

Budget Proposals 2024/25: Restructure parking fees and charges

Consultation Summary Report

Why did we consult?

The council is facing unprecedented financial pressures. From historically high inflation increasing contract costs, to rising housing costs and through to large increases in cost and demand in supporting our most vulnerable residents with social care, the council has some major cost increases.

In 2024/25, we need to find £14.2 million in savings or income generation. This figure is based on the assumption that Council Tax increases by 4.99% overall in line with previous government referendum limits. We have identified £12.2 million worth of savings and income generation, of which approximately £1.75 million comes from proposals that require public consultation.

Through extensive internal discussions and meetings with our service providers, we've identified 10 proposals.

For more information please visit <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/balancing-our-budget>

Approach

We published all the public facing proposals on our website on 27 November 2023 with feedback requested by midnight on 11 January 2024.

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 and Engagement Hubⁱⁱ.

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 considered. Feedback was then invited through an online survey, and hard copies of the proposal documents and surveys were made available on request.

The service had recently completed a consultation on the proposed new Parking Strategy. Anyone from that consultation that requested to be kept informed were emailed details of this consultation. Posters were also put up in car parks.

As well as publishing the consultations on our website, we also emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 2,500 people), local stakeholder charities, representative groups and partner organisations notifying them of the exercise and inviting their contributions. Service Directors contacted those organisations directly affected prior to them being made publicly available.

Finally, we issued a press release on 28 November 2023, and further publicised our consultations through our social media accounts and residents' e-newsletters. We also placed posters in our main offices and other council properties e.g. libraries and family hubs and made them available to WBC Councillors to put up in the wards/parishes.

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Proposal Background

There are 27 council-operated car parks in West Berkshire and 469 designated parking spaces available on-street in Hungerford, Newbury and Thatcham. Our Car Parks team, oversee these parking facilities and provide a civil enforcement function, in addition to managing the Blue Badge scheme and administering our concessionary fares scheme.

Our 2023/24 revenue budget for car parks is minus £1.1 million (with expenditure £2.0 million and income £3.1 million). Income generated from parking services enables us to continue to provide a broad range of functions including public transport services, traffic schemes, speed management and civil enforcement as well as different types of parking facilities.

Parking charges at council car parks were increased in 2018 following a period of public consultation. Since then, despite high inflation levels, charges have remained relatively unchanged, in part with a view to supporting residents and businesses with the impact of the pandemic.

We have just completed a public consultation on a draft Parking Strategy for 2024-2034, which included a number of proposals to map our parking provision for the next 10 years. The strategy and proposals included restructuring some of the fees and charges associated with parking services, which have been reflected in the new charges proposed, with consideration of consultation feedback received.

Legislation Requirements

Local authorities have powers under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the Road Traffic Act 1991, the Traffic Management Act 2004, the Civil Enforcement of Road Traffic Contraventions Regulations 2022, and the Transport Act 2000 to manage and enforce parking provision.

Any surplus revenue from parking charges must not exceed spending on relevant Environment functions following the High Court ruling against the London Borough of Barnet ('the Barnet case') on 22 July 2013.

The proposed changes to the fees and charges will be advertised under Section 35C of the Road Traffic (Regulation) Act 1984.

Proposal Details

To amend the parking fees and charges for 2024/25. The specific proposed changes to car parks are:

- introduce a 20p increase on most one hour (or shortest stay) tickets for car parks across the district

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- to align Goldwell and Northcroft Leisure Centre (and, seasonally for 1 April to 30 September, Northcroft Lane West) charges to provide consistency for the users attending Northcroft Leisure Centre and support use of the Newbury Lido
- ensure parking charges, where they apply, are implemented all day, every day, across West Berkshire unless there is a good justification for not doing so
- introduce evening and Sunday charges in some places where these don't currently exist
- introduce charges in Lambourn, which will require the installation of a ticket machine
- adjust Station Road, Hungerford charges to be competitive with the nearby APCOA facilities
- reduce charges at Northbrook multi-storey car park due to current underutilisation and to help free up capacity at other Newbury parking facilities

For our other parking fees and charges, the main changes are:

- season tickets have been modelled to offer annual, quarterly and monthly options, based on equivalent daily charges for 80, 25 and 10 days respectively
- resident permits have been modelled to be charged in four tiers: Tier 1 - where resident permit bays are in parking charge areas; Tier 2 - where there are good bus and rail services and car club availability; Tier 3 - reasonable bus and rail services; and Tier 4 - bus services only
- it is proposed, for 2025/26, to charge second (or additional) residential permits at a higher rate, and that early notification of this intention is being given at this time
- to introduce an administrative charge for All Zone permits, which are currently provided free of charge (but extend their validity from 1 hour to 2 hours); it is anticipated that some medical and care professionals will review their need for the permit

Please refer to the summary of parking fees and charges for 2024/25.

Please refer to the detailed document, which illustrates the current and proposed charges, identifies the relevant strategy proposals, incorporates local benchmarking data, and provides a comparison between the proposed charges and a blanket inflationary increase (of 32% from 2018).

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This proposal will save the council up to £500,000 per year.

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total, 258 responses were received through the survey. We also received direct responses from Reading West & Mid Berkshire CLP and Newbury CLP, Thatcham Town Council, and Tilehurst and Basildon Parish Councils. We received no petitions.

