

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget proposals 2026/27: To extend and increase the peak-time hire charges for the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground				Service Director: Jon Winstanley Author: Paul Hendry		
Proposals:		To increase the peak-time hire charges for the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground by 35%.				
		To extend the peak-time hire charges for the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground to include all day Sunday.				
Total budget 2025/26:			Initial proposed saving / Anticipated additional income 2026/27:	Approx. £25,000	Recommended saving / Anticipated additional income 2026/27:	£8,000
No. of responses:		In total, 103 responses were received. The breakdown of responses is as follows:				
			Number	%		
		A resident of West Berkshire	94	91.26%		
		A user of the artificial pitch	71	68.93%		
		A West Berkshire business owner	6	5.83%		
		Employed by a business located in West Berkshire	3	2.91%		
		Employed by West Berkshire Council	1	0.97%		
		A Parish/Town Councillor	1	0.97%		
		A District Councillor	0	0.00%		
		A West Berkshire Council partner organisation	0	0.00%		
		A West Berkshire Council service provider	0	0.00%		
		Other - please specify below:	4	3.88%		

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	<i>(N.B % will not total 100% as respondents were able to select more than one option)</i>	
Key issues raised:	The consultation on the proposed 35% increase in artificial pitch fees and reclassification of Sundays as peak time revealed strong opposition from stakeholders. Newbury and Thatcham Hockey Club raised very strong opposition. They have stated that the proposed changes will increase their costs by around £20,000 next season, with nearly 40% of this due to Sundays being reclassified as peak charging days. The proposed fee increase is expected to reduce accessibility due to affordability, particularly for children, juniors, and low-income families many of whom use the facility on Sundays. Sundays appear critical for youth hockey, and the changes could significantly affect participation. Financial pressure on clubs is another major concern, as higher membership fees may price out families and potentially lead to club and age group closures. Health and wellbeing could also suffer, as increased costs discourage participation, negatively impacting physical fitness and mental health. Community and social interaction, which clubs provide, may decline, threatening their sustainability. Furthermore, the proposal undermines equality and inclusion, conflicting with Sport England objectives and inclusive sport policies. Educational institutions i.e. local schools and colleges may reduce sports provision due to higher costs, and in the long term, reduced grassroots participation could harm talent development and damage the council's reputation.	
Equality issues:	The proposal is likely to have an impact on several protected and vulnerable groups. Children and juniors, who rely heavily on affordable access for training and matches, would be most affected, particularly on Sundays when youth sessions are scheduled. Lower-income families face increased financial barriers due to higher fees, which could make participation unaffordable, while disabled and inclusive groups, such as those involved in disability hockey, risk losing vital opportunities if sessions become financially unviable. These changes undermine efforts to promote equality and inclusion in sport, contradicting national objectives set by Sport England and England Hockey. These are addressed in the EIA for the proposal. Beyond affordability, the proposal threatens community cohesion and social inclusion. Volunteer-led initiatives aimed at engaging children from state schools could be impacted, reinforcing perceptions of hockey as elitist and inaccessible. Schools may also reduce sports provision due to rising costs, limiting opportunities for competitive and team sports. Overall, the changes risk widening inequalities in health, wellbeing, and educational outcomes, while damaging grassroots development and Newbury's reputation for inclusive community sport.	

