



Finance

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Your Ref:

Date:

Dear

Consultation with Non Domestic Ratepayers 2014/15

Each year, the Council consults with its Non Domestic Ratepayers with regard to its overall financial position, and on its plans for the year ahead. Consultation is made in writing with organisations representing businesses within the Borough.

Gedling Borough Council is facing a further cut of 13.7% in its funding from Central Government in 2014/15, as announced on 18 December 2013. An additional cut of 15.8% for 2015/16 is indicated by the current settlement, and it is anticipated that further substantial reductions can then be expected each year until at least 2018/19. This is in addition to the significant cuts experienced over the last few years, meaning that the Council will need to make significant reductions in its net expenditure over the medium term.

Councillor John Clarke, Leader of the Council, has again outlined the Council's intention to maintain top quality services, despite continued budgetary pressures. Spending on front-line services including waste and recycling, street cleaning and parks will be protected, and the Council is again committed to retaining two hour's free car parking across the borough in 2014/15 in recognition of the importance placed on its impact on local shopping centres. It is intended to roll out super-fast broadband in the Borough's rural communities, and to increase support to businesses in order to promote job creation, especially for young people. Investment approaching £1.5m in the Bonington Theatre and Arnold Leisure Centre is now almost complete, and this will help to maintain Arnold Town Centre as a vibrant place for work, shopping and recreation.

Over the last year, further efficiencies in back-office operations have been introduced, including a reduction in the number of staff employed. Savings of over £300,000 on employee expenses were achieved in 2012/13 and further savings are being delivered during 2013/14, both as a result of positive vacancy management and delivery of efficiencies earlier than planned.

During 2013/14 the Council has completed the acquisition of land that will permit the development of Gedling Country Park. Almost £300,000 has been spent to date on engineering and safety work, and it is anticipated that a further £1m will be invested during 2014 on infrastructure that will develop the park for public use. This exciting development is one that the Council is proud to be associated with. Funding has been secured from partners including Gedling Homes, Growth Point and private developers, and this is allowing the project to be undertaken at no direct cost to the borough's taxpayers. The project is a clear example of the many ways in which the Council is working with other agencies to deliver services as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In 2014/15 the Council intends to work hard to deliver growth in the provision of new homes, and to attract new businesses to the borough and is considering the creation of a business development fund to further assist businesses to grow in the Borough. It also intends to continue with the protection of vulnerable groups by making available reductions in Council Tax to those on low incomes.

To help pay for the aspirations referred to above, other plans for the year ahead include:

- further significant management restructuring
- reducing the cost of mayoral activities
- attracting more users to the popular garden waste scheme; whilst maintaining charges at the current levels
- creation of more natural environments in parks and open spaces allowing greater bio diversity whilst at the same time reducing maintenance costs
- transferring assets, such as Community Centres, into direct community ownership and management
- placing greater emphasis on the commercial sale of surplus landholdings

As part of the budget consultation, your views on the following questions are sought:

1. Would you support the Council establishing an "Economic Development Fund" in order to support local businesses and apprenticeship schemes, and to invest in businesses to help with the creation of jobs?

Yes / No / Other Comments (please specify)

2. If you have answered "Yes" to question 1, what are your views on a Fund of £250,000?

About right / Should be More – how much? / Should be Less – how much?

3. Should the Council continue to support economic development activity in the Borough by its provision of two hours free car parking?

Yes / No / Other Comments (please specify)

4. The Council intends to collaborate more closely with several of its neighbouring authorities in order to develop more efficient ways of working, and to offer resilience in the delivery of our services. Do you agree that we should do this?

Yes / No / Other Comments (please specify)

5. Following the introduction of the local Council Tax Reduction Scheme in 2013/14, the Council intends to continue its support to parish councils to protect them from the initial loss of income they suffered due to the implementation of the change. The cost of this will be in the region of £28,500 per year. Do you agree that we should do this?

Yes / No / Other Comments (please specify)

6. For 2014/15, the Council is trying to balance the burden on taxpayers with the need to make savings as a result of cuts in its funding, by proposing a zero Council Tax increase. Do you agree that the Council should do this?

Yes / No / Other Comments (please specify)

7. Do you have any other comments on the financial management of Gedling Borough Council?

Cabinet is expected to agree its budget recommendations to Council at its meeting on Thursday 20 February 2014, with Council meeting to decide the budget on Monday 3 March 2014. It would therefore be helpful to receive any responses by Tuesday 18 February 2014. Please address your replies to Mr Mark Kimberley, Corporate Director and Chief Financial Officer, at the above address or email him at mark.kimberley@gedling.gov.uk.

Mark Kimberley
Corporate Director and Chief Financial Officer