

WNC 2026/27 Budget Consultation

Helmdon Parish Council's Finance Committee met on 19 January 2025 and considered whether to make a response to WNC's 2026/27 Budget consultation. It was agreed that commenting on every aspect of the consultation was beyond the scope and capacity of the council and to focus on three particular aspects: green waste charges, proposed parking charges in Brackley, and B4525 Welsh Lane remediation works.

This report provides an analysis of the West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) 2026/27 budget proposals as they pertain to the specific interests of Helmdon Parish Council, followed by a suggested formal consultation response.

Part 1: Detailed Report on Budget Proposals

The draft budget for 2026/27 is framed as the most challenging since WNC's inception, driven by a £64.2m base budget growth requirement to meet rising statutory demand. To bridge the funding gap, the Council is relying on £32m in service efficiencies and significant increases to discretionary fees.

1. Garden Waste (Green Bin) Charges

WNC is proposing a substantial increase in the annual subscription for kerbside garden waste collection. The fee, which is £60 for 2025/26 is set to rise to £80 in 2026/27. This represents a 33.3% increase in a single year for the 2026/27 period. The Council categorises this under "*Charging and Income*" to reflect the actual cost of service delivery.

2. Brackley Parking Charges

For the first time, WNC intends to introduce car parking charges in Brackley to align its town centres.

- **Infrastructure:** The Council has proposed a £1 million capital investment to construct a new long-stay off-street car park on the old Southfield Primary School site.
- **Off-Street Tariffs:** The proposed rates for the new car park match those in Daventry and Towcester: £1.10 for up to one hour, £2.20 for up to two hours, and a flat £3.00 fee for Saturdays, Sundays, and Bank Holidays.
- **On-Street Charges:** Once the off-street car park is open, WNC also intends to implement an on-street pay-and-display charge of £1.60 per hour in Brackley.

3. HS2 Road Safety Fund and the B4525

The draft capital programme for 2026/27 includes a specific allocation of £210,000 from the HS2 Road Safety Fund.

- Scope: The fund is designated for "road safety improvements in the vicinity of the HS2 route".
 - Maintenance Pressures: The B4525 Welsh Lane is a primary route for HS2 construction traffic, contributing to the broader "unavoidable growth" and contractual inflation pressures in the Place Directorate, which total £3.7m for 2026/27.
 - HS2 Marshal: The Council continues to fund a HS2 marshal post (£65k) to manage the impacts of the national project.
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Part 2: Suggested Consultation Response

To: West Northamptonshire Council Budget Consultation Team

From: Helmdon Parish Council

Date: [Insert Date]

Subject: Response to 2026/27 Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan

Helmdon Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the 2026/27 draft budget. While we recognise the "*sustained demand-led service pressures*" facing WNC, we wish to record our strong objections and recommendations regarding the following points:

1. Garden Waste (Green Bin) Subscription Increase

We strongly object to the proposed increase of the garden waste subscription from £60 to £80 in 2026/27. This 33% year-on-year hike is excessive, particularly for rural residents who lack alternative disposal options. We are concerned that this increase will lead to a rise in fly-tipping in rural lanes and hedgerows, creating an additional clean-up cost for WNC and a blight on the rural environment. We urge the Council to cap this increase at the rate of inflation.

2. Introduction of Parking Charges in Brackley

Helmdon Parish Council opposes the introduction of parking charges in Brackley town centre, including the £1.60 per hour on-street charge and the tariffs at the proposed Southfield Primary School site. As Helmdon residents rely on Brackley as their primary service hub, these charges represent a new tax on rural living. We believe these charges will:

- Disadvantage rural residents who have no viable public transport alternative to reach Brackley.
- Harm the economic vitality of Brackley's local businesses.

- Displace parking into residential side streets. Furthermore, we question the wisdom of spending £1 million in capital funds on a new car park at a time when the Council's "underlying position" is described as a "structural gap".

3. Allocation of HS2 Road Safety Fund to the B4525 (Welsh Lane)

We note the inclusion of £210,000 in the 2026/27 capital programme for the HS2 Road Safety Fund. Helmdon Parish Council formally requests that a significant and fair proportion of this fund be allocated specifically to the B4525 Welsh Lane. This road has been disproportionately affected by heavy HS2 construction traffic, leading to severe degradation of the carriageway and increased safety risks for our residents. Given that the fund is intended for safety improvements "in the vicinity of the HS2 route," the B4525 should be a priority project for 2026/27 to mitigate the impact of this national infrastructure project on our local community.

Conclusion

We urge WNC to reconsider the impact of these "efficiency" measures on rural sustainability and to ensure that mitigation funds, such as the HS2 grant, are directed to the areas of highest local impact.