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Suggestions for minimising any negative effects of the proposed change:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Many respondents asked for no rise, a freeze, or only inflation-linked (c. 10%) / much smaller stepped increases spread over time.	The council has only ever increased fees at this site by approximately the rate of inflation. Artificial pitches require lighting and maintenance, and energy costs have risen significantly in recent years. Utilities costs have risen significantly above inflation for several years up to 2024/25.	
	Do not make Sunday peak (especially Sunday mornings used for junior development; some suggest off-peak after 6pm).	It is noted the particular impact of Sundays being considered as peak. This is one of our busiest days and Sundays are generally considered as peak periods in the private and public leisure sector. Many councils classify weekends (including Sundays) as peak, especially for artificial pitches and sports halls, though some councils keep Sunday mornings off-peak for junior training.	
	Uniform/consistent approach: avoid penalising one day/group; if increases are unavoidable, apply across all users, not just Sundays.	See above. The impact of Sundays as peak time is noted.	
	Protected groups and youth sport: keep junior and disability sessions lower/subsidised; discounts for charities; avoid penalising children's sport.	There may be an option to look at a discounted or loyalty pricing structure for protected groups or youth sports, if the proposed price increases are implemented.	
	Protect key development times (e.g., Sunday mornings) and maintain access for junior and disability sessions.	Many councils classify weekends (including Sundays) as peak, especially for artificial pitches and sports halls, though some councils keep Sunday mornings off-peak for junior training. There may be an option to apply discounted rates for certain groups.	

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	Review “peak/off-peak” definitions using utilisation data; several note Sunday evenings are quiet.	We may review utilisation in the evenings to see if there is an option to retain off peak at this time.	
	Increase booking flexibility: allow one-third pitch bookings and smarter shared-half use so smaller teams aren’t forced into larger, costlier slots.	This is something we can consider in conjunction with the clubs and regular users.	
	Consider a second pitch at Henwick (pursue grants/external funding).	This is potentially a matter for the Henwick Masterplan which is considering the overall future use of the site. Also has relevance to the Playing Pitch Strategy.	
	Re-mark tennis/netball courts and add simple adaptations so they can host junior hockey; make better use of under-booked assets.	This facility has capability for hockey use as it is a ‘Gen 2’ surface suitable for mixed use. We do however need to consider the demand for tennis. This was a former tennis facility but we have lost the demand for tennis over the years. We need to provide opportunity to grow this demand once again.	
	Improve wider facilities and train an on-site team to look after the venue.	Future management models for this site have been discussed but not progressed at this stage. Savings from a new management model are not guaranteed at least not in the short term.	
	Provide a clear rationale for any changes, including a full cost-benefit analysis (health, social value) and an overall financial review (not just short-term revenue).	We appreciate the suggestion to provide a clear rationale for the proposed changes. While we absolutely recognise the importance of balancing financial sustainability with health and social value, it is very challenging for a local authority to quantify the wider social and welfare benefits of sports facilities in a way that is universally accepted. These benefits, such as improved mental health, community cohesion, and long-term health savings, are real but difficult to measure precisely.	

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		At the same time, without a viable and financially sustainable facility, there is no sports provision at all. Maintaining the facility to a safe and high standard requires significant ongoing investment, and this means we must ensure income covers costs over the long term. Our goal is to strike a balance, keeping facilities accessible while ensuring they remain operational and fit for purpose for years to come.	
	Address concerns about consultation credibility by publishing utilisation and pricing evidence, and responding transparently to feedback	Our responses here are comprehensive and transparent. Benchmarking can only provide a partial picture, as comparator facilities vary significantly in their characteristics and cost structures.	
	Better promotion of available slots; advertising/sponsorship opportunities; fundraising; consider higher charges for non-residents; and manage any demand dip proactively.	We agree that loyalty discounts, resident or regular-user incentives, and better promotion of available slots are all valuable ideas that can help improve accessibility and engagement. Advertising, sponsorship, and community fundraising are also important opportunities we will continue to explore.	
Suggestions for other savings options:	Suggestion	Council response	
	As a resident within very close proximity to Henwick is has also been noticed recently that the floodlights on the pitch have been coming on during the weekday and staying on until the site closes at 22:00, in which for the majority of the time the surface is not being used.	Usage is actively monitored, and demand is consistently high, with all available hours fully booked. While lighting is required throughout occupancy for safety, we have invested in improved technology to keep energy costs as low as possible. We will monitor lighting use however so thank you for this suggestion. We are considering the conversion of lighting to LED.	

