

2024 Budget Consultation: Summary Report

Why the Council Consults on its Budget

89. The Council has a statutory duty to consult on its annual budget setting with local businesses and business groups. In addition, it is long established custom and practice to consult the residents, as payers of Council Tax, and a cross-section of community groups and organisations. In addition, the Council has a statutory duty to consult on any substantial change proposed for a service.

What the Council was consulting on

90. The Council focussed the consultation on some of the options it wished to consider to help fill a £3.8 million in the 2024/25 budget:
- The proposed rise in Council Tax by the statutory maximum amount allowed by local authorities;
 - Reducing service provision for public toilets, grounds maintenance and cutting the de la Warr Pavilion concessionary grants budget and
 - Increasing fees and charges where the Council has the control to do so.
91. We provided the public with links to various information, such as the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28, to support the consultation process and this can be found below.

How We Consulted and Who was invited to Respond

92. We identified that the following groups would be impacted by the proposed budget. Firstly, there is a statutory requirement to consult with local businesses and representatives of the business community. In addition, we identified that we wished to hear from and sent an invitation to take part to:
- Council Tax-payers and residents or visitors using services where changes are proposed;
 - Town and parish councils;
 - Representative voluntary groups, clubs and other organisations that work with people experiencing sickness or disability, using recreation and sporting facilities in our parks and other green spaces, experiencing poverty or deprivation, minority ethnic groups, or having an interest in the environment, conservation and heritage of the area; and
 - Our Rother Local Strategic Partnership membership who includes representatives from the voluntary sector, Sussex Police, local and regional NHS and public health, East Sussex Fire and Rescue, East Sussex County Council, our main local housing association and so on.
93. The opportunity to consult was communicated through social media (Facebook and X, formerly Twitter), through media releases and two articles in the My Alerts emails sent to over 37,800 residents' email addresses. Three video interviews with Councillors were also provided as part of this.
94. An invitation to consult was sent by email to seven business organisations (such as the Chambers of Commerce). Invitations to consult were sent to 47 local voluntary groups, charities and organisations representing the categories

above. We also emailed the 22 members of the Rother Local Strategic Partnership. In addition, we sent a consultation invitation to 18 sports clubs and local organisations that use our parks and recreation grounds, which was sent to 35 committee members, coaches, or other representatives in total.

Respondents to the Consultation

95. We received a range of responses through various contact channels.
96. We received 584 completed online questionnaires from residents with a further 16 completed online questionnaires from members of the public that either visit or work in the district.
97. There were 60 specific responses regarding only public toilets sent through emails, online Contact Us forms, handwritten notes and printed letters that were either posted or handed into council offices.
98. There were eight completed online questionnaires and four emailed responses from local organisations that are in the local charity and voluntary sector or residents' associations. This includes an email from East Sussex County Council's Communities, Economy and Transport department.
99. A further eight responses came from seven local sports clubs by way of our online questionnaire and an email.
100. We had four responses from respondents who said that they represented a business or business organisation, but their businesses were not named.
101. In total, seven parish councils responded to the consultation by email or posted returned questionnaires. A further three respondents said that they were responding for a parish council but did not name their parish council and are probably parish councillors answering as residents.
102. This gives us a total of 694 individual responses.
103. In addition, during the consultation period the Council received petitions in relation to public toilets, signed by 1,857 individuals. We have not recorded how many were residents and how many were visitors.
104. The signed, printed petition sheets are headed as follows:

'We need Devonshire Square toilet and others to remain open as it's against our Human Rights, for the elderly, people with disabilities and families.'
105. Most but not all the documents included an additional sentence.

'Public toilets must be taken seriously by politicians and local councils and be treated as essential infrastructure in local towns.'

Demographic Breakdown of Residents Who Responded

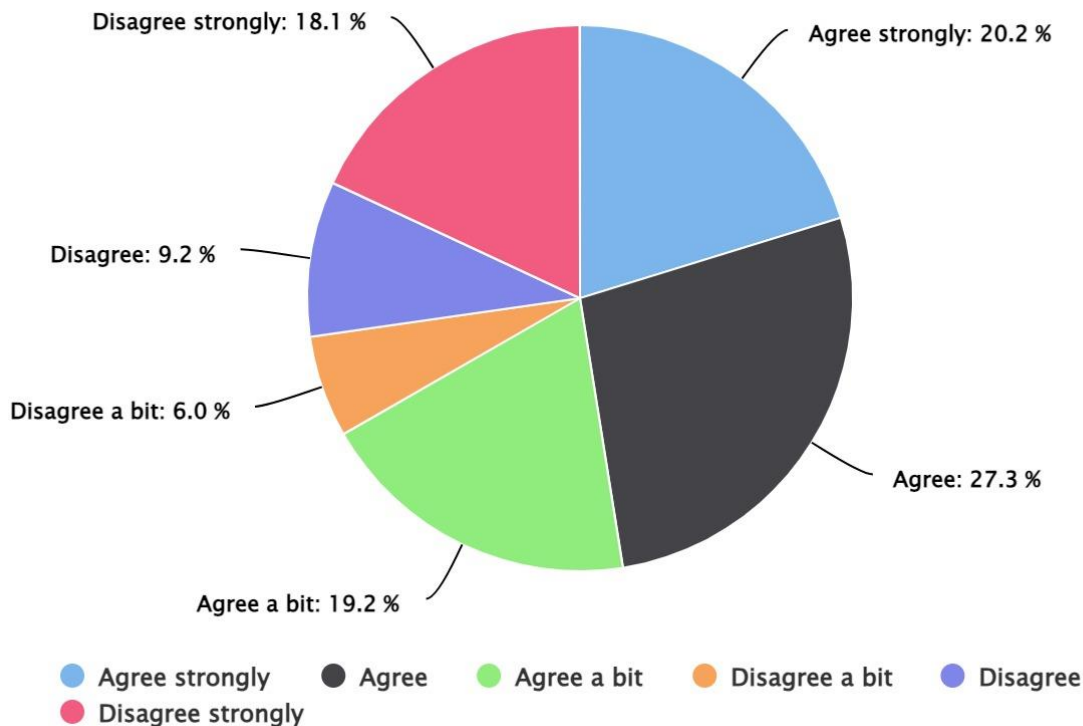
106. The following information was only asked of those using the online survey. We can only extrapolate volunteered information from correspondence.
107. Of the total responses:

- 45% were from Bexhill (47.7% of Rother's population);
 - 8% from Battle (7.5% of Rother's population);
 - 6% of respondents were from Rye (5% of Rother's population);
 - The remaining 41% were residents from rural Rother living in the villages or countryside;
 - In addition, we have identified that 27 of the 60 emails regarding public toilets (only) were from Rother residents. This is based on their supply of an address, a statement that they are a resident of a place in Rother or similar clear indication of residency.
108. We had 46% male respondents, 48% female respondents, 1% trans respondents and 5% preferred not to answer the question.
109. In age groups, only one person was under 18 but this consultation was not targeted at under 18s. We had 3% aged 18 to 34 and this age group was significantly under-represented with not enough people to do any analysis by this age group. However, 22% were aged 35 to 54, 26% were aged 55 to 64 and 45% were aged 65 to 79. We had 4% of respondents over the age of 80 but this is not a large enough sample for analysis by this age group.
110. 70% of respondents were not disabled and 20% were disabled. The remaining 10% respondents did not wish to answer this question.
111. 85% of respondents were White British. A further 3% were another category of White ethnicity. We have 0.3% who were gypsy or travellers. In addition, 1% were from a mixed ethnicity or background, 0.3% were from a Black ethnicity and 0.3% were from an Asian ethnicity. 10.1% prefer not to say their ethnic background. People from non-White ethnicities continue to be a bit under-represented compared to Rother's population.
112. Visitors provided the same information, but the sample is too small for analysis purposes unless we combine residents and visitors' responses together.

Results to Key Questions

Raising Council Tax

113. We asked respondents their views on raising the Council Tax by £5.94 a year for a Band D property. We asked, in the current financial circumstances, if respondents agreed or disagreed it is appropriate to increase Council Tax to help continue to fund services?
114. Members of the public answered with a combined 48% that either agreed or agreed strongly, with a total of 67% agreeing to some extent. So, more than two in every three residents agreed to some extent. The remaining 33% disagreed to some extent with 18% disagreeing strongly.



