

Response ID [REDACTED]

Submitted to West Northamptonshire Council Draft Budget 2026 to 2027 Consultation

Submitted on 2026-02-03 14:23:07

About you

How are you responding to this consultation?

On behalf of a town or parish council in an official capacity

Other::

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation (business, community group, residents' association, council or any other organisation), please tell us the name of your organisation, and your role:

Organisation::

Brackley Town Council

Job title/role::

Deputy Town Clerk

Proposed increase to Council Tax

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should increase core Council Tax by 2.99% to address the additional cost, and protect and invest in services?

Tend to disagree

If you disagree, please use the space below to outline other ways you feel we could address the shortfall this would create, that we aren't already considering.

Comments on 2.99% increase:

While we recognise the pressures on the Council's base budget, we urge WNC to avoid new measures that undermine local economies and shrink the longer term tax base. In particular, do not introduce town centre parking charges in Brackley and pause capital spending on a proposed long stay car park at the Southfield site.

Introducing charges would reduce high street footfall and viability, which in turn depresses business rates and employment. A "white elephant" long stay car park risks tying up c. £1m in an asset with limited demand (local estimates suggest fewer than ~40 regular users), while also displacing shoppers from the centre to out of town alternatives.

Instead, we recommend:

1. Targeted efficiencies in non statutory, low utilisation assets;
2. Phasing non essential capital schemes until payback is robustly evidenced;
3. Ring fencing any parking related income strictly in compliance with s55 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 purposes (special account), and ensuring no de facto revenue raising approach to parking policy, consistent with case law (e.g., R (Attfield) v London Borough of Barnet).
4. Pro growth measures for town centres (wayfinding, light touch public realm) that are proven to maintain or lift the local tax base over the medium term.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should protect Adult Social Care by increasing Council Tax by 2% to fund the rise in costs?

Tend to agree

Use the following space if you have any comments on the impacts of the 2% increase, or any alternative options you feel we should consider:

Rise to 2% Council Tax increase to fund Adult Social Care increase effects and mitigation:

On balance, Brackley Town Council tends to agree with the Adult Social Care precept: demand and unit costs in adult social care continue to rise and this precept is a transparent, purpose specific mechanism. We ask that WNC pairs the precept with:

- Clear annual reporting on outcomes for vulnerable residents;
- Continued market sustainability work with care providers;
- Maximising prevention and reablement to dampen future demand growth.

Fees and charges

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Council should put up some fees and charges in line with inflation and operational costs, to help fund services?

Strongly disagree

Use the following space to provide your comments about fees and charges:

Name of fee:

Bins

Comments about fees and charges:

Garden waste charges rising 33% – disproportionate and unjustified:

We are concerned about the proposed 33% increase in garden waste bin charges. This is a substantial rise during a period of financial strain for households and would make West Northamptonshire one of the most expensive garden waste services in the UK. No accompanying service improvements have been identified, and residents are being asked to pay significantly more for the same level of provision. The scale of the increase feels excessive, poorly timed, and inconsistent with wider council commitments to sustainability, recycling, and accessible environmental services. We are not happy with this proposal, and feel it places an unfair financial burden on residents.

Name of fee:

Parking

Comments about fees and charges:

Off street parking charges – Brackley Town Centre (and related enforcement/long stay provision)

Summary position: We oppose introducing parking charges in Brackley because the policy is strategically misaligned, economically damaging, operationally counter productive, and legally risky if framed as revenue raising.

Strategic conflict with WNC frameworks:

- Economic Growth Strategy – Priority 1 (Business Growth & Productivity): Charges reduce accessibility and footfall, harming independents trading on tight margins.
- Priority 3 (Vibrant & Resilient Town Centres): Charges are a barrier to use; they risk higher vacancies and a weaker retail mix.
- Priority 4 (Employment, Skills & Workforce Resilience): Retail is a key local employer; diminished turnover → job losses.
- Cross cutting Enabler (Infrastructure & Connectivity): Charges introduce a new participation barrier, especially for lower income households and villagers reliant on car access.

Misalignment with the One West Northamptonshire Plan – Priority 3 (Thriving Towns & Neighbourhoods): The Plan commits to accessible, vibrant centres and encouraging residents to use local services. Charges drive custom toward out of town free parking destinations (e.g., in neighbouring areas), undermining Brackley's competitiveness.

Economic and fiscal impacts:

- Short term fee income is outweighed by medium term revenue erosion: lower footfall → reduced retail turnover → closures → falling NNDR (business rates) → employment losses → pressure on the benefits system → potential shrinkage of the council tax base.
- Local knowledge indicates very limited demand for a large long stay offer in Brackley; the proposed Southfield car park investment (~£1m) risks becoming a low utilisation asset.

Operational consequences:

- Displacement to surrounding residential streets (e.g., Banbury Road, Manor Road) will worsen parking conditions and enforcement burdens.
- If on street spaces remain free or less regulated than off street, the policy will simply redirect vehicles rather than manage demand.

Legal context and compliance risks:

- Parking charges cannot lawfully be set for general revenue raising; they must be for traffic management purposes under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.
- Statements framing parking income as addressing "inequity" or forming part of the base budget risk creating evidence that the dominant purpose is fiscal, not traffic management (cf. *R (Attfield) v Barnet*, where revenue raising motivations were held unlawful).
- Under s55 RTRA 1984, parking income must be ring fenced in a Special Parking Account for prescribed uses, not blended into general budget setting.