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	A point should also be made to the constant condition of the artificial pitch enclosure (not the surface itself), which is frequently covered in litter, and damaged/broken equipment, and left unlocked the majority of the time, which results in groups utilising the pitch in an ad-hoc basis, while not paying for it.	We acknowledge that unofficial use of the facility is a periodic issue, ranging from boot camps to individual training sessions. Unfortunately, this is very difficult to police under current staffing constraints. We are looking at current locking and unlocking arrangements and are exploring/trialling digital locks at the site.	
	Maybe consider installation of solar panels and heat systems to lower long term costs of power to the changing rooms etc.	This is a good point which we will raise with colleagues and in the Environment team, they are involved in sustainable energy options elsewhere.	
	To save money across the district you should put an immediate freeze on nonessential spending and cancel the Lib Dem vanity projects.	The Council has already introduced a range of stringent measures to help manage the challenging financial situation. This includes a freeze on non-essential spending. New projects are also scrutinised by various boards to ensure they can deliver suitable benefits for the community or value-for-money before the Council allocates funding and resources to them.	
	Explore solar for floodlighting and broader partnerships (e.g., Newbury College Football Academy); improve marketing to fill slack times (walking football, etc.)	This is a good point which we will raise with colleagues and in the Environment team, there are involved in sustainable energy options elsewhere. We have worked closely with the Football Academy but there isn't enough capacity on the artificial pitch and their use of grass pitches had to be closely managed to prevent surface damage. The Masterplan exercise underway may present opportunities for a future partnership.	
	Community work parties	We have used the Probation Service in the past but there is very little financial advantage as they are very much restricted in what work they carry out.	

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	Fire the useless councillors making ridiculous decisions in our community	West Berkshire councillors are typically conscientious and diligent people who are passionate about serving their community. If residents have specific concerns about their ward councillor they can discuss this with them or use their vote at the next local elections.	
	Instead of wasting money on Newbury Town FC for a new 3G pitch then direct them to use the Henwick Worthy pitches for their matches.	The Playing Pitch Strategy clearly identifies a strong need for more sports facilities in West Berkshire. Our focus is not on prioritising one over the other, but on creating solutions that allow both to be provided efficiently and sustainably.	
	Reduce the number of staff at Market Street, Newbury, RG14 5LD	The Council has been implementing a number of solutions to reduce its costs and manage the difficult financial situation. For example, many teams have held vacancies or deleted posts from their structure. The use of agency staff has also been significantly reduced in recent years.	
	Review management model (in-house vs. contracted) and align pricing across all sports surfaces for consistency.	This is an interesting point we have considered previously. Managing sports pitches in-house offers very limited financial advantage compared to contracted services because of the significant overheads involved, including staffing, maintenance, compliance, and operational costs. These overheads often outweigh any perceived savings, making external management a more cost-effective and sustainable option for delivering high-quality facilities. Future management models may ultimately have to be considered however.	
	Sell the operation entirely/returning the facility back to open space.	The Playing Pitch Strategy identifies a need for more, not less, formal sports provision across the district to meet current and future demand. Returning this facility to open space would reduce opportunities for structured sport and contradict the strategic objectives aimed at increasing participation and improving health outcomes. Our focus must remain on retaining and optimising formal sports facilities rather than reducing them.	

