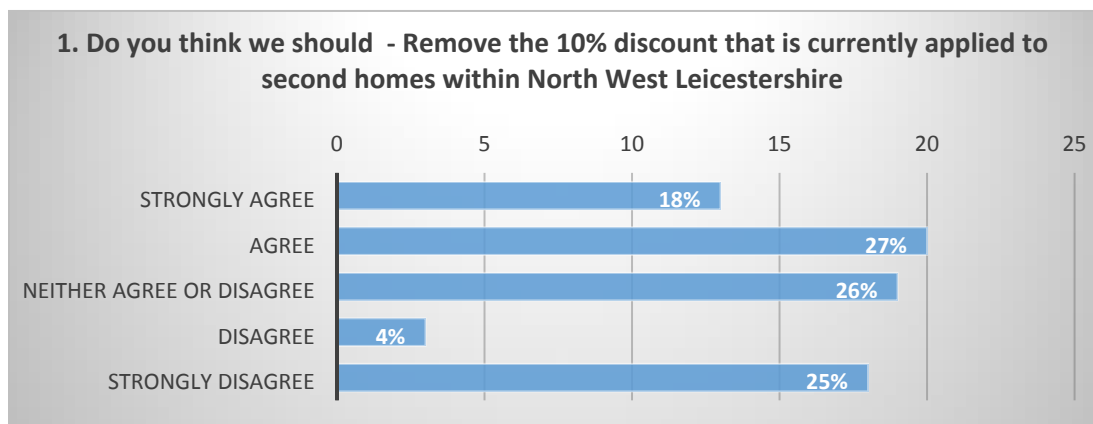


## CONSULTATION RESPONSES

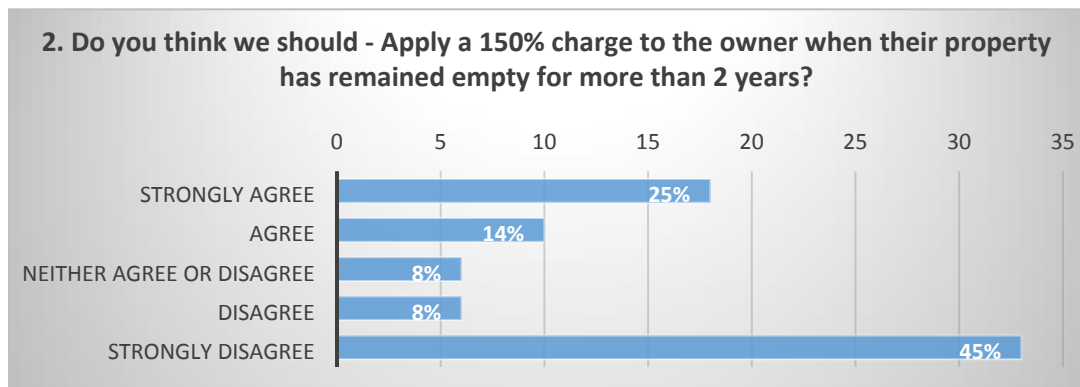
The Council conducted a 5 week consultation period with North West Leicestershire District Council residents on the proposed Council Tax changes. The consultation was made available on 22 October via paper and online survey through the Council's website and closed on Sunday 25 November.

A total of 70 completed surveys were recieved .

