on water, manage and treat waste on site, convert waste to a usable product and minimise the cleaning and maintenance requirements in remote locations.

## APPENDIX A - LIVERPOOL PLAINS SHIRE COUNCIL - PUBLIC AMENITIES

Location	Features	Opening Hours	Infrastructure
Quirindi Library	One Accessible cubicle and a parent's room, separate male and female cubicles.	Business Hours	Town water, sewage
Werris Creek Library	One male and female cubicle, both are accessible. Baby change table in female cubicle.	Business Hours	Town water, sewage
Quirindi Administration Building	Currently being upgraded to accessible.	Business Hours	Town water, sewage
Longfield Oval, Quirindi	Accessible toilet cubicle in the entry to the men's section.	Daylight hours and when events are scheduled.	Town water, sewage
Golland Fields, Quirindi	One accessible cubicle.	When events are scheduled	Town water, sewage
George Street, Quirindi	One accessible cubicle.	Business hours	Town water, sewage
Rose Lee Park, Quirindi	Accessible cubicles.	Daylight Hours	Town water, sewage
Wallabadah Freedom Camping	Accessible showers and cubicles.	24 hours	Town water, septic
Quipolly Dam Recreation Ground	Male and female pit toilets.	Daylight Hours	Tank water, on site waste management.
Currabubula Recreation Ground/Freedom Camping	Accessible shower and toilet adjacent to main amenities.	24 hours	Tank water, septic

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Location	Features	Opening Hours	Infrastructure
Visitor Information Centre Willow Tree	Accessible cubicle, separate male and female toilets.	Business hours	Town water, septic
King Park Willow Tree	Accessible cubicle, male and female cubicles.	Daylight Hours	Town water, septic
Willow Tree Hall	Non accessible male and female toilets	When events are held.	Town water, septic.
Quirindi Lookout	Non accessible male and female toilet.	Daylight hours	Town water, septic
Single Street Werris Creek	Accessible cubicle (key required) separate male and female cubicles. Cleaning provided by Werris Creek Lions Club.	Daylight hours	Town water, sewage
Bell Park, Quirindi	Accessible cubicles, baby change table in the female cubicle.	Daylight hours.	Town water, sewage.
Quirindi Cemetery	Accessible cubicle, with step at entry.	As required	Town water, septic
Spring Ridge Freedom Camping/Recreation Ground	Non accessible male and female cubicles.	Daylight hours	Town water, septic
Premer Lions Park/Freedom Camping	Accessible shower and toilet adjacent to male and female cubicles.	24 hours	Town water, septic

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Location	Features	Opening Hours	Infrastructure
Werris Creek Freedom Camping	Portable male and female showers and toilets.	24 hours	Town water, sewage
Willow Tree Freedom Camping	Non accessible male and female cubicles.	Daylight Hours	Town water septic
David Taylor Oval Werris Creek	Accessible cubicles.	Daylight hours	Town water, sewage
Nancy Gray Pavilion	Changing Place facility adjacent to main entrance. Male and female cubicles inside the building.		Town water, sewage
Currabubula Hall	Non accessible male and female toilets.	When events are held	Tank water, septic
Wallabadah Hall	Non accessible male and female cubicles.	When events are held	Town water, septic
Spring Ridge Hall	Non accessible male and female cubicles.	Daylight hours	Town water, septic
Warrah Creek Hall	Accessible cubicles adjacent to building.	When events are held	Tank water, septic
Royal Theatre, Quirindi	Accessible cubicle adjacent to separate male and female cubicles.	When events are held.	Town water, sewage
Werris Creek Lions Park	Accessible male and female toilets	Daylight hours	Town water, sewage.