115. The same question was asked to local organisations, parish councils, etc. Only three parish councils responded to this question, and all agreed, two responses from businesses agreed and two disagreed, seven sports organisations answered this question and six agreed and one disagreed, while seven other organisations answered this question and they all agreed.
116. Bexhill Heritage stated that they ‘reluctantly support the proposed Council Tax increase’.

Public Toilets

117. The analysis below is based on the Council’s consultation exercise. There is separate consideration of the petition received in respect of public toilets at the end of this appendix.

Support to Keep Open 13 Sites

118. We asked all respondents which of the 13 sites we had kept open during the trial closure should remain open (until other arrangements were in place) or should close and be replaced by another site. There was strong majority support that all the 13 public toilet sites should remain open from all members of the public.
119. The site with least support is Camber West Car Park (old toilet block), with 29% saying close and replace with another. In addition, 29% said Lucknow Place Car Park (Rye) should close and be replaced with another site. In third place is Bexhill Cemetery, at 27.5% saying they should close.
120. The most supported sites are Camber Central Car Park (90%), Battle Market (89%), Winchelsea Beach (89%) and Rye Station Approach (89%).

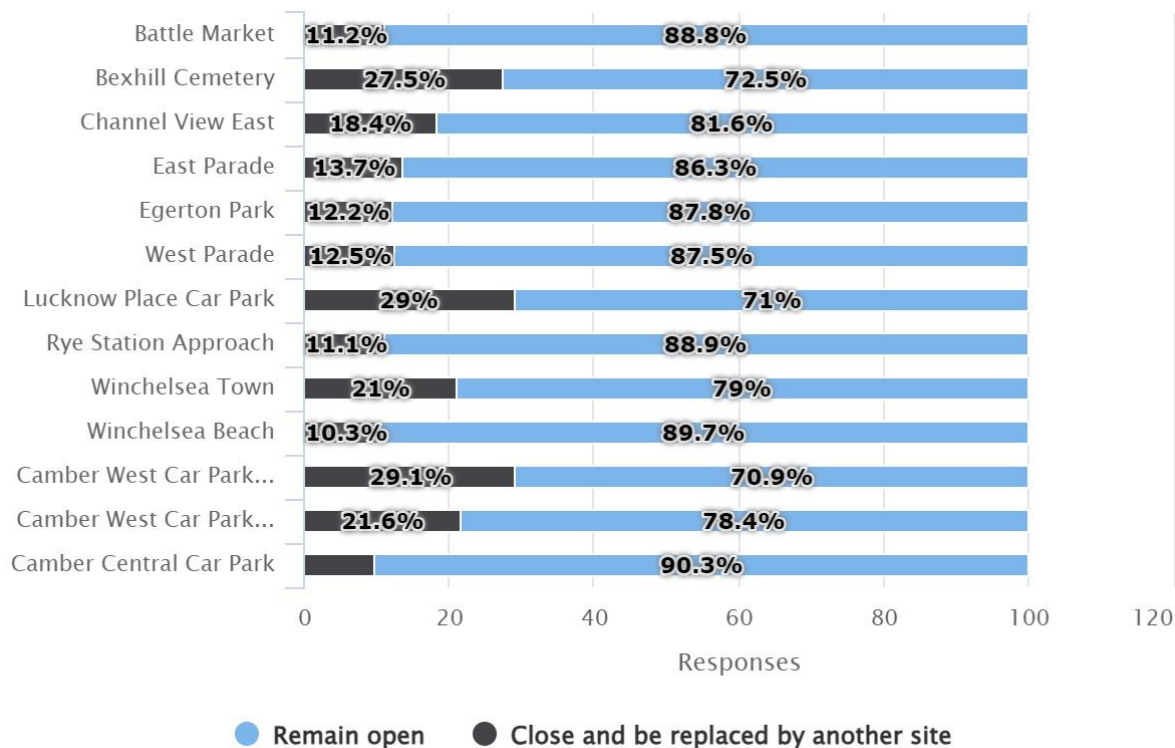


Figure 1 Members of the Public: sites to remain open to close/replace

121. **Bexhill in Bloom** responded that Bexhill Cemetery and Channel View East could be closed and replaced with other sites, the remainder to remain open. Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society answered that East Parade site could be closed and placed with another site.

122. We have emails on behalf of the **Beach Hut Owners Group** for East Parade supporting the continued opening of the East Parade site. The main arguments are:
 - a. Around 80 beach huts pay the Council around £600 a year to approximately totally £50k a year to use their huts all year round;
 - b. The toilets are crucial for proper use and enjoyment of the huts;
 - c. Considering what is paid it is wrong of the Council to close the toilets; and
 - d. East Parade is used by many walkers and cyclists and beach visitors, so toilets are needed all year. It is a busy and vibrant place, used for leisure, pleasure, promoting mental and physical health.

123. **Winchelsea Residents Association** wrote in support of the retention of public toilets in Winchelsea. Their main arguments were:
 - a. It is unfair to ask residents to state the case for local needs and vote negatively for other locations. This should not regress into a numbers game, rather a fair and rational assessment;
 - b. The town is not large, but it receives thousands of visitors to the heritage area as well as the school and shop and a full programme of events;
 - c. The centre of the town is on the 1066 walk promoted by the County Council, with new information points;
 - d. Visitor numbers are increasing;
 - e. The area attracts a significant number of elderly people and children who reasonably expect toilets to be available;

- f. There are no alternatives other than the current public toilets, the pub toilets are customers only and not suitable for large numbers. Winchelsea is isolated from other public toilets, the closest to the town being 1.5 miles at Winchelsea Beach and a difficult journey; and
- g. Previous experience of temporary closures has results in visitors abusing nearby spaces, near to the recreation ground and path to and from the primary school and the bus shelter. This was a risk to public health.

124. **Bexhill Heritage** said ‘clean, safe, and fully operational public toilets are, understandably, regarded as an entitlement by our visitors and residents alike. Those toilets that the Council suggests should remain open in Bexhill represent a minimum acceptable provision for the town, especially so given Bexhill’s age profile. We note that the Council hopes that the remaining toilet facilities will be maintained to a higher standard than at present. This will be important. We also note that the Council wishes to devolve responsibility for public toilets in Bexhill to the Town Council. It is disappointing that negotiations to affect this transfer of responsibility have seemingly failed to achieve a satisfactory outcome. We urge the Council to redouble its efforts in this matter and seek mediation as necessary. It is urgent and residents are being let down.’

Alternative Sites Proposed to Close That Should Be Open

125. We asked if respondents would like to suggest an alternative site instead of, or to be exchanged for, the 13 proposed sites and 103 members of the public had an alternative to suggest.
126. Of those using the questionnaire, we had 45 respondents saying that they would like to have Pett Level open, with 19 respondents wanting to keep open Devonshire Square (Bexhill) with 10 respondents suggesting Little Common Roundabout.
127. Through other correspondence there are seven responses for all Rother facilities to be open, 45 references to open any closed facilities in Bexhill and four requests to open all facilities in Battle. For specific sites the combined count, without including the general support for all sites or all sites in Bexhill or Battle, is as follows:

Mount Street car park	9
Cooden Sea Road	6
Devonshire Square	34
Little Common Recreation Grnd	0
Little Common Roundabout	11
Manor Barn	12
Norman’s Bay	1
Polegrove Bowling	2
Polegrove Grandstand	4
Sidley Car Park	2
Strand Quay	2
Gun Gardens	4
Pett Level	48
Sedlescombe	4

128. In addition, there was the petition to open Devonshire Square and the petition to open all public toilets. Devonshire Square was re-opened by Bexhill Town

Council under temporary arrangements before this report was written. Therefore, arguments in favour of opening Devonshire Square are available on request but are not included in this report.