Absence of a Business Impact Assessment:

No business impact assessment has been undertaken to understand how charges would affect Brackley's trading environment, visitor behaviour, retail resilience, or employment base. This omission is significant: introducing a new cost burden on a small market town without analysing sensitivity to footfall changes, elasticity of demand, or the cumulative impacts on independent retailers risks making decisions unsupported by evidence. For a policy that directly influences town-centre viability, the lack of a structured economic impact review represents a material gap in due diligence and weakens the case for implementation.

Financial risk of the £1m borrowing requirement:

The proposed Southfield long-stay car park requires approximately £1 million of council borrowing, which will incur ongoing debt-servicing costs over many years. Given Brackley's modest parking demand profile and the limited revenue potential identified locally, it is highly unlikely that car park charging income will generate the surplus required to cover loan repayments, interest, maintenance, enforcement, and lifecycle costs. This creates a significant financial exposure: if utilisation remains low—as current evidence strongly suggests—the scheme will become a structural budget pressure rather than a self-financing asset. Proceeding without a clear repayment model or robust demand analysis introduces avoidable financial risk to the authority.

Do not introduce parking charges in Brackley. Do not proceed with the large long stay car park at Southfield without compelling, independently evidenced demand and a clear traffic management objective. Work with Brackley Town Council and traders on alternative measures that protect vitality and align with WNC's adopted strategies.

Name of fee:

Comments about fees and charges:

Name of fee:

Comments about fees and charges:

Draft General Fund Capital Programme 2026 to 2031

If you have any comments to make on these proposals, please give us your views below:

Name of scheme(s): :

Town-Centre Parking Infrastructure/proposed long stay car park (Southfield Site)

Comments on Draft General Fund Capital Programme:

We recommend removing or pausing the proposed Southfield long stay car park allocation pending robust evidence of demand and value for money. A ~£1m capital outlay for a facility that local experience suggests would attract fewer than ~40 regular users is unlikely to meet utilisation or payback tests, particularly when weighed against opportunity cost.

The scheme appears inconsistent with the Council's town centre priorities: it is not addressing a defined traffic management need, is likely to displace short stay shopper parking, and could undermine the high street. Any car parking investment should be small scale, targeted, and clearly linked to town centre vitality outcomes (e.g., better turnover of short stay shopper bays; improved signage; accessible bays; digital wayfinding) rather than a large long stay build.

Other comments

Use the following space to let us know if you have any other comments you would like to make about the proposals in this draft budget:

Comments on anything contained in draft budget:

The draft budget narrative rightly focuses on financial sustainability, but parking charge introduction in Brackley conflicts with the Council's own strategic pillars and risks long term revenue erosion through economic scarring of the high street.

We ask Cabinet to reject this proposal and instead commit to town centre positive measures that maintain footfall, protect local employment, and support a resilient rates base. We also ask that any references to parking income as part of the "base budget" be reviewed to ensure alignment with s55 RTRA ring fencing and the principle that parking policy must pursue traffic management purposes, not general revenue.

Brackley Town Council stands ready to work constructively with WNC officers on proportionate, evidence led alternatives.

Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2026 to 2027 and Medium Term Financial Plan

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase rent by 4.8% (an average increase of £5.51 per week) across the Council's housing stock managed by Northamptonshire Partnership Homes (NPH)?

Tend to agree

Use the following space if you would like to tell us why you answered the previous question in the way that you did:

Comments on 2.7% rent increase:

We recognise that the 4.8% proposal aligns with the national Rent Standard (CPI+1%) and underpins viability for essential safety, decency and energy efficiency works. We ask for continued focus on fuel poverty mitigation, targeted support for vulnerable tenants, and strong oversight of delivery outcomes.

If you think this proposal might have a negative effect, please use the space below to explain what that effect could be and suggest ways to avoid it:

Comments and mitigation 2.7% increase to rents:

Potential impacts on low income households can be mitigated through early identification, discretionary support, energy efficiency investments that lower bills, and continued partnership working with advice services.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase garage rents by 4.8% (an increase of £0.58 per week)?

Tend to agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase general service charges by 4.8%?

Tend to agree

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the planned investment of £78.6m for social housing during 2026 to 2027?

Tend to agree

Use the following space if you would like to tell us why you answered the previous question in the way that you did::

We support the scale and balance of the HRA programme, particularly safety compliance, energy efficiency, adaptations, and new build supply. These priorities deliver social value and help stabilise future cost pressures.

Use the following space should you have any further comments on the HRA Capital programme:

Any further comments on HRA Capital programme:

Please maintain strong programme management and post investment evaluation (cost, schedule, outcomes). On energy upgrades, prioritise measures with best lifetime bill reduction for tenants to mitigate rent impacts.

If you have any other comments you would like to make about the details within the Draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget report and its appendices, that you have not already told us, then please tell us here:

Comments on HRA Revenue Account and appendices:

Clear communication with tenants on the purpose and benefits of rent and service charge changes is essential. Publishing annual outcome dashboards would aid transparency and trust.

How did you find out about this consultation?

Please let us know how you found out about this consultation (Select all that apply)

From an email alert from West Northamptonshire Council

Comment here: