Budget proposals 2026/27: To extend and increase the peak-time hire charges for the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground

Consultation Summary Report

Why we consulted?

Councils across the country continue to face unprecedented financial pressures, and West Berkshire Council ("the Council") is no exception. The Council is responding to increasing demands in adults' and children's social care services supporting our most vulnerable residents, and in other areas such as homelessness and home to school transport. The increases in demand, combined with higher inflation and increasing costs, are financially impacting the Council and its suppliers.

In 2026/27, we need to find £6.4 million in savings or income generation. This figure assumes that Council Tax increases by the maximum 4.99%.

To fill the remaining gap, we have a range of options available, including changing how we provide services and making internal savings, for example: re-tendering contracts for better value for money, streamlining processes, and introducing new charges or increasing existing charges for some services.

In February 2026, we will set our budget for the financial year ahead (2026/27). To help shape that process, we asked local residents, communities and other parties for their views on how we could fund and prioritise the services we provide. We are also sought their views on two specific proposals.

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

Approach

We published the 'Balancing our Budget' consultation on our website on Monday, 1 December 2025 with feedback requested by midday on Monday, 12 January 2026.

Respondents were directed to a central index page[i], which outlined the overall background to the exercise, and provided links to our 'Balancing our Budget 2026/27' survey, as well as the individual proposals on our Consultation and Engagement Hub[ii].

Each individual proposal 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.

As well as publishing the consultations on our website, we also emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 2,500 people), we also emailed the consultation documents to all regular users of the artificial pitch facility.

Finally, we issued a press release on Monday, 1 December 2026 and further publicised our consultations through our social media accounts and residents' e-newsletters. We also placed posters in our main offices and made them available to Services to put up as required.

Proposal Background

Henwick Worthy Sports Ground offers a wide range of outdoor sports facilities including a floodlit artificial pitch suitable for football and hockey. The pitch is available for hire every day from 10am to 10pm. Peak hours are defined as weekday evenings from 6pm to 10pm, and all day on Saturday. Bookings can be made for half or full pitch use.

The site is owned and managed by West Berkshire Council, but is maintained by Krinkels UK Ltd, the Council's grounds maintenance contractor. There is no formal volunteer programme associated with the pitch operations, although our regular community sports clubs often contribute to the sporting offer at the site through coaching and match-day support to help manage teams and supporters.

From 1 October 2024 to date, the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground has been booked 1,429 times, generating £86,663 in income. This reflects strong and consistent community demand, with usage spanning local football clubs, schools, and recreational groups. The facility plays a key role in supporting grassroots sport and active lifestyles across the district.

In the 2024/25 financial year, our expenditure on this facility was £262,479, our total income was £176,886, made up from booking income, grants and contributions from Thatcham Town Council, and rental payments from local sports clubs. Our total net expenditure (the total spend minus any income) was £85,594.

We carried out benchmarking of artificial pitch hire charges across a range of providers in the public, private, and charitable sectors, to inform our proposal. While charges vary significantly, the analysis indicates that:

- demand for artificial pitches remains high, particularly during weekday evenings (peak times)
- the competitive landscape and usage levels suggest there is scope to increase our hire fees above the rate of inflation without adversely affecting demand

It is important to note that true comparisons are difficult due to:

- variations in pricing structures, including pitch size (full, half, 5-a-side etc.), sport type, and booking duration
- discounting and incentivisation schemes, such as community rates, block booking discounts, and school partnerships
- seasonal pricing, with different rates applied in summer and winter months

- Despite these differences, the benchmarking shows that full pitch peak-time hire charges (60 mins) range from £60 to £159 per hour, with most being between £105 and £125 per hour.

Legislative and Statutory Requirements

There are no legal or statutory requirements.

Proposal Details

To increase the peak-time hire charges for the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground by 35%:

Artificial Full Pitch (11 a side) Peak-time Charges

Period	Current cost	Proposed cost
30 mins	£46.00	£62.00
60 mins	£92.00	£124.00
90 mins	£140.00	£189.00

Artificial Half Pitch (5 a side) Peak-time Charges

Period	Current cost	Proposed cost
30 mins	£26.00	£35.00
60 mins	£51.00	£68.85
90 mins	£78.00	£105.30

We also propose to extend the peak-time hire charges for the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground to include all day Sunday.

Off-peak charges are unaffected by this proposal but will, as in previous years, be uplifted by inflation rounded up or down to the nearest £1. It is hoped that this will encourage more daytime and other off-peak usage of the facility by community groups, schools, and casual users. We will do additional promotion of the facility to these groups.

No reduction in service hours or removal of facilities is proposed. The artificial pitch will remain fully operational.

It is anticipated that this proposal would generate an additional income of approximately £32,600 annually.

While future usage levels may fluctuate, the revised fee structure provides a robust financial buffer and a clear path towards meeting strategic income goals.

Whilst the proposed uplift is financially significant it would support the continued investment in pitch maintenance and upgrades, and the long-term sustainability of the service.

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Consultation Summary Report

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Consultation Summary Report

Consultation Response

Number of Responses

In total 103 responses were received.

Summary of Main Points

The consultation on the proposed 35% increase in artificial pitch fees and reclassification of Sundays as peak time revealed strong opposition from stakeholders. Respondents highlighted significant risks, including reduced accessibility for children and low-income families, financial strain on clubs, and negative impacts on health, wellbeing, and community cohesion.

Newbury and Thatcham Hockey Club raised very strong opposition. As they are a primary user, it is worth specifically documenting their concerns. 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 times. This would force the club to either cut services, raise fees significantly, or consider relocating. As Sundays are mainly for junior and disability sessions, the change risks pricing out families and discouraging young players, undermining participation and inclusivity.

Concerns were raised about transparency and fairness, particularly as grass pitch fees remain unchanged.

Respondents suggested easing the impact of the proposed fee increase by applying smaller, inflation-level rises or introducing the increase gradually over time. They recommended offering targeted subsidies for juniors and disability sessions, along with block booking discounts and loyalty schemes to keep participation affordable. Other ideas included generating income through advertising, charging higher rates for non-local users, and encouraging community fundraising initiatives to reduce reliance on fee increases. Improving facilities was also highlighted, such as building additional pitches, allowing smaller pitch bookings, and making better use of underutilised courts. Finally, respondents stressed that any changes should align with health, inclusion, and Sport England objectives to support the Council's Leisure Strategy and maintain equitable access to sport.

Summary of Responses by Question

1. Which of the following best describes you?

(N.B % will not total 100% as respondents were able to select more than one)

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	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	4	3.88%

2. Have you ever hired the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground?

	Yes		No	
	Number	%	Number	%
During peak time, i.e. weekday evenings (6pm to 10pm) and all-day Saturday	41	40.59%	60	59.41%
During off-peak time	43	42.57%	58	57.43%

3. How often do you hire the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground?

Respondents skipped this question if they had never hired the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground.

During peak time, i.e. weekday evenings (6pm to 10pm) and all-day Saturday

	Number	%
Very frequently	22	56.41%
Frequently	7	17.95%
Occasionally	5	12.82%
Rarely	1	2.56%
Very rarely	4	10.26%
Total	**39**	**100.00%**

During off-peak time

	Number	%
Very frequently	17	40.48%
Frequently	7	16.67%
Occasionally	12	28.57%
Rarely	3	7.14%
Very rarely	3	7.14%
Total	**42**	**100.00%**

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following proposals?

To increase the peak-time hire charges for the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground by 35%. For example, the 60mins/full pitch charge would increase from £92 to £124

	Number	%
Strongly agree	6	6.25%
Agree	13	13.54%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	3.13%
Disagree	8	8.33%
Strongly Disagree	66	68.75%
Total	**96**	**100.00%**

To extend the peak-time hire charges for the artificial pitch at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground to include all day Sunday

	Number	%
Strongly agree	8	8.33%
Agree	7	7.29%
Neither agree nor disagree	5	5.21%
Disagree	7	7.29%
Strongly Disagree	69	71.88%
Total	**96**	**100.00%**

Summary of ‘Please explain the reasons for your response(s):

Local parents and sports enthusiasts emphasised the vital role of clubs like Newbury and Thatcham Hockey Club in promoting health, social skills, and resilience for children and adults. Team sports are seen as essential for countering the negative effects of excessive screen time and supporting mental well-being.