129. The following represents the main arguments from the public in favour of opening the sites in the trial closure:

130. **Pett Level:**

- a. Remote, no other facilities nearby like shops, cafes, that could be used as an alternative;
- b. Nearest available public toilets at Winchelsea Beach, located between Winchelsea Beach and Hastings Country Park, longer distance than Camber beach where three public toilets will remain open;
- c. Charges at Camber have driven more use of Pett Level beach, acting as overflow to Camber on busy days;
- d. Large volume of people use this site, busy all year, popular hiking route, SSSI, visited by many local school children, large school groups, used by swimmers, used by dog walkers, used by delivery and bus drivers, tradesmen and motorists, residents;
- e. Closure will lead to misuse of other locations;
- f. Risk to women, females, children and disabled;
- g. Nearby beach side café has no toilets;
- h. 5 toilets in Bexhill and 4 in Camber but Pett Level used all year round and no other in vicinity so no logic in closing;
- i. Greater numbers of visitors as now significant tourist destination: ample on-street parking, beach, submerged ancient forest, geological interest, promenade, lifeboat house with events;
- j. During lockdown, with toilet closures, village became polluted, use of bushes, gardens, boats, drives, beach, sea, will be repeated. Health and environmental issues;
- k. Businesses are not always open, won't let non-customers use toilets;
- l. Local businesses will suffer if remove facilities;
- m. Busier than Winchelsea Town, town and beach have other toilet facilities and pub and other commercial places;
- n. Pett Lifeboat constantly asked if visitors can use toilet but operate with shared septic tank and can't provide facility;
- o. New Beach Club is members only and won't allow public to use facilities; and
- p. Discriminating against disabled people not easily mobile. Current disabled facility dirty, disgusting, contaminated.

131. **Manor Barn:**

- a. Only facility in Old Town, no other public facilities in area, better geographical spread of facilities;
- b. Important for people working on their allotments, as otherwise time on site is limited;
- c. I use it. Easier to use. Constantly in use;
- d. Lights are left on even if closed; and
- e. Usually used disabled toilets and many now closed that usually use in Bexhill. Chronic illnesses mean need to use toilets when out and about.

132. **Little Common Roundabout:**

- a. Necessary due to bus stop. Used by bus drivers, who need somewhere to go;
- b. Only option in Little Common. Bexhill has other options, LC does not;
- c. Well used by public. High footfall. Heavy use;
- d. Busy A259. Used by drivers as well as local shoppers;
- e. Older demographic;
- f. Limited options near Little Common; and
- g. Disability with flare-ups out of the blue, thought of being caught out whilst shopping in Little Common just too much to bear, not able to go there since closure.

133. **Mount Street, Battle:**

- a. Not at the far end of town, more central to shops, other toilets too far away for shoppers and tourists;
- b. Tourist town, not feasible to operate with only one public toilet. Tourists expect more facilities. Tourists have taken long journeys;
- c. Well used and better choice than Market Square, better than remote market square toilet;
- d. Pivotal to local community;
- e. Damaging to High Street businesses; and
- f. Causes person with prostate cancer and side-effects resulting in frequent, urgent need, great difficulty and distress, especially after driving 15-20 minutes to Battle and needing toilet when arrive, can't hold on long enough to walk to Market Square.

134. **Cooden Sea Road:**

- a. Only access to toilet for train travellers, no loos in station;
- b. Major beach, near beach, for visitors;
- c. Hotel doesn't allow use of theirs;
- d. Gents not open for over a year, disabled toilet has to be used, pumps outside prevent access to any of loos;
- e. Bike riders, dustmen, postman, tourists all use this more than some of the proposed toilets; and
- f. Many elderly residents rely on these facilities.

135. **Polegrove Grandstand:**

- a. Keep at least one open between the Polegrove and East Parade. Other toilets too far away;
- b. Don't close any of them. Lobby Government for more money;
- c. Hundreds of people walk their dogs each day, people work there; and
- d. Too much vandalism in the park.

136. **Rye Gun Gardens:**

- a. Many people ask about a toilet in St Marys Church and are directed to the Gun Garden.

137. **Sedlescombe:**

- a. Not enough toilets available in villages; and
 - b. Give some thought to taxi drivers out in the country and need this convenience, as does the flex bus that is based in the village.
138. **Polegrove Bowling:**
- a. Covers both ends of the park; and
 - b. Older residents are bowlers, have different needs, only needed in summer.
139. **Sidley Car Park:**
- a. Has no public toilets at all; and
 - b. Many elderly people, residents, rely on these facilities.
140. **Strand Quay:**
- a. Town centre location. Better location than Station Approach;
 - b. For elderly and disabled. Many elderly must wait for bus and need a toilet to use; and
 - c. Current high usage, particularly by elderly and those using Rother car parks at Strand and Gibbets Marsh.
141. **Normans Bay:**
- a. No other seafront public toilets from Pevensey Bay to Bexhill except Normans Bay;
 - b. Increased footfall due to coastal path;
 - c. A lot of day visitors to beach in summer months – families, elderly;
 - d. Health hazard – during Covid, using beach, side of road, in village, using underwear and socks as toilet paper and discarded on beach; and
 - e. Disabled visitors to beach requiring facilities with some urgency.
142. Please note that there were 5 comments about keeping open all the listed public toilets listed for closure. Also, several suggestions to adopt a scheme where businesses have some form of compensation or incentive to provide public toilets.
143. Organisations responded as follows.
144. **Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society** would keep Manor Barn open. Their reasons were: 'It's good if visitors are encouraged to visit the historic Bexhill Old Town area and provision of these toilets is helpful for tourists as well as for those using the remaining few local shops and businesses. The toilets are situated in the Manor Gardens Car Park so adjacent to the Manor Gardens which attract many visitors as well as tourists, some of whom travel to the area by public transport. The toilet at Bexhill Train Station is not open to the general public.'
145. **Strandliners** (local charity or voluntary group) would keep open Pett Level because 'Public toilets near green and blue spaces (parks and beaches) are invaluable to local Rother residents health and wellbeing. Many schools and groups use Pett Level toilets when visiting. Strandliners regularly hold events at Pett Level for adults and young people, RSPCA Mallydams Wood use the toilets for their groups. If there were no toilets at Pett Level there may be less

beach visitors, ensuring health and wellbeing is reduced for Rother residents, or there will be more people caught short and using bushes, trees, rocks etc. It is not a better choice, it is another toilet that should remain open with the others.'

146. **East Sussex County Council's** Project Officer – Bus Service Improvement Plan raised the access to public toilets that are needed by bus drivers. 'An issue that has arisen is the reduced (indeed closed) toilet facilities available to bus drivers. Unlike train drivers they do not have one on-board. It is something people don't tend to think of. They can of course use depots, but with extended routes and more early morning and evening services will not always be close to one. Such access impacts their health and well-being which of course has a knock-on impact on bus services. A key means of tackling climate change is to reduce vehicle numbers and emissions and one bus can take 70 cars off the road. We appreciate that budgetary pressures has led to closures of lavatory facilities. What we were wondering is if they would be scope for drivers to access facilities using radar keys? If an additional lock is added for security, we could look at how we manage those keys for drivers as well.'
147. A committee member of **Sidley Martlets Bowls Club** would open Polegrove Bowling public toilets because there are 'already 2 sites available on Bexhill sea front and this alternative would be for those using the Polegrove.'
148. **Fairlight Parish Council** asked for Pett Level toilets to be open. Their reasons were:
 - a. Whilst some public toilets particularly those in the towns may be closed without leaving members of the public without access to toilets due to commercial outlets or public venues in the vicinity, this is not the case in rural areas. In Pett Level for instance, there are no public houses or cafes within easy walking distance. The nearest public house or eating establishment is a walk of 1 mile with an ascent of 169 feet. There is a café (Eater's at Pett) at Pett Level which has only one porta-loo and this is not available for non-customers;
 - b. Many Fairlight residents enjoy the walk from the village to Pett Level either to be able to have a picnic on the beach or have a cup of tea as provided by Pett Church free of charge at all times or an ice cream from the ice cream van in good weather, or enjoy the other attractions of Pett Level including the Lifeboat station with events such as fetes, the submerged forest, many fossils on the beach and the Military Canal;
 - c. This area is also part of the coastal path and there are many footpaths for people who wish to come to the area, to enjoy the beach and the scenery. Some of these have travelled a moderate distance, and the area is populated by many retired people. There, can be considerable crowds in the summer, with overflow from Camber meaning Pett Level is now "discovered";
 - d. This closure is marked as a trial, but there is no evidence of how the trial will be evaluated. This could be by monitoring the number of people who are forced by their bodies to seek a secluded spot to relieve themselves, or by an increase in unsavoury smells coming from some areas of the beach and land around. We knew during covid when the lavatory was shut what it was like – and that is bad; and
 - e. Fairlight Parish Council urges you to recognise that an area such as Pett Level which is popular all year round especially of sunny winter days needs public toilets more than an urban area where alternative toilets are available.

The toilets at Pett Level are an essential local resource which Rother needs to continue to fund to maintain the amenity of the area.