Summary of Main Points

Views expressed were both in favour and against the proposal, and it was a fairly even split excluding Lambourn. This was seen as the most palatable of the ten proposals.

Those in favour explained that people who could afford cars could afford parking charges, and that the proposals would support a move to active and sustainable travel.

Those against were critical of the impacts, especially on shops, as people were less likely to come into Newbury in particular.

A number of suggestions were made to improve the offer, with the most practical already included within the Parking Strategy 2024-2034 and have been considered when proposing the fees and charges for 2024/25.

Lambourn residents were concerned that introducing charging would make the High Street more dangerous and there could be a potential loss of trade for high street shops.

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Summary of Responses by Question

1. Which of the following best describe you? Please select all that apply.

	Number	Percentage
A user of the service	154	59.69
A resident of West Berkshire	225	87.21
A visitor to West Berkshire	3	1.16
A West Berkshire business owner	10	3.88
Employed by a West Berkshire business	18	6.98
Employed by West Berkshire Council	6	2.33
A Parish/Town Councillor	15	5.81
A District Councillor	0	0
A partner organisation	0	0
A West Berkshire Council service provider	0	0
Other	5	1.94

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to amend parking fees and charges for 2024/25?

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	32	13.22
Agree	41	16.94
Neither agree nor disagree	24	9.92
Disagree	23	9.50
Strongly disagree	122	50.41

Comments made ranged across all views. Some suggested that charges could be higher than proposed. There were calls for more investment in bus services and improved cycling facilities to offset higher charges, and suggestions that this will encourage walking and reduce congestion. It was also noted as the least painful option of the ten proposals.

A number of respondents wanted a lower charge or free parking option for the first 30 minutes.

Others complained that charges were already too high and that increasing charges further will adversely affect town centres or lead to more on-street or pavement parking. There was considerable opposition to charges in Lambourn.

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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?

Many were concerned that this would further impact businesses and town centre vibrancy. Also, the increases will particularly impact low income households, blue badge holders, and those without suitable public transport options. Residents in Lambourn and Pangbourne were concerned about increased parking on-street or on pavements making it difficult both for traffic and pedestrians.

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.

Suggestions included giving discounts to West Berkshire residents, reduced rates for the elderly and those on benefits, or just reduce the Council tax. A short period of parking could be free or at a reduced rate, or businesses could reimburse the first hour of parking. Introducing a discounted pre-payment rate, offering reduced price weekly tickets, or season tickets based on the number of days used and not a specific time period. There were also calls to remove the cliff edge parking charges between day and night rates, and to introduce transferable tickets to allow those with less mobility to park nearer their destinations.

Other suggestions included better signposting of Northbrook multi-storey, incentivising bus use and improving bus services, and introducing a north-south park and ride.

There were calls to retain cash and card payment options; to remove parking from Lambourn High Street; and to provide better district-wide enforcement of illegal parking. Thatcham Town Council requested free parking in the vicinity of Thatcham Station after midday, and no charges for school streets permits.

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

In terms of parking charges, options to save money were to get businesses to pay some or part of their customers parking charges, use ANPR technology, or get rid of traffic wardens.

There were many more suggestions for raising income. Raise charges further. Better enforcement and increased fines. Allow cash payments only in £1 increments. Introduce pre-payment which would bring money in earlier. Trial low cost car parks to see if it increases use. Fix broken parking barriers. Attract big retailers to town centres.

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General options for saving money: Reduce staffing costs (management, staff, agency staff, contractors, consultants, dealing with underperforming staff and sickness, freeze staff pay, administration). Reduce councillor expenses. Amalgamating councils in Berkshire. Remove funding for fringe groups. Stop vanity projects (cycle lanes, Net Zero initiatives, pedestrian zones, speed limit reductions). Reduce costs in social care (move resources to preventative services, joint case management, remove separate budgets in children's services). Reduce costs for environmental services (remove or food recycling, reduce HWRC hours, use smaller buses on routes with lower passenger numbers, fix potholes to reduce claims, better strategy for long term road maintenance view). Other suggestions were to reduce or improve the library service, fewer costly events in Newbury Town Centre, and not to add to reserves when times are hard.

Options for income: Increase council tax. Adequate government funding. Sell some investment properties for a profit. Convert old council buildings to flats for rent. Use libraries to provide fingerprints and photos for visa applications. Increase brown bin fees. Run cafes in parks. Allow installation of EV charging stations but with council taking a percentage of revenue. Charge for concessionary bus passes. Introduce speed cameras. Build more houses.

6. If you, your community group, or organisation think you might be able to help reduce the impact of this proposal, if the decision is taken to proceed with it, please provide your contact details below.

26 responses were received.

7. Any further comments?

Many responses repeated earlier comments, including both supportive and unsupportive views. Newbury Velo are happy to provide cycling sessions for those who would like a refresher on road riding safely. The Council needs to be more visible. Don't charge in Lambourn. More parking spaces required in Bartholomew Street and for disabled.

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

Peter Walker
Service Lead – Highways & Transport Innovation
Environment Department
15 January 2024

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.*

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

ⁱ <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/balancing-our-budget>

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