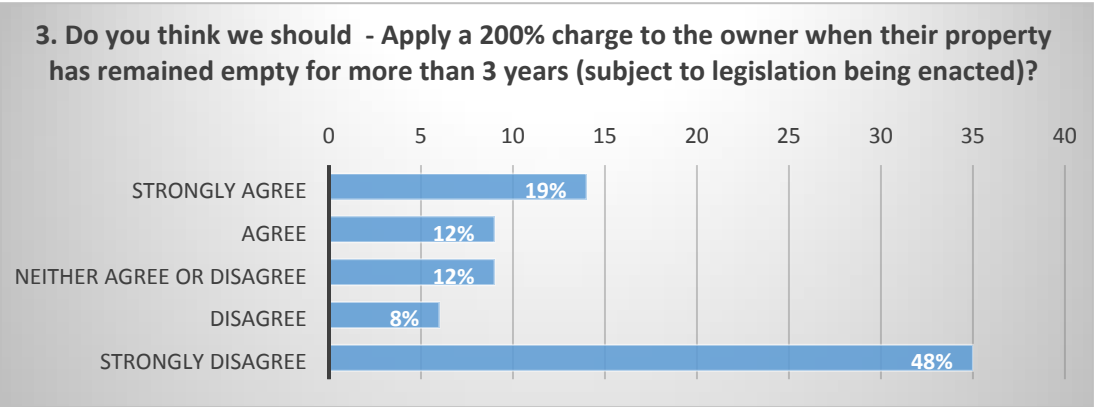
When respondents were asked whether we should remove the 10% discount currently applied to second homes within the district, over four in ten (45%) indicated that they agree with this whilst 29% do not.



The respondents where also asked if we should apply a 150% charge to the owners when their property has remained empty for more than 2 years, Just under four in ten (39%) have agreed to this and 53% do not.



Three in ten (31%) agreed that the we should apply 200% charge to the owner when the property has remained empty for more than 3 years. Nearly six in ten (56%) disagree with this change.



We have received 43 views & suggestions about the proposed changes, and a further 19 comments that may help the council make savings or reduce spending.

The Head of Finance also received a letter from a resident siting her views about this changes. A typed up version is available below.

Ref: xxxxx

Dear Ms Bingham,

I am thoroughly disgusted and disappointed Re: letter about empty properties. No. xxxxxxxx is on the market to be sold and has been for the last 3 months. My late husband purchased it with the idea that we would move to that property. Unfortunately my husband became terminally ill with Cancer and passed away in August. Because of his illness the project took longer to complete and if you check your files you will see photographs of the state of building and the amount of work that needed to be done. Paying 100% council tax on a empty property is legalized robbery as I receive nothing in return. Oh by the way my name is xxxxx not xxxxx if you think you could get that right.

Thank You.

xxxxxxxxxx

**Do you have any views or suggestions about our proposed changes to the Council Tax Liability scheme?**

first find out the reason why the property is empty, it may not be habitable, repairs are costly, as there are now no grants available, when owners are doing their own renovation it takes a lot longer to complete tasks, they should not be penalised for this.

I am a pensioner who for the last 12 months plus I have employed builders at great expense to totally renovate a property which I inherited, so that I may move into it on completion. It may be that the property is finished and I will have occupied it before your April deadline. However, extensive building work always takes longer than you expect and I fail to see why the council believes charging extra amounts of money in such cases helps with the lack of available housing in the district. This is just a money grabbing exercise by the council who are actually providing me with very poor service for what I currently pay. You have not even been capable of providing me with a replacement waste bin for my property. Council tax covers many services, but I am already paying for these in the property I do occupy. You are actually discriminating against people such as myself, when I am putting all my cash into renovation of the property whilst some properties are empty for years on end and are just left to decay and I guess you will not even be able to identify who the owners are. I hope if this does go through that it will include the many empty commercial properties such as shops, factories and hotels like the Royal hotel in Ashby. However, I guess domestic owners are a much easier target for you to rob.

I cannot see how a surcharge system could work. I occasionally have empty properties and if they were to be empty for two years it would be because there were no tenants available. In which case I would drop the rent or furnish it and avoid the surcharge..

I would be interested in knowing more about the statistics on empty property in nwlcd. Are they really being bought for capital growth. My experience is to the contrary

As an owner of a "empty" property that has been empty for almost 2 years before any increase in council tax is considered the reason for the property being empty should be taken into consideration. In my case full council tax has been paid throughout this period without the benefit of any services. The property has been openly advertised for sale for the whole duration. I would have loved a sale in week one but 2 collapsed housing chains and a third now getting close to completion takes time and has already cost a lot of money. And this is on a house where the mortgage cost would be less than the rental cost I could charge. I can afford a loss of 2 years rental but many could not and the council should consider approaching these sellers and offering to buy the property to reduce the number of private landlords and increase the number of social housing stock that they can control and correctly manage.