149. **Salehurst and Robertsbridge Parish Council** already have a long-term lease for the car park and toilets. They had some specific comments on public toilets in rural villages. 'We specifically object the closure of public toilets as a cost-saving measure which wholly disregards the wishes and needs of the local population. In Salehurst & Robertsbridge, the village car park and toilets are leased on a long-term basis from RDC and we agree that this arrangement should be replicated wherever possible, with a one-off financial incentive where appropriate and affordable. We regard the longstanding argument about the freehold of toilet blocks to be irrelevant under these circumstances.'

Other Organisations or Venues Better Placed to Provide Public Toilets

150. We asked respondents which other organisations or venues they thought would be better placed to provide public toilets in their area, given that Rother District Council cannot provide them. The responses from the public were:

- RDC should provide all, should not close any, best choice to provide, etc
- Don't need public toilets anyway – already other venues
- Town councils and parish councils
- Portakabin company
- Libraries
- Heart of Sidley
- Restaurants, cafes, pubs, e.g. Wetherspoons
- Sports clubs – football, cricket, bowls, depending on location.
- Supermarkets
- Private company
- East Sussex County Council
- A charity
- Local businesses (unspecified)
- de la Warr Pavilion
- Places of worship
- Old Town Preservation Society
- Town Hall, other council buildings
- Rye Partnership
- National Trust, English Heritage
- Transport providers
- Shopping precincts and centres
- Multiple suggestions related to charging for the service as an alternative to closure

151. There were four local organisations that named town or parish councils, two of the sports clubs mentioned a town council, one sports club thought no one else would want to provide the facilities and one sports club said it remained the responsibility of RDC. Bexhill Athletic Football Club already have the key to the facility at Sidley Recreation Group and are happy to keep these open during events on site and close them when they leave. However, this was a short term arrangement until the takeover of the pavilion and toilets by Heart of Sidley.

152. **Battle Town Council** said Battle Town Council is currently considering devolvement and is awaiting further information from Rother District Council to allow this discussion for decision.
153. **Rye Town Council** said that they were best placed to provide public toilets in Rye.
154. **Icklesham Parish Council** replied that Icklesham Parish Council are keen to take on responsibility for both the toilets in Winchelsea Town and Winchelsea Beach and have been in discussions with Rother regarding this for some time. As RDC are aware, both buildings are in a terrible state of repair and the Parish Council are currently taking steps to ensure that this is a viable option for the Parish Council.
155. **Crowhurst Parish Council** replied that they did not know of any other organisation that can afford to keep them open other than RDC.

Other Savings Proposals

Grounds Maintenance Contract Reductions

156. We asked respondents if they would be negatively impacted by reductions to the grounds maintenance contract. For the general public, 42% said that they would be affected. However, 58% said they wouldn't be affected.

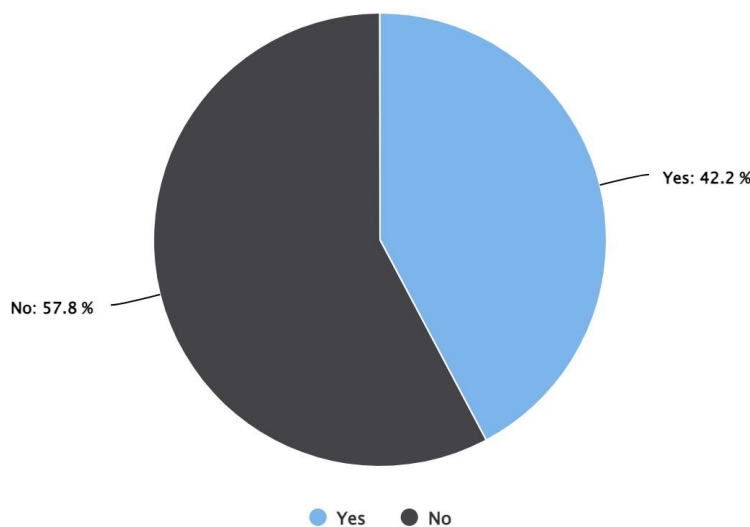


Figure 2 Public responses, affected by changes to grounds maintenance

157. Here are some key points made about impact:
- Living next to public space hugely overgrown;
 - Reduces ability to play sports at reasonable cost, reducing number of people who can play. Higher subscriptions on members. Falling player numbers. Affordability for those on low incomes and young people;
 - Contractor must be taking advantage so should bring back in-house;
 - Mental health benefits diminished;
 - Using play parks for children, unable to use due to grass;
 - Already getting shabby or unkempt, unattractive reduction in aesthetics, Seafront gardens overrun with rats in recent years probably cost for removal

- nearly as much as maintenance, general decline, more downward spiral, scruffy town;
- g. Attractiveness to visitors impacts local economy/businesses/shops, business failure leads to empty shops, job losses;
 - h. Pride, negative attitude;
 - i. Difficult to walk when disabled;
 - j. Blocks view of roads, verges overgrown has impact on drivers and safety;
 - k. Fewer activities for young people could lead to more vandalism and ASB;
 - l. Parks and open spaces valuable for many living in flats or no outdoor space;
 - m. Loss of safety in using pitches;
 - n. Have to use volunteers to maintain pitches/greens, parks;
 - o. Could destroy clubs under pressure to find money;
 - p. Increase in hay-fever allergies;
 - q. Increase in dog fouling;
 - r. Tarmac over verges instead, no cutting, no blocked drains; and
 - s. Discourages use of parks, greens, community spaces, restricts access.
158. **Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society** replied that ‘there are three historic sites in Bexhill Old Town which would be detrimentally affected: Manor Gardens, Barrack Hall Park and Barrack Road Memorial Gardens. The Manor Gardens, with their Grade II listed Manor House "ruins" are beautifully kept by the current contractor and this is often remarked upon by visitors. The Gardens have been inspected and played their part in the South and South East in Bloom Competition where Bexhill has won gold twice. They have many regular visitors and can be used as a backdrop for events when hired from Rother District Council. Barrack Hall Park is an historic area which formed part of the large camp of the King's German Legion on their arrival from Hanover in the early 19th century. Some years ago Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society gave a large sum of money to Rother District Council so that the Park could be redesigned and to ensure a moratorium on building development on the site for 125 years. Barrack Hall Park has also been listed in "Fields in Trust". The Barrack Road Memorial Gardens were a cemetery, the resting place of troops of the King's German Legion and some local people. There is a new commemoration board in the Gardens, recently installed by the Bexhill Hanoverian Study Group and part funded by Bexhill Old Town Preservation Society.’
159. **Bexhill in Bloom** said that their ‘volunteers would have to work harder to maintain certain areas in Central Bexhill. We need more volunteers, but people, especially older people are looking for work. Bexhill Town Council should take on some responsibility. Maybe cheaper to employ your own gardeners, as Hastings have done. That way you have direct control and dedicated area support.’
160. **Rother Ramblers** replied that ‘the excellent work carried out by the grounds maintenance teams enhances the areas making it more attractive for residents and visitors. It encourages and supports wildlife and its habitats. Some of the areas are peaceful and help with mental health and wellbeing.’
161. **Winchelsea Residents Association** said there would be a loss ‘of proper facilities especially for school children’.
162. **Bexhill Heritage**, as part of their response, expressed that they are ‘concerned about reductions in expenditure for the maintenance of parks and open spaces

and for the facilities they contain. Such a policy will inevitably erode civic pride and is likely also lead to an increase in vandalism as people might be tempted to take the view that 'nobody seems to care so why should we?' Egerton Park is justifiably popular with everyone. Allowing it to 'run down' will be a very significant blow, especially to children and families. Actively seek to identify and secure alternative sources of funding to support the delivery of some of these services? We strongly recommend that the Council applies a more gradual tapering to the proposed 'public realm' budget reduction while, at the same time, making even more strenuous efforts to persuade local organisations and groups to take further responsibility for parks, open spaces and leisure buildings. Bexhill Heritage is willing to hold discussions with the Council to this end. We are confident that other local organisations would also be prepared to step forward. We also urge the Council to identify and secure alternative sources of funding. Again, talks with the Town Council should be high on the agenda.'