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Suggestions for income generation:	Suggestion	Council response		
	Retain key junior windows on Sundays; pilot off-peak after 6pm and publish utilisation data.	Will consider all options for mitigating the impact of peak usage.		
	Introduce quarter-pitch bookings, loyalty/block-booking discounts, and a regular vs. ad-hoc tariff.	We agree that loyalty discounts, resident or regular-user incentives, and better promotion of available slots are all valuable ideas that can help improve accessibility and engagement.		
	Spread any increase across all users rather than penalising particular days/sports; ensure proportional/fair distribution	I understand this refers to the fact that grass pitches are not being considered for a fee increase. This is because, particularly at locations other than Henwick, the quality of our grass pitches does not justify an increase without significant capital improvements, improvements that may not achieve the desired results given the nature of the land		
	Introduce loyalty/season tickets, block-booking discounts, and differentiated rates for regular vs. ad-hoc users; lower tariffs for children and under-represented groups.	We agree that loyalty discounts, resident or regular-user incentives and discounting for youth and family use are worthwhile and important considerations.		
	Consider non-resident pricing and ensure grass-pitch charges and floodlight use are priced consistently across clubs.	We agree that loyalty discounts, resident or regular-user incentives and discounting for youth and family use are worthwhile and important considerations.		
	Some argue the facility should be free/nominal cost as a public health asset; others propose selling the operation entirely.	Maintaining fees at current levels or nominal levels as in this suggestion, is not practical or sustainable for the council at present because the cost of operating and maintaining these facilities continues to rise. Inflation, staffing, utilities, and essential maintenance all require significant funding, and current income levels		

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		do not cover these costs. Without appropriate fee adjustments, the council would need to divert funds from other critical services or reduce the quality and availability of the facilities. Additionally, keeping fees artificially low undermines the ability to invest in improvements, making the facilities less attractive and potentially reducing usage over time. A balanced approach is necessary to ensure financial sustainability while still supporting public health objectives	
	Review demand (e.g., Sunday evenings often quiet)	We're keen to encourage use of the facility during quieter periods and will explore targeted marketing strategies to achieve this	
	Allow smaller booking units (e.g., quarters), enable shared halves, and add lights to make sub-pitch bookings viable.	We will open a discussion with the main user and other clubs to consider whether there is a value in this.	
	The new tennis/netball courts are frequently described as under-used; open them to other sports (junior hockey, football 5-a-side) or convert (e.g., padel).	We intend to persevere with marketing this facility primarily for tennis use, as it was developed to replace the former tennis courts and meets that specific need. However, we recognise the importance of maximising usage, so we will look to accommodate other sports during available time slots where practicable.	
	Improve/floodlight the smaller artificial area and open it more widely; invite netball leagues and other clubs	This is a consideration within the emerging Henwick Masterplan document; we are also mindful of impacts of light on neighbours.	
	Strong demand to build a second full-size, floodlit hockey pitch; would double capacity and keep more hockey activity at Henwick	This is a consideration within the emerging Henwick Masterplan document	
	Add outdoor/indoor cricket nets, enhance drainage, and invest in	An interesting suggestion which we can explore with users.	

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	netball courts to broaden year-round use		
	Advertise the hire space better; attract schools, academies, and clubs (e.g., Reading/Chelsea youth camps).	Agreed we will look at marketing opportunities.	
	Run community events (charity matches, fetes, “party in the park”), enable food/drink vendors, and pursue sponsorship (e.g., local businesses)	We will certainly consider sponsorship and marketing opportunities, and other income streams as part of this exercise.	
	Consider parking fees (e.g., £0.50–£1) and charge personal trainers/groups currently using space for free.	This is an option but without on street residential parking restrictions then we are concerned about displacement. This is worthy of further investigation however.	
	Introduce loyalty/season tickets, block-booking discounts, and differentiated rates for regular vs. ad-hoc users; lower tariffs for children and under-represented groups.	We agree that loyalty discounts, resident or regular-user incentives and discounting for youth and family use are worthwhile and important considerations.	
	Consider non-resident pricing and ensure grass-pitch charges and floodlight use are priced consistently across clubs.	We agree that loyalty discounts, resident or regular-user incentives and discounting for youth and family use are worthwhile and important considerations.	
	Kick-off a marketing drive for the tennis/netball courts and smaller	We’re keen to encourage use of the facility during quieter periods and will explore targeted marketing strategies to achieve this	