There must also be property inherited or owned by people who cannot afford to spend money getting a property up to a saleable condition and these should be helped to sell not further penalised.

However, there may be some just sat on an empty property just waiting for the market value to improve then in that case there may be a case to charge more

I strongly disagree with charging 150% for properties that are vacant for more than 2 years. Where is the justification for this additional cost, as it is I am barely using any local resources, but still paying 100% of the council tax reluctantly while I perform this significant renovation project which is taking much longer than I originally anticipated.

I can understand if people are just leaving empty to potentially penalise them, but I have been down there every weekend trying to push on so I can get some income from the property.

I just cant see how you can justify charging more for a property that is empty compared to someone who is actually utilising the local services, it is just another method of taxing and penalising

Agree with the above. However.... sometimes renovating a property takes longer than a year as in our case. We have really been stung with the full rate applying after a year - with the very best of intentions. The property was in a dreadful state and required a lot of work. I think that there should be an option to extend this year period e.g. applying to increase it so that you can xplain your case and have things considered.

I think it would stop people buying property and removing just the kitchen or bathroom and expecting to pay no council tax, doing other work or no work on the rest of the property. That way they never pay council tax, but then will do the work and sell before the next year council tax bill and also the value of the property as increased.

New Build properties that are still under construction, but have been deemed complete should be exempt from Council Tax for longer to give the house builder the opportunity to market and sell the newly constructed homes.

I strongly feel that owners that have a house that is currently listed with an estate agent for sale, or to rent, that keep their property maintained, and are actively taking viewings from potential buyers or tenants, are doing everything in their power to make sure the property is not left empty, and therefore should not be liable for these extra charges .

Owners who leave a property empty to fall apart with no consideration for the property, or the area should be liable for the extra charges.

I think that the 10% discount should remain to encourage house buying with regards to the penalty for the empty houses. Most of these would be empty due to investors just leaving them there and empty. i for one work a lot abroad so my house is empty quite a lot bu still reside there, but always maintain it to the highest standards.if people are paying their council tax for any services they use and are not there much, surely council tax costs for you guys are lower. the more we use the services the higher the cost is to the council? so as long as people are looking after their property, its tidy and no rubbish mounting up or letters sticking out of letter boxes and causing a general nuisance, then i don't really think any penalties should apply

In fact, i think the costs should be set on the basis of how much you use the services. i for example hardly use them at all, yet i am paying the full rate of council tax.

I feel as though it is another scheme to rob the ordinary man in the street blind again, it wouldn't be to bad if we received the services we already pay for now. I am in a position of paying the bills on two houses due to the death of my father and the refusal of family members help with the bills until the property is sold, how the hell am I supposed to find the money to pay double.

According to the guidance published on the empty home premium "The government's intention behind the decision to provide billing authorities with the power to charge a premium was not to penalise owners of property that is genuinely on the housing market for sale or rent."

Therefore, any empty property that is being advertised as available for occupation, whether for sale or rent should be exempt from the premium regardless of how long it takes to find a buyer or tenant. Adding a premium may force owners of empty property to sell below market value, thus deflating the housing market. This may well be the intention but it would be a penalty on those who are guided by estate agents, who themselves may over inflate prices to receive higher commission.

In principle I can see why a move to the above changes is necessary to free up housing stock. However, I think there need to be safeguards that can be applied in individual cases.

For example, XXXXXX being listed as a second home is deceptive as one tends to think of second homes as 'holiday retreats'. In my case this has been the family home since 1960 occupied by my parents for much of this time. My mother died last year aged 94. In her final years she was in care (funded privately from savings) but always maintained the vision of being able to come home one day. For this reason I kept the bungalow on and made use of it occasionally to stay there whilst visiting her (I live in S. London).