163. All the sports organisations that responded agreed that they would be affected by changes to grounds maintenance. Their comments are as follows:
164. **Sidley Martlets Bowls** club facilities are enjoyed by c70 bowling members and by a further c1,000 bowlers each year from around the district, local towns and villages and touring teams. As well as a form of gentle exercise and some competitive activities, bowls is recognised as a great way of reducing social isolation. The annual cost of maintaining a bowls green is relatively expensive at about £11,000pa.' 'XXX. It might be better for clubs to take over the maintenance as long as some provision is made for low-income families to be able to still use the facilities.'
165. We are **Bexhill Athletic Football club**. We currently provide football training and competitive matches for around 110 people, aged between 14 - 55 years of age. The benefits of physical activity on mental and physical health is unquestionable, however we provide a preventative service to many vulnerable children, promoting fair play and sport education. The planned changes will adversely affect our club, as without the pitches being maintained we would not have facilities to provide the activities that we do. We have submitted a proposal to RDC and Heart of Sidley - confirming our willingness to take on the maintenance of the football pitch - common practice amongst many grass roots clubs in the UK and a precedent which has been set by sports clubs such as Rye Rugby Club, We do not see why or what interest the Heart of Sidley would have in running this facility or taking control of the management of the pitches, when our club is the primary user of the pitch. We propose that, alongside the maintenance of the pitch, we would control all of the bookings - ensuring the we make space for community events which we are aware take place several times per year and events which the Heart of Sidley would wish to add throughout the year.
166. The **Little Common Ramblers Cricket Club** replied that 'finding equipment and volunteers will be onerous financially. This could destroy many cricket clubs.'
167. I am a member of **Little Common Cricket Club** - it would mean that we have to take on the grounds ourselves, we are fortunate in that we have volunteers passionate about putting time in to improve the club. However, we currently

don't have the equipment or storage facilities required to be able to do this, this would come at some cost to us which makes things very difficult.

168. **Bexhill United Ladies FC** will be impacted catastrophically by the devolution of facilities to Bexhill United FC/Little Common FC without safeguarded provision for equal access to facilities. XXX. The Council were able to enable booking. If fair, affordable and equal access is not mandated as part of the devolution, women and girl's football will be adversely impacted in Rother either through having no access to facilities or potentially being priced out. As a stand-alone, self-funded Women's and Girls Club (the only one in East Sussex, let alone Rother) we focus on increasing and maintaining participation, with a not-for-profit approach. This is only possible if facilities are available. Whilst men's clubs can make provisions for girls/women, there are countless examples where women's/girls football is the first section to be cut depending on committee personnel or club funds. Football is fun, improves self-esteem, creates new friendships– and like all sport, it plays a key role in combating obesity, particularly in teenagers. It also positively impacts mental health. It is imperative we are able to continue to offer participation opportunities. Including Bexhill United LFC in the devolution arrangements will likely unlock funding. There are other grassroots men's clubs who will face the same issues Bexhill United Ladies FC will if they are also not afforded the opportunity to be involved in the devolution.
169. The town and parish councils answered as follows:
170. **Battle Town Council** will be adversely affected by the number of complaints received. Also by loss of amenity at children's play area due to long grass, litter and hidden debris.
171. Now that RDC has no presence in the town, **Rye Town Council** is often the first port of call for complaints about services provided by other bodies - frequently RDC or ESCC. A reduction in the standard of grounds maintenance is likely to result in the Town Hall staff spending more time responding to complaints. The service reduction proposed will have an adverse impact on the appearance of the public realm, reducing residents sense of 'pride of place' and might deter visitors from returning to the town - affecting negatively the local economy.
172. Not applicable: all of the green spaces within **Icklesham Parish** are managed by the Parish Council.
173. **Salehurst and Robertsbridge Parish Council** replied that the council 'believe that grounds maintenance can be devolved to parish and town councils where appropriate but only if the responsibilities and costs are fully explained and calculated. Local councils should have the right to refuse to take on these responsibilities if they feel they will not be financially viable.'

De La Warr Pavilion Concessionary Fund

174. We asked respondents if they would be negatively impacted by removing the de la Warr Pavilion's concessionary fund. This is a grant fund given to local community groups to help them afford to rent the Pavilion for their events. The public said that 14% of them would be impacted.

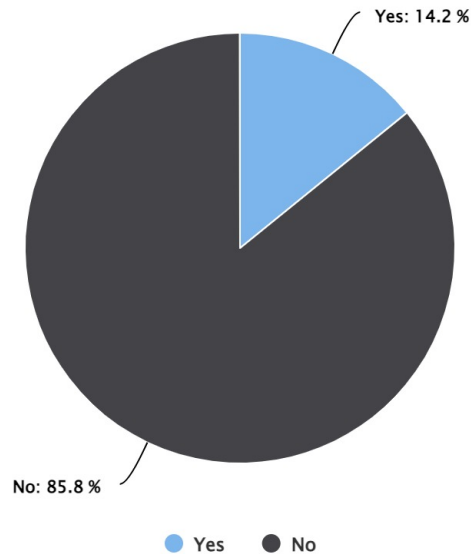


Figure 3 Public Response on Negative Impact if Removed DLWP Concessionary Fund

175. At this point, some respondents misunderstood the meaning of the word concession and thought it was related to concessionary ticket prices, but these two issues are unrelated and therefore those comments are not included. Comments on the impact or removal of the fund were:

- a. Needed, otherwise the space becomes an elite space, which is wrong. Essential the building is used by all the community and as often as possible. A landmark site which all should be able to access and use;
- b. If decision jeopardises the Pavilion, it would be a disaster for Bexhill as jewel in crown. Combined with other cuts would contribute to spiral of dereliction;
- c. Worry the DLWP will be open less often;
- d. Reduced events would result in fewer visitors. Less people paying for parking and using local shops, reduction in income;
- e. Local groups should be encouraged to be part of the success of DLWP and have reasonably priced access to such an iconic facility, because DLWP is a huge local asset and contributor of thriving restaurants and cafes. Key area for Bexhill tourism;
- f. This is a prestige building and should be maintained, maintain it as considerable people attend the events. Worried building fabric might suffer;
- g. Reduces the range of events available in the area. Certain events like summer sing and productions by amateur groups would not be put on, leaving both casts and audiences without a focus. Loss of local art group displays. Losing much loved activities. Stops local community groups providing free or low cost events, workshops, etc. to anyone from the District. DLWP probably won't have much to offer;
- h. Fewer reasons to visit and buy coffee, cake, gifts;
- i. Unfair question – many people in Rother will not be impacted by this but the people who will be should have a strong voice;
- j. Ask all groups this will affect before removing;
- k. Would raise ticket and other prices. Will be too expensive for many local residents;
- l. Heritage is important;
- m. Relatively small amount of funding is a lifeline to local groups and provides financial support to iconic building;

- n. Community groups could not afford to use the theatre. Narrows the groups entitled to use DLWP. Some worthwhile community groups would fold. Community groups need a hand up to feel their sense of worth and support in what they do, it's only £12k but is appreciated by such groups;
- o. As an active member of BAW we have two exhibitions a year in The Studio of the DLWP. The most recent in the foulest weather on 4 November attracted approaching 300 visitors during the day. As the only viable seafront venue this is vital; there is no hall available in the town centre and we rely on 'passing trade' for visitors;
- p. Bexfest very beneficial to Bexhill, over 10,000 people of all ages visit the town from 2021. Rising cost of hire of DLWP has made hiring the venue unattainable. Without these events, or help with costs, events will struggle, and the tourism will become obsolete. We need to keep supporting local events and festivals within the area;
- q. No impact as not the only venue in Rother and long way from many people's homes, limited in what it can offer, not people friendly, seems to be cashless, phone isn't answered, received a lot of government money in any case;
- r. Why should local and young up and coming talent not get a chance to perform in a wonderful venue. They are our future. For each child on stage will be bring family, neighbours, friends to see them, each person spending and increasing profits for everyone; and
- s. Less chance to see local artists perform.

176. **Battle Town Council** said that Battle residents may be affected by this.

Increasing Fees and Charges

177. We asked respondents how much they agree or disagree that the Council should put up some fees and charges to help fund services. The public responded that 41% either agreed or strongly agreed and a total of 68% agreed to some extent.