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	pitch; invite netball leagues and schools.		
	Floodlight the smaller area; add refreshments and EV chargers; upgrade drainage and amenities.	This is a consideration within the emerging Henwick Masterplan document; we are also mindful of impacts of light on neighbours. We have installed/about to instal an EV charger in the car park and will certainly explore solar opportunities. We are currently looking at advertising opportunities and may well bring clubs into discussions regarding sponsorship.	
	Develop events and sponsorship packages; explore solar to reduce running costs.	See above	
	Provide a café and food vans to generate income.	While the idea of providing a café or food vans to generate income is understandable, there are several practical challenges. These include the need for appropriate infrastructure such as power and water supply, compliance with food hygiene and safety regulations, and the cost of managing or contracting the service. Additionally, demand can be highly seasonal and unpredictable, making it difficult to ensure consistent revenue. Introducing food vending could also require additional staffing and oversight, which adds to operational complexity. For these reasons, this option is not currently considered a sustainable solution.	
	Review demand (e.g., Sunday evenings often quiet)	We will continue to review the demand for the site at different times and explore if this can be reflected in future pricing models.	
Officer conclusion and recommendation as a result of the responses:	<u>Conclusion</u> The consultation has highlighted significant concerns regarding the proposed 35% increase in artificial pitch fees and the reclassification of Sundays as peak time. Respondents emphasised the potential negative impacts on accessibility for children, juniors, and low-income families, as well as the broader implications for health, wellbeing, and community cohesion. Clubs fear financial strain that could lead to reduced participation or even reduced sessions and provision for some groups, undermining equality, inclusion, and long-term coaching development.		

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	While these concerns are valid and must be acknowledged, the Council also has a responsibility to ensure that facilities remain financially sustainable and aligned with strategic objectives. A balanced approach is therefore essential, one that considers phased or inflation-linked increases, targeted discounts for juniors and inclusive sessions, and exploration of alternative revenue streams. This will help maintain affordability and community engagement while supporting the ongoing viability of the facility.				
	<u>Recommendations</u>				
	<u>Main Recommendation for Implementation</u>				
	1. Phased Implementation Having fully reviewed the views of respondents, it is recommended that the planned fee increases are introduced gradually over three years (10.5% approx. per annum), allowing customers and other stakeholders time to adapt to above-inflation rises. This approach will mitigate immediate financial impacts and maintain participation levels. The proposed fees for the next three years are shown in the table below:				
	<u>Artificial Full Pitch (11 a side) Peak-time Charges</u>				
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	<u>Artificial Half Pitch (5 a side) Peak-time Charges</u>					
	Period	Current cost	Proposed cost consulted on			
	30 mins	£26.00	£35.00	£29.00	£32.00	£35.00
	60 mins	£51.00	£68.85	£56.00	£62.00	£69.00
	90 mins	£78.00	£105.30	£86.00	£95.00	£105.00
	<u>Secondary Recommendations for Further Exploration</u> 2. Sunday Peak Time Review Reassess the reclassification of Sundays as peak time, given its impact on youth and disability sessions. Consider maintaining off-peak pricing for these groups or introducing targeted discounts. It is not recommended that Sunday is reclassified as peak time, until further assessments have been carried out. 3. Further Benchmarking & Engagement Conduct additional benchmarking against comparable facilities and engage further with the Hockey Club and other stakeholders to ensure transparency and fairness in pricing. 4. Discounting & Loyalty Schemes Explore discounts for juniors, disability sessions, and block bookings, alongside loyalty incentives for local community users to support inclusion and retention. 5. Alternative Revenue Streams					

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	Investigate advertising and sponsorship opportunities and consider granting the Hockey Club greater autonomy in managing the facility to unlock operational efficiencies. The Club may wish greater autonomy over sponsorship opportunities. 6. Parking Charges Assess the feasibility of introducing car parking charges, while addressing displacement risks through potential street parking restrictions. 7. Income Target Adjustment Revise income targets downward to reflect the phased approach and time required for implementation and engagement. 8. Policy Alignment Ensure all changes align with the Council's Leisure Strategy and Sport England objectives, supporting health, wellbeing, and equality.		

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