

Budget Proposals 2016-17: Public Conveniences - Newbury

Summary of Feedback Received and Key Findings

Why we consulted?

Over the last four years we have had to make savings of £23m because we've received less money from central government. We have done this by becoming more efficient at what we do, by reducing some of our administrative functions and increasing our income. Throughout this period we have done our best to protect front line services.

We now have to find another £20m over the next four years, with almost £11m to be found in 2016/17. Much of this will come from further efficiencies within the council, but £4.6m will have to come from services that will impact the public.

In order to inform the budget setting process for 2016/17 we published a list of those proposals which would likely have a direct impact on service users, and sought the views from those affected and interested:

- to understand the likely impact
- to identify any measures to reduce their impact
- to explore any possible alternatives

Approach

All the proposals were published on the council's website on 3 November 2015 with feedback requested by 14 December 2015. Respondents were directed to a [central index page](#), with a video message from the Chief Executive outlining the background to the exercise.

Information relating to this proposal was linked directly from this index page. This contained more detailed information on what was specifically proposed, information on what we thought the impact might be, as well as what else we had considered in developing and arriving at this proposal. Feedback was then invited through an online form and through a dedicated email address.

Each individual budget proposal was placed on our [Consultation Portal](#) which automatically notified those registered that an exercise had been launched. Members of the West Berkshire community panel (around 800 people) and local stakeholder charities, representative groups and partner organisations were also emailed directly, notifying them of the exercise and inviting their contributions.

Heads of Service made direct contact with those organisations affected by any of the budget proposals prior to them being made publically available.

A press release was issued on the same date, as well as publicised through Facebook and Twitter.

Background

There is no statutory duty requiring local councils to provide public conveniences. The Council originally had seven public conveniences across the District. Of these, five have been transferred to the local parish and town councils or in the case of Aldermaston Wharf, transferred back to the Canal and Rivers Trust. The public conveniences at the Wharf and Pembroke Road in Newbury remain open and funded by this Council.

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We are proposing to save £70,000 by either, transferring the operation of the public conveniences located in Newbury at the Wharf and Pembroke Road to Newbury Town Council, or if that is not possible, closing them.

Summary of Key Points

We have received 25 responses from individuals, one from Newbury Town Council, one from the Green Party and one from the Highways and Transport Service.

Most of the respondents were against the closure of these facilities. In general, there was less concern about the closure of Pembroke Road. The Wharf on the other hand is seen as a key facility for visitors, tourists and for those with particular needs such as young families, the elderly and those with a disability.

There were no objections to seeking funding from third parties and some respondents made their own suggestions along these lines, however generally those who responded stated that the facilities should be retained.

A number of people referred to the relocation of the Bus Station to the Wharf and that this alone should feature heavily in any decision on the Wharf facility's future.

Newbury Town Council said that they are willing to discuss all opportunities to retain what they consider to be valuable facilities although they, like WBC have their own funding constraints.

1. Are you, or anyone you care for, a user of this service?

20 out of the 25 responses said that they or someone they care for use the toilets.

2. What do you think we should be aware of in terms of how this proposal might impact people?

- Newbury Town Council stated that they are willing to work with WBC to look at the options. In their own consultations on becoming involved financially, two out of three respondents said the public conveniences should be retained.
- Closure of the Newbury public conveniences will impact on the elderly, those with small children and those with disabilities. Respondents commented that the wharf toilets are the nicest to use in the town centre.
- Closure of the Pembroke Road facility will not present a problem at all as no one would choose to use them over the new facilities at Parkway.
- The Wharf facility is essential for the visiting tourist buses. Their closure could result in less day visitors and coach visitors stopping in Newbury.
- Drivers and customers of the new relocated bus station will need to have public conveniences, unless new facilities are provided within the build.
- The Wharf facility is used by the market traders.
- There will be an impact on the late night economy and those who use the burger vans and food outlets in the evenings.
- Everyone who shops in Newbury will be impacted.
- If Pembroke Road closes there will be an impact on the 'Shopmobility' service. Pembroke Road is the only facility they have access to.
- It's a damning indictment at the state of our society that the Council is even considering closing the last public toilets in Newbury. The Kennet Centre and Parkway are not alternatives as these are privately owned.