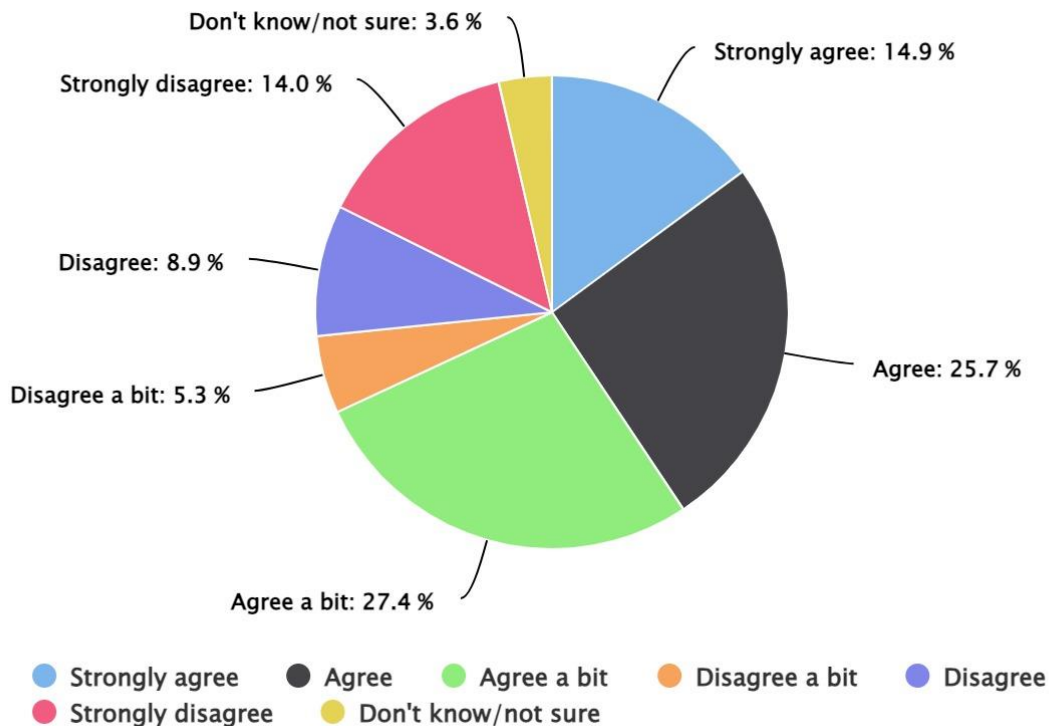


Figure 4 Public on Putting Up Fees and Charges in line with inflation

178. Responding organisations that gave a view on this question all agreed to some extent to raising fees and charges with two exceptions. Bexhill and Rother Homeless Unity Group disagreed and one response from an unnamed business disagreed.

Priority Services and Functions

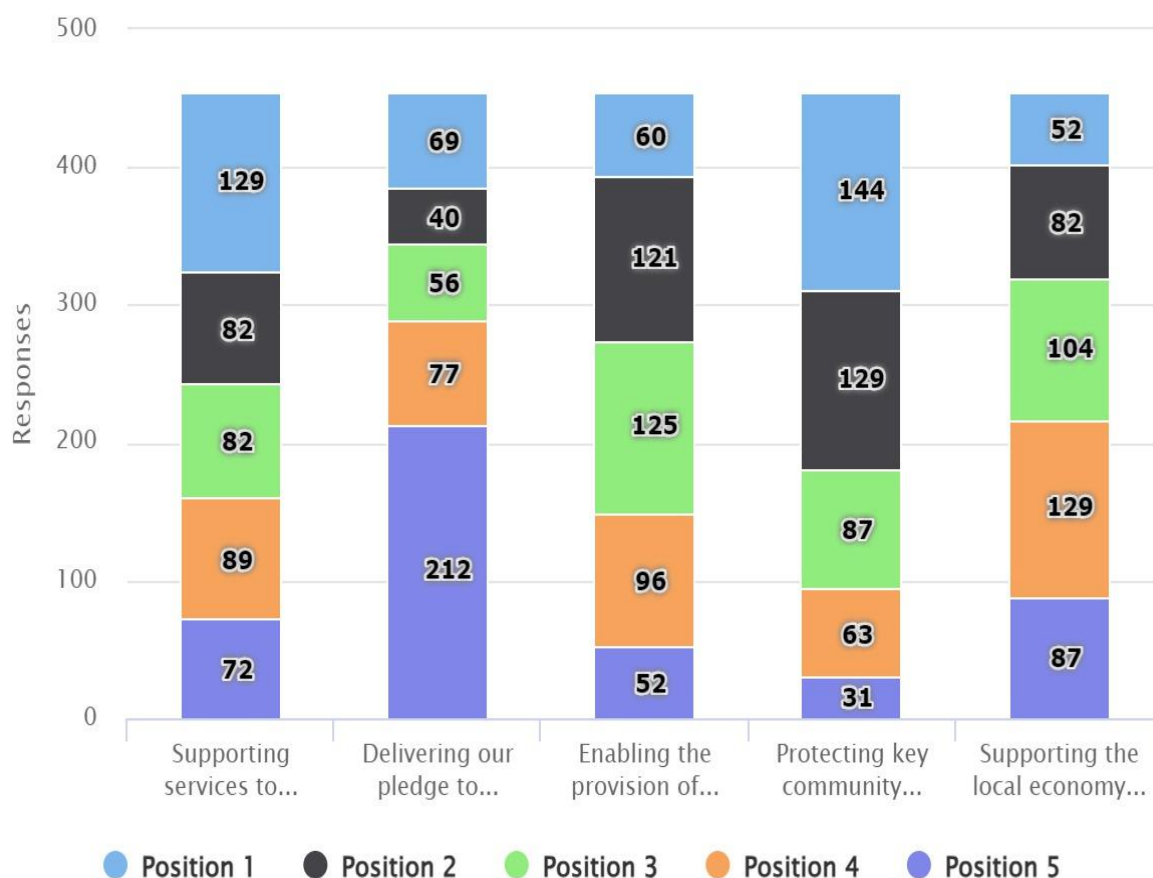
179. We asked respondents to put five groups of services and functions into priority order. They were asked to place them in order from 1 (top priority) down to 5 (lowest priority). These were as follows:

- Delivering our pledge to become a carbon neutral organisation by 2030 (this involves improving energy efficiency of buildings, investing in renewable energy and more sustainable ways of running our vehicles);
- Protecting key community facilities and services by devolving them to parish/town councils or sports/community organisations (this includes public conveniences and maintaining parks, gardens and sports pitches to current standards);
- Enabling the provision of leisure facilities and working with partners to improve health and wellbeing outcomes (including sports centres);
- Supporting the local economy (through support for cultural and heritage facilities, tourism, and regeneration projects); and
- Supporting services to vulnerable people (such as funding to the community voluntary sector to provide advice and support to those struggling with the cost of living).

180. Members of the public clearly placed as a top priority the functions of protecting key community facilities and services by devolving them to parish/town councils

or sports/community organisations, with 32% selecting this as their top priority and a further 28% saying that this was their second priority.

- 181. The second priority was supporting services to vulnerable people, funding voluntary sector to provide advice and support to those struggling with the cost of living. Here 28% of respondents selected this as their first priority and a further 18% selected it as their second priority.
- 182. The third priority was enabling the provision of leisure facilities and working with partners to improve health and wellbeing outcomes (including sports centres). Although only 13% had this as their top priority, it is balanced by 27% having it as their second priority. In addition, 28% had it as their third priority.
- 183. The fourth priority was supporting the local economy through support for cultural and heritage facilities, tourism and regeneration projects. Only 12% of the public had this as their first priority and 18% had it as their second priority. A further 23% selected it as a third priority and 28% selected it as their fourth priority.
- 184. For 47% the lowest priority was delivering a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, energy efficiency of buildings, renewable energy, and more sustainable ways of running vehicles. A further 17% selected it at position 4.



- 185. Responding organisations rated the following as their top two priorities:
- 186. **Bexhill and Rother Homeless Unity Group** – selected supporting services to vulnerable people as their top priority and enabling the provision of leisure facilities as their second priority.