The proposed significant rise in artificial pitch hire fees at Henwick, for some sessions and the further financial impact of reclassifying Sundays as peak time, would significantly impact grassroots hockey and football. Clubs fear they will have to raise membership costs, making participation unaffordable for many families and threatening the survival of community sports programs and events.

Higher costs contradict public health goals, risk widening inequalities, and could lead to reduced physical activity, harming mental health and increasing NHS burdens.

Respondents suggest maintaining off-peak rates for junior sessions, improving facility management, and exploring fairer funding options instead of imposing steep hikes.

5. Is there anything you think we should be aware of in terms of how these proposals might impact people? For example, do you think they will affect some individuals more than others?

	Number	%
Yes	74	77.08%
No	22	22.92%
Total	**96**	**100.00%**

6. What do you think we should be aware of in terms of how these proposals might impact people?

The responses emphasised the immense value of local sports clubs, particularly Newbury and Thatcham Hockey Club, in fostering community connections, physical health, and mental well-being.

The proposed increase in artificial pitch hire fees, including reclassifying Sundays as peak time, is strongly opposed. Respondents argue that this change would significantly raise costs for clubs, forcing them to increase membership fees and match charges. For families, especially those with multiple players or lower incomes, this could make participation unaffordable, leading to reduced membership and even club closures. The impact would be particularly severe on junior hockey sessions, grassroots football, and inclusive programs for children with disabilities.

Concerns extend beyond affordability to broader social and health implications. Higher costs risk excluding disadvantaged groups, worsening inequalities, and undermining efforts to combat childhood obesity and mental health challenges. Many respondents highlight that sport is a lifeline for neurodiverse individuals and those struggling with well-being. Limiting access could increase anti-social behaviour and place additional strain on public health services, contradicting national and local strategies aimed at promoting active lifestyles.

The response also criticises the lack of consideration for the Hockey Club as the primary user of the facility and questions the fairness of targeting artificial pitches while grass pitches remain unaffected.

Overall, contributors stress that the proposed changes could turn community sport into an elitist activity, erode volunteer-driven programs, and damage the social fabric that these clubs have worked hard to build.

7. Do you think our proposed changes might have a negative effect on you or other people?

	Number	%
Yes	83	86.46%
No	13	13.54%
Total	**96**	**100.00%**

8. What suggestions, if any, do you have for how we could minimise the negative effect should we proceed?

Many respondents suggest not increasing charges at all, arguing that recreational facilities should remain affordable and accessible to promote health and well-being. If an increase is unavoidable, they recommend keeping it in line with inflation or introducing a smaller, gradual rise rather than a steep hike. Several propose not making Sundays peak time, or at least protecting Sunday mornings for junior sessions, and ensuring any changes do not penalise children’s or disability sports.

Other ideas include discounts or subsidies for block bookings, repeat users, and long-term contracts, as well as loyalty schemes for regular clubs. Flexible pricing models, such as lower rates for junior and inclusive sessions, were suggested to maintain accessibility. Respondents also recommend spreading increases across all users rather than targeting specific times and providing clear justification for any rise.

Additional proposals include using underutilised facilities like tennis/netball courts, building a second pitch with external funding, and generating revenue through advertising or sponsorship instead of raising hire fees.

9. Do you have any suggestions on how we might save money or increase income at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground?

	Number	%
Yes	66	68.75%
No	30	31.25%
Total	**96**	**100.00%**

10. What suggestions do you have for how we might save money or increase income at Henwick Worthy Sports Ground?

Several suggestions focused on generating income through new services and better use of existing facilities. Introducing paid parking, opening a café on weekends, and allowing catering vans or food stalls during events were seen as easy wins. Sponsorship and advertising opportunities, partnerships with local businesses, and hosting community events such as charity matches, school competitions, and parkruns were also highlighted as ways to bring in revenue.

Increasing hire fees moderately, charging groups that currently use pitches for free, and offering referral incentives or discounts for block bookings could encourage more consistent usage.

