

Budget Proposals 2018/19: Neighbour Notification Letters for Planning Applications

Consultation Summary Report

Why we consulted?

Over the past eight years we've had to find savings worth £55m, while at the same time responding to an increase in demand for services. This is due to a reduction in funding from central government which has seen the Revenue Support Grant (worth £33.7m to the council in 2011/12) fall to just £100,000 in 2018/19, ahead of being phased out completely in 2019/20.

We've found these savings by becoming more efficient at what we do, reducing our workforce by over 20% over the past seven years, reducing some of our administrative functions and increasing our income. We've also had to make difficult decisions about reductions to some public services. However, throughout this difficult and challenging period we've done our best to protect services.

In 2018/19 we have to find a further £10m worth of savings or additional income, to ensure we deliver a balanced budget. We're proposing that a significant amount of these savings will come from within the council, through making further efficiencies such as re-tendering contracts. However, a number of proposals, amounting to £1m, have been identified from services that will impact the public. It was these proposals that made up the Budget Proposals 2018/19 consultation.

Approach

We published all the public facing proposals on our website on 27 November 2017 with feedback requested by midnight on 10 January 2018.

Respondents were directed to a central index pageⁱ, which outlined the overall background to the exercise, and provided links to each of the individual proposals on our Consultation Portalⁱⁱ.

Each individual page included further details on the specifics of what the proposal contained and what we thought the impact might be, along with any other elements we'd taken into account. Feedback was then invited through an online form and through a dedicated email address. Hard copies of the proposal documents and surveys were also made available on request, and responses were also accepted verbally and by letter.

As well as publishing the consultations on our website, we emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 700 people) notifying them of the exercise and inviting their contributions. Heads of Service also made direct contact with those organisations directly affected prior to them being made publicly available.

We issued a press release to local media, local MPs, all District Councillors and Parish Clerks on the 27 November 2017, and further publicised our consultations through our Facebook and Twitter accounts.

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Finally, we placed posters in our libraries and made them available to WBC Councillors to put up in the wards.

Proposal Background

There is a desire and a requirement to advertise planning applications in a way that alerts the public to proposals which may be of interest to them, so that they are both aware of the proposals, and also able to make comments.

Currently the service places an orange site notice on, or in the vicinity, of all sites where there is a current planning application. The site notice sets its own 21 day period from the day it is placed on site, for comments to be submitted by anyone who wishes to make comment.

In addition to statutory requirementsⁱⁱⁱ, the service sends direct mail letters to all properties with a common boundary, and where the proposal is a major development, all properties within 100m of the application site.

Details of the applications are also made available on our website^{iv}.

Proposal Details

To cease sending individual notification letters to properties in the vicinity of a planning application, where there is an option to choose between notifying neighbours by letter or by site notice.

Legislation Requirements

The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015^v sets out the requirements for publicising planning applications. There are several types of application which must be advertised by the placing of a specific site notice on, or near to, the application site. There are corresponding press notices which must also be placed.

The vast majority of applications must be publicised via our website and also by either a general notice, specific to the application, placed on or near the site, or by letter to any adjoining owner or occupier.

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 97 responses were received.

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Summary of Main Points

Concern was raised relating to the elderly and people with disabilities who may not be aware of development proposals from the site notice alone. No viable alternatives were proposed. Suggestions were also made for improved use of Orange Notices.

Summary of Responses by Question

1. Are you...?

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
A resident of West Berkshire	86	74.1%	88.7%
Employed by West Berkshire Council	8	6.9%	8.2%
A Parish/Town Councillor	14	12.1%	14.4%
A District Councillor	2	1.7%	2.1%
Other	6	5.2%	6.2%
Total	116	100.0%	119.6%

2. How far do you agree with the proposal to cease sending individual notification letters to properties in the vicinity of a planning application, where there is an option to choose between notifying neighbours by letter or by site notice?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Agree	45	46.4	46.9
Neither agree nor disagree	8	8.2	8.3
Disagree	43	44.3	44.8
Total	96	99.0	100.0
Not answered	1	1.0	
Total	97	100.0	

3. What do you think we should be aware of in terms of how this proposal might impact people? For example, do you think it will affect particular individuals more than others?

A number of respondent's commented that the elderly, disabled, partially sighted and those who may not have access to the internet could be impacted by the proposal.

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4. If the decision is taken to proceed with this proposal, do you have any suggestions for how we can reduce the impact on those affected? If so, please provide details.

- 43% suggested that better use be made of orange site notices:
 - displayed more prominently
 - extra notices for larger sites or sites which are more isolated and off a main road
 - displayed longer
 - removed when no longer needed,
 - easy read options for disabled people
 - displayed on community/village notice boards and venues
- Combine site visit and putting up site notice
- Still send to nearest neighbours
- Braille letters, increased font size in NWN adverts
- Applicant writes to neighbours
- Developer engage with the community

5. Do you have any other suggestions as to how these savings might be delivered within this service? If so, please provide details.

- Allow people to sign up for email notifications
- Improved access to the website
- Use social media

6. Do you have any suggestions on how we might increase income, either in this service, or elsewhere in the council? If so, please provide details.

It was suggested that planning fees be increased or the developer be charged for sending neighbour notification letters.

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

- Parish councils to inform residents
- Volunteers to deliver notifications and support local elderly residents and those with a disability

8. Any further comments?

None.

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Officer conclusion and recommendation can be found in the associated Overview of Responses and Recommendations document.

Gary Lugg
Head of Service
Development and Planning
16 January 2018

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.

ⁱ Central Index Page – <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/budgetproposals>

ⁱⁱ Consultation Portal - <http://info.westberks.gov.uk/consultations>

ⁱⁱⁱ Statutory requirements - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2015/595/article/15/made>

^{iv} WBC Planning Portal - <https://publicaccess.westberks.gov.uk/online-applications/search.do?action=simple&searchType=Application>

^v The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2015/595/contents/made>