187. **Bexhill in Bloom** selected supporting services to vulnerable people as their top priority and devolving services to other organisations as their second priority.
188. **Rother Voluntary Action** selected supporting services to vulnerable people as their first priority and becoming a carbon neutral organisation as their second priority.
189. **Strandliners** selected becoming a carbon neutral organisation as their first priority and devolving services to other organisations as their second priority.
190. **Friends of Ancient Monuments and Museum** selected supporting services to vulnerable people as their first priority and devolving services as their second priority.
191. **Rother Ramblers** selected devolving services as their first priority and enabling the provision of leisure facilities as their second priority.
192. **Winchelsea Residents Association** selected supporting services to vulnerable residents as their first priority and devolving services as their second priority.
193. Two sports club representatives selected supporting the provision of leisure facilities as their first priority. Three sports club representatives selected supporting services to vulnerable people as their first priority. Three sports club representative selected devolving services as their first priority.
194. Two of the businesses (unnamed) selected supporting the local economy and one selected supporting services to vulnerable people as their first priority.
195. **Battle Town Council** selected delivering a carbon neutral organisation as the first priority and supporting services to vulnerable people as the second priority.
196. **Rye Town Council** selected supporting services to vulnerable people as the first priority and enabling the provision of leisure facilities as the second priority.
197. **Crowhurst Parish Council** – selected delivering a carbon neutral organisation as the first priority and supporting services to vulnerable people as the second priority.

Other Issues to Consider

198. Finally, we asked respondents if they had anything else that the Councillors should take into account before finalising the budget. This is a summary of the key points. Anything already covered in previous questions is not included. Any matter already addressed in our covering information for this consultation and any references to services and functions that are not in the control of the district council are not included.
199. The public said to take into account:
 - a. The pressures on the poorest and lower paid, large elderly and vulnerable population. Needs of older people;

- b. Reducing outreach office hours impacts residents technologically excluded and financially excluded;
- c. As the de la Warr Pavilion has just received a very large grant it should not receive any other funding or grants from the district or town council. The shortfall of £500,000 could be addressed by cutting the annual grant to the DLWP;
- d. The council needs to address empty homes, purchase them, charge more council tax. Buy homes to house homelessness. More affordable housing. Go back to owning council houses;
- e. Bring grounds maintenance and other services in-house, employ directly, sell their services commercially, Ashford Borough Council and Aspire Landscaping, invest to save. More entrepreneurial, alternative solutions;
- f. Reduce staff absences, staff sickness, invest in Planning Team, reduce staffing, stop remote or home working, answer the phone;
- g. Remove, get rid of Bexhill Town Council – costing more Council Tax, their remit was to take responsibility for some services and have yet to see what they are doing;
- h. Fees and charges, proportionate increase is okay but then shouldn't need to go cashless to save money. Put prices up;
- i. Consider the increases in planning fees;
- j. More partnership working with charities, parish councils, share services and management with other local councils;
- k. Lobby the government to increase funding to local councils;
- l. Don't be too aware of cost of living. 10.1% increase in pensions for 2023/24. May be increase in pensions of 8.5% for 2024/25 unless there is a move to stop the triple lock;
- m. More enforcement on caravan sites;
- n. Consider the rural communities as they also have elderly, disabled, vulnerable people. Spread budget around Rother;
- o. Do more consultation with local people on their opinions, on what they want;
- p. Give more opportunities to local trades/traders;
- q. Bring in more investors to the area;
- r. Provide more information about funding and cuts to back office systems as has to have an effect;
- s. Public sector workers have had below inflationary wage increases. Raising charges is going to impact;
- t. Offering assistance doesn't help those just about managing when it is getting harder each year. Don't forget the middle people, keeping their heads above water but not enough for treats and luxuries;
- u. Review contracts, re-tender contracts, make sure most cost effective, inspect contracts up to standard;
- v. Make more use of volunteers, recruit volunteers;
- w. Have more beach huts. Even on the promenade for seasonal renting.

200. A full list of comments will be made available to Council Members.

201. **Rother Voluntary Actions** added that 'where possible all effort should be taken to reduce the impacts of cuts on Rother's 3rd sector and VCE organisations and the infrastructure that supports them. Many are seeing increasing demand for their services due the Cost-of-Living Crisis (COL) as this is impacting heavily on VCSE organisations and they are supporting high numbers of vulnerable residents by delivering basic need services such as support for food poverty, mental health, families in crisis, debt advice, domestic violence, addiction, and dependency.'

202. **Rye Town Council** added ensuring that applications for external funding will, if successful, result in benefits spread across the whole of the Rother District (and not predominantly Bexhill).
203. **Salehurst and Robertsbridge Parish Council** were not specifically replying to this question. However, they had additional comments in their written response about what they would like the Council to take into account that would fit here. 'We acknowledge the considerable financial pressures being felt by RDC and note the proposals being put forward to ensure its continued solvency. We believe that if drastic measures are not taken immediately, RDC is likely to be effectively insolvent during calendar year 2024. We feel strongly that rural villages and communities should not bear the brunt of cuts being made to services. There is a widespread perception that RDC is very focused on Bexhill, as the largest populated area in the region and the one with the most electoral seats.' 'We deplore any attempts to bring party politics into the argument and District and Local Council levels. This is unhelpful and we call upon all our representatives to work together in a spirit of harmony to resolve these difficulties. Any decisions taken should be with a finite timescale for detailed review after a specific period has passed. Any alterations to services (including closures) should be regarded as temporary rather than permanent, with a view to reinstating them in less straitened times. Rightly or wrongly, people judge the performance of their local councils by what they see and not what may happen behind the scenes. Salehurst and Robertsbridge parish lies within a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which is a major tourist attraction in its own right. We want visitors, as well as residents, to enjoy their time here and to have the facilities which they require. It is incumbent on all levels of local government to work together constructively to ensure these are maintained in rural as well as urban areas.'

Conclusion

204. We would like to thank all respondents who took the trouble to take part in this consultation. The subjects were complex and contentious, and many people had to take quite a lot of time to consider all the material and their own responses.
205. We note that although we have overall support for many measures that the Council wishes to take there are many respondents concerned about the cumulative longer-term impacts on the district.

The following is an extract from our website used to support the budget consultation process:

2024/25 Budget Consultation – Financial Challenges Ahead

The ongoing difficult financial climate continues to put council budgets under severe pressure.

Inflation, increases in the cost of providing local services such as waste and

housing, coupled with over a decade of reductions in central Government funding means that we now face a £3.8 million budget shortfall for 2024/25.

Councils in England face a funding gap of over £4 billion over the next two years and you can read more about the [Local Government Associations 'Save local services' campaign](#).

Our Lead Cllr for Housing, Ruairi McCourt, explains the budget situation in the following video.

[NOTE: We also had a video from the Leader of the Council, Cllr Doug Oliver during the first weeks of the consultation.]

What services do we provide?

The chart below shows how the Council spends its money on the services we provide, with the gross expenditure budget for 2023/24 being £44.1m.

A large chunk of our £44 million budget is spent on our waste and recycling contract, but we also provide other local services such as support for the homeless, environmental health, leisure facilities, public toilets, street cleaning, dealing with littering, car parks and open spaces, council tax and housing benefit, and local planning applications.

These are all vital services that help support people and our economy across the district, but they all cost money to run, and we will have less money to run them.

Proposed savings and efficiencies

We need to address our £3.8m budget gap. We are aiming to make savings over the coming years from our new Fit for the Future programme, which we should generate savings of £3.3m next year. This still however leaves us having to use £0.5m from reserves to balance the budget.

If we are not able to identify efficiency savings, extra income, or budget reductions, we will have no choice but to use more of the Council's reserves, which are rapidly reducing.

Service reductions will be a last resort, and we'll protect our resident's priorities by making efficiency savings and increasing our income wherever we can.

The survey contains questions regarding proposals for the closure of certain toilets across the district; a list of those facilities which will be impacted can be found on our [Public toilets to close on a trial basis over the winter months](#) webpage.

Similarly, there are proposals around changes to the grounds maintenance contract; however, it should be noted that many open spaces, especially those outside Bexhill, fall under the remit of the town and parish council's and will not be affected by these proposals. You can view the [list of potentially affected sites \(pdf\)](#).

Income Increases

The current draft budget proposes increases in fees and charges where these are under the Council's control.

Our proposals help us stick to the priorities that residents, businesses, and our partners have helped us set, while helping to address the budget gap we are facing.

Capital programme

The Council's capital programme shows what we intend to spend on purchasing new assets and improving existing ones over the next five years. Over the period of our Medium-Term Financial Strategy we plan to invest more than £150m, funded by a mix of grants, capital receipts, reserves and borrowing.

How you can help – give your views

How do you think the Council should manage this budget challenge? You can give your views during our budget consultation from Tuesday 7 November until Sunday 17 December. You can do that online or by post (just email or phone for a paper questionnaire to be posted to your address).

We'll collate all the views we receive and report them to our main council meetings early next year. All views given will help us to decide on the best way forward – so your help will be greatly appreciated.