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- It should be self evident to sensible people that public conveniences are part of a civilized society. There was no need to build elaborate Wharf toilets; the Council must learn to provide sensible facilities at a reasonable cost. Public conveniences are a basic human right.
- Local businesses need to attract people into the Town so give visitors the basic facilities they need.
- There will be increased incidences of defecation in the street. Toilets are essential on public health grounds.

3. Do you feel that this proposal will affect particular individuals more than others, and if so, how do you think we might help with this?

This proposal will impact on families with young children, the elderly and infirm; also tourists, visitors to the Town and Market Traders.

4. Do you have any suggestions as to how this service might be delivered in a different way? If so, please provide details.

- The Council could perhaps charge for use of the facilities, or provide simpler automated facilities instead such as superloos or similar.
- As there are alternatives elsewhere in the Town, the Council should signpost these so visitors know where they are.
- The Library is a possible alternative.
- If the Town Council cannot help fund and run the PC's then can the BID contribute?
- The Council could perhaps approach local businesses to sponsor these facilities.
- Councilors' allowances should go back to at least where they were before the Conservative group awarded itself a 16.5% pay rise in May 2015, this would help make a contribution.
- If these toilets are no longer sustainable then a new toilet facility could potentially be built in the new Wharf Bus Station, however funding would be required to build and maintain this facility.

5. Is there any way that you, or your organisation, can contribute in helping to alleviate the impact of this proposal? If so, please provide details of how you can help.

There were no responses.

6. Do you think the two public conveniences in Newbury add value to the overall offering as a visitor destination? Please explain the reasons for your response.

The general response was YES but there is a general feeling that the Pembroke Rd facility adds less value than the Wharf PC's with comments like "The Wharf facilities are essential to tourist trade".

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7. Any further comments?

There was a general consensus that the public conveniences should be retained.

'The Council needs to consider what kind of town centre Newbury should have. For a Town of this size, two public toilets is not excessive'

'One respondent stated that they were under the impression that both PC's were maintained by the funding received from car parking, as is the case in National Parks etc. Thus which-ever organisation is receiving the Car Park funds should own and maintain the Public Conveniences whether this is West Berks Council or Newbury Town Council.'

'Why should any rate-payer from outside Newbury pay to maintain facilities mainly for the use of Newbury residents.'

The impacts on tourist trade were highlighted:

'These toilets are principally placed where they are for the use of visitors to the town. We receive many such visitors on coaches particularly in the summer time. They seem to at least go and have a cup of tea or coffee and a bun and often purchase from the local shops. We had a great new shopping centre built to encourage people to shop in our stores which in turn brings revenue into the local coffers, but we must also offer politeness offer them the ability to use our toilets. Otherwise passing tourist coaches will all stop at the service centres on the M4 and we will lose their trade.'

Conclusion

The exercise has not highlighted any impacts that are not already anticipated. There are other alternative facilities elsewhere at the Kennet Centre and the new Parkway shopping facility. Plans for a relocated bus station are under consideration, if WCs are required for the bus drivers then I understand this is unlikely to include the required provision. The loss of the Pembroke Road facility would have a negative impact on the 'Shopmobility'. Tourist bus visitors may be impacted but there are alternative facilities and I would suggest that in any case they would combine a visit with a refreshment stop as part of refreshment / shopping experience.

Please note: *In order to allow everyone who wished the opportunity to contribute, feedback was not sampled. Therefore this wasn't a quantitative, statistically valid exercise. It was neither the premise, purpose, nor within the capability of the exercise, to determine the overall community's level of support, or views on the proposals, with any degree of confidence.*

The feedback captured therefore should be seen in the context of 'those who responded', rather than reflective of the wider community.

All the responses have been provided verbatim as an appendix to this report. Whilst this summary seeks to distil the key, substantive points made, it should also be read in conjunction with the more detailed verbatim comments to ensure a full, rounded perspective of the views and comments are considered.

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