Since her death I have had the task of clearing out the contents of over 50 years' accumulation. I wanted to be fastidious about recycling as much as possible (which my mother would have approved of) rather than using a skips. This has taken some time as I can only visit about once a month. The bungalow was put on the market in the spring but only very recently have I had the first offer.

I feel that in circumstances like mine punitive measures to increase council tax when I am not really in a position to make much use of council services are not very fair.

Tax or Government Revenue, be it central or local or personal should always have as a core value FAIRNESS to the individuals concerned...we are ALL EQUAL but it is evident that SOME are MORE EQUAL than OTHERS.

Some residents pay NO TAX, Council or Personal...which means that those who DO PAY TAX are taxed MORE to subsidize the NONE PAYERS...IS THIS FAIR ?

Some receive a 25% reduction in council tax for single adult occupancy or age related circumstances...the criteria for these reductions are tenuous to say the least and the system is not monitored with sufficient rigor and penalties for misuse are not sufficient to deter abuse.

The definition of an empty property MUST BE....UNFURNISHED and PERMANENTLY UNOCCUPIED.....If the property is FURNISHED and OCCUPIED on OCCASIONS this is the choice of the OWNER and Councils DO NOT have the RIGHT to Financially PENALIZE FREEDOM.....Human Rights Act .....FAIRNESS and EQUALITY.

Regarding your proposed increase in council tax premiums on long term empty properties. I agree something needs to be done but a blanket increase to all is totally unacceptable, as it seems that the only way the council is to achieve this is to raise revenues.

I would suggest a structured incentive scheme is a better approach. Not everyone with an empty property is guilty of doing nothing! I can speak from my own personal situation as an example and also a close friend of mine. As a self-employed builder I am currently completely renovating a property in XXXX as your records will show. This property is being renovated to current building control regulations. I am trying to complete this along with the need to earn money from my business in order to pay for more materials and labour costs. It is a massive undertaking and now I read the council is proposing to ask for more revenue. I am sure you are aware of the plights of people renting sub-standard property, to which I am trying to address. Increased payments to yourselves only adds to slowing this process down for me as with other standing charges.

It is most definitely not in my interest to have this property empty a further day as I am not receiving any rental income only paying out. As I stated not all empty homes are the same and if you choose to implement these measures I would advise you also implement a scheme where by homes that are being renovated back to a top standard, as funds and time allows, be inspected periodically to maintain progress is being made. Property owners who have no intention of renovating should be the ones penalized.

Second home owners make significantly less use of the local services such as schools, rubbish collection, road cleaning and should be compensated by a reduction in the Council Tax they pay.

Also, second home owners cause much less wear and tear to roads and pavements and generally do not cause as much damage to the local environment or pollution as those living permanently in the area. These should be recognised in the Council Tax they pay.

(I understand that Councils can give furnished second homes a discount of up to 50%. The current discount from North West Leicestershire of 10% isn't exactly 'generous' compared to other authorities.)

However, I agree that owners of unfurnished empty homes should be charged more as the accommodation could be used for homeless families and others in dire need of accommodation.

Privately owned homes are the property / asset of the owner, what they do with it is their business. It is unlikely that homes will be left empty, deliberately, for an extended period of time. (This was a practice for a short time in London where house prices were rising very fast, this is not the case in NWL) These proposed increases on a tax that returns nothing to the payee is a miserable attempt to squeeze cash from any available source to help fill the gaps caused by improper, inefficient or inept budgeting by the local authority. I am currently paying council tax on a property I'm trying to sell, losing those funds every month has not helped me to refurbish to the standard I would have liked and has added time to the period it has been empty. Perhaps the local authority, concerned with low levels of available housing as you are should considering offering to buy them at market value.

1) I think the charges proposed are excessive