Complete Survey

A print-ready copy of the Budget Consultation survey is available to download using the button below. When complete, you should post this to *Budget Consultation, Rother District Council, Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea, TN39 3JX*.

Print-ready Survey (docx)

Large print and other versions of the printed questionnaire are available on request by emailing consultations@rother.gov.uk. Please indicate the version you require, the consultation you are enquiring about, and your postal address.

Next steps

Over the coming months, the Council will be working on its budget for the forthcoming financial year (2024/25). We will be holding key council meetings and consulting residents, businesses, and stakeholders. At each major step in the process, we'll update you with the current news on our website and across our social media channels to keep you informed of the latest developments.

Any further questions?

Our Budget FAQ's webpage may answer any questions you have. For more information, please see the FAQ's at the bottom of this webpage.

Want to delve deeper into the details?

Read the full report – [Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28 \(pages 3 to 46\)](#)

- Appendix 1: Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) – General Fund Summary Forecasts (page 47)
- Appendix 2: Savings Summary (page 48)
- Appendix 3: Capital Programme (page 49)
- Appendix 4: Fees and Charges (pages 50 to 74)
- Appendix 5: Risk Assessment (pages 75 to 77)
- Appendix 6: Sensitivity and Scenario Planning (pages 78 to 80)
- Appendix 7: Extract from the Overview and Scrutiny meeting of 16 October 2023 (pages 81 to 84)

Contact Us

Email submissions and responses should be sent to consultations@rother.gov.uk.

Frequently Asked Questions from Those Answering the Consultations

Q1: Why is the council in such a poor financial position?

A1: The local government sector has seen funding increases of around 33% over the last 8 years. However, central government has focussed a significant proportion of this increase on areas such as adult and children's social care, which are not areas that the Council has responsibility for. Our funding increase has only been based on a 2.5% increase over the same period and represents a real term cut which, when coupled with high inflation, and increasing costs of providing services, means we face one of the most challenging financial situations for many years.

Q2: Why don't you just use reserves to plug the gap?

A2: In the past, we have used our reserves to help fill gaps in our budget. However, whilst this does help in the short term, the strategy is not sustainable – once reserves are spent, they are gone. If savings are not delivered and reserves continue to be used, they will fall below our recommended minimum level of £5m.

Q2: Are you going to cut services?

A2: The reality of the situation we face means that we will have to change the way we deliver some services, and we may have to reduce the level of others. Budget pressures including rising costs, inflation, and years of reductions in central government funding means that we face a scenario of trying to provide the same level of service with far less money.

Q3: What services are going to be affected by cuts?

A3: The Council has a legal duty to provide certain services, such as waste collection and the payment of benefits, which are often described as statutory services. There are then also a range of services which the Council can choose to deliver or not, these are called non-statutory or discretionary services, and include things such as the provision of public conveniences, cultural activities and sport and leisure facilities. Unfortunately, when reductions have to be made it is often the discretionary service areas which have to be reduced first as the statutory services are protected.

No decisions have been made, and any proposals will be worked up and subject to public scrutiny over the coming weeks and months before we finally set our budget for 2024/25 at our budget meeting in February next year.

Q4: Does this mean you're going to increase council tax and charges?

A4: We recognise that residents and businesses are struggling with the current cost-of-living crisis, so any future council tax increases, or raises in charging for services like garden waste for instance, will have to be very carefully considered before any decision is made.

Q5: How is Council Tax divided up?

A5: Although we collect your council tax, it is split between us, East Sussex County Council, the Sussex Police Crime Commissioner, the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and the town and parish councils. Less than nine pence in every £1 pound you pay in council tax goes towards Rother District Council services. An average household pays just 54 pence per day for all the services that Rother District Council provides.

Q6: How much is Rother District Council's part of the Council Tax?

A6: Currently, our element of the Council Tax is £198.60 which equates to £3.82 a week or £16.55 a month for Rother District Council services. A 2.99 per cent increase would add just over 11 pence per week to a Band D property, meaning that homes in Band D would pay less than 55 pence per day for over 60 services which the Council provides.

Q7: Why can't you use the different government grants such as Levelling Up money, or Capital Programme funding to fill the void?

A7: We've been extremely successful in gaining government grants for several exciting local projects, including the Levelling Up fund for the De La Warr Pavilion and Heart of Sidley initiatives, and Shared Prosperity Funding for various projects across the district. But these are ring-fenced grants that can only be used for these projects – we are not allowed to take any of the funding to use to offset budget shortfalls. We also have an ambitious Capital Programme designed to improve facilities and boost communities, but we are not allowed to use capital resources to help plug budget gaps.

Q8: Why don't you just cut back-office management and staff costs?

A8: To provide the services that the district needs, we need the right level of staff to help us. We are constantly looking to see if we can save money, reduce central costs and at the same time protect front line services. We'll continue with this strategy as we work to balance the books.

Q9: Why don't you save money by sharing services with other councils?

A9: Sharing services is already being used by the Council – for example we already share some services with Wealden District Council, and we've also proposed that some of our services are taken over by local town and parish councils. If we believe we can provide a high-quality level of service for local people at reduced costs by sharing that service, then of course we will look at that very seriously.

Q10: Why does RDC insist on Bexhill Town Council being subject to the terms of a lease if taking over the running and maintenance of public toilets in Bexhill?

A10: Assets owned by Rother District Council are generally subject to legal requirements when being operated to deliver a public service to residents.

When another body or a third party takes over the responsibility for the asset and for the delivery of the service, these legal obligations must be passed over to the third party to ensure they are upheld.

It is standard practise to agree a legal document called a licence or lease. This document makes sure that both parties are clear on their responsibilities and what is required from the service, both legally and in the running of the facility. Whether a licence or a lease is more appropriate will depend on each individual situation.

Both parties to the licence or lease agree the terms and length of period. The licence or lease will include names of the parties, obligations to hold insurance, pay utilities, health and safety aspects, start date and end date of responsibilities, details of the nature of the service, to name but a few.

The purpose is to protect all parties, especially the users of the asset or service, in the long term.

You might be interested in the minutes of the Bexhill Town Council meeting on 6 December when it discussed the recommendations of their Asset Transfer Committee. You can view the [Asset Transfer Committee minutes](#) on the Bexhill Town Council website.

Further information on petitions received by the Council

206. The Council received a printed document in the same bundle of papers for the manually signed petition sheets. That print out included a list of names. The printout was not labelled. We have assumed that this document was part of the petition for Devonshire Square public toilets.

207. We are aware there was an online petition on public toilets generated through the change.org website. We have not received any electronic petition material from this petition or anything identified as 'signatures' from this site unless that was the print-out referred to above.
208. Change.org provides a free petition generating and recording tool to help the public easily create and share an online petition.
209. However, the online petition has completely different wording and does not use the sentences at the head of the printed petition. What it has in common is referring to Rother, public toilets and human rights.
210. The covering or heading text (below) does not refer to any specific public toilet site.
211. It does have a photograph of a sign or notice. A member of the public familiar with Bexhill might be able to identify it as a notice, with map, placed on the Devonshire Square public toilets.
212. The online petition had the following text:

'Reopen Rother District Council Public Toilets for Human Rights'

[Photograph of sign with text: 'We apologize for any inconvenience. Rother District Council's closest alternative public toilets can be found at Channel View East, Egerton Park and West Parade, shown on the map below.' Map shows 'You are here' label on the location of Devonshire Square toilets (unnamed).]

'Why this petition matters
Started by [name available]

As a local resident of East Sussex, I am deeply concerned about the closure of public toilets by the Rother District Council. This decision has had a significant impact on our community, particularly affecting the elderly, families and people with a wide range of disabilities who rely on these facilities. It is not just an issue of convenience but one that touches upon basic human rights and dignity.

Public toilets are more than just amenities; they are essential for maintaining public health and hygiene. According to Age UK, over 50% of older people have underlying health conditions that necessitate frequent use of toilet facilities when out in public (source: Age UK). Furthermore, around 13.9 million people in the UK have a disability (source: Family Resources Survey), many of whom may require accessible toilet facilities when away from home.

The closure has put undue stress on these vulnerable groups in our society and infringes upon their right to participate fully in community life. We believe this action by the council is short-sighted and fails to take into account the needs and rights of all residents.

We call upon Rother District Council to reconsider its decision and reopen public toilets across East Sussex immediately. Your signature can help restore this essential service for those who need it most - sign today!