Improving management and reducing waste were key cost-saving ideas. Better control of pitch access to prevent unpaid use, avoiding unnecessary floodlight operation, and considering in-house management instead of outsourcing were suggested.

Energy efficiency measures such as switching to LED lighting, installing solar panels, and adding EV chargers could reduce long-term costs while creating new income streams. Investing in drainage and reviewing ground staff practices would help avoid unnecessary cancellations and lost revenue.

Facility improvements were seen as essential to boost income. Repurposing underused tennis and netball courts for football, hockey, or padel was a recurring theme, alongside floodlighting smaller pitches for year-round use. Building a second hockey pitch and adding more 3G football surfaces were considered high priorities to meet demand and attract more bookings.

Flexible pricing strategies, such as lower rates for juniors and underrepresented groups, were suggested to increase participation. Overall, respondents emphasised balancing community access with smart investments to maximise usage and revenue.

11. Do you have any further comments?

Concerns were raised that higher fees would force clubs to raise their own charges, leading to reduced membership, fewer services, and even club closures, ultimately resulting in less revenue for the council. Several comments highlighted the importance of maintaining affordable access, particularly for juniors and underrepresented groups, and warned that pricing people out of facilities would harm physical and mental health at a time when healthcare systems are already under strain.

A common response called for the Council to consider the long-term benefits of sport and exercise, rather than short-term financial gains, and to conduct a full cost-benefit analysis to understand the wider social and health impacts.

Respondents also criticised the scale of the proposed increase, describing it as excessive, unfair, and poorly planned. Many argued that benchmarking against other local authorities and exploring alternative revenue streams would be more appropriate than imposing steep charges. Suggestions included charging businesses and trainers who currently use facilities for free, introducing dog licenses, and improving utilisation of existing pitches through better planning and floodlighting.

Several comments stressed that sport should be encouraged, not penalised, and warned that the Council risks losing demand and damaging community engagement if prices rise too sharply. Overall, the feedback urged the Council to prioritise inclusivity, transparency, and long-term community wellbeing over short-term profit.

12. What is your gender? (Optional)

	Number	%
Male	50	53.76%
Female	36	38.71%
Other	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	7	7.53%
Total	**93**	**100.00%**

13. How old are you? (Optional)

	Number	%
Under 18	0	0.00%
18-24	2	2.15%
25-34	9	9.68%
35-44	23	24.73%

	Number	%
45-54	28	30.11%
55-64	10	10.75%
65-74	7	7.53%
75 and over	3	3.23%
Prefer not to say	11	11.83%
Total	**93**	**100.00%**

14. Please tell us your postcode, excluding the last two letters, e.g. RG14 5

After reviewing the list of postcodes, the majority fall within the RG14 and RG18 postal regions. RG14 appears most frequently, followed closely by RG18. There are also several entries for RG19 and RG20, but these occur less often than RG14 and RG18. A few outliers include RG7, RG8, RG26, and RG31, which are mentioned only once or twice.

In summary, most people in this list are concentrated in the RG14 (Newbury area) and RG18 (Thatcham area) regions, with smaller clusters in RG19 and RG20.

15. I consent to the council collecting and processing special category data according to the purposes outlined in its privacy notice.

	Number	%
Yes	76	79.17%
No	20	20.83%
Total	**96**	**100.00%**

16. What is your ethnic group? (Optional)

	Number	%
White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British	3	3.95%
White Irish	67	88.16%
White other	1	1.32%
Gypsy, Irish Traveller or Roma	3	3.95%
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	0	0.00%
Asian or Asian British	0	0.00%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	2	2.63%
Other ethnic group	0	0.00%

	Number	%
Prefer not to say	0	0.00%
Total	**76**	**100.00%**

17. Do you have a disability, long-term illness, or health condition? (Optional)

	Number	%
Yes	18	23.68%
No	56	73.68%
Prefer not to say	2	2.63%
Total	**76**	**100.00%**

Officer Conclusions and Recommendations: Officer conclusions and recommendations can be found in the associated Overview of Responses and Recommendations (ORR) document.

Paul Hendry
Countryside Manager
Environment
21/01/2026

***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.

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[i] https://www.westberks.gov.uk/balancing-our-budget
[ii] https://www.westberks.gov.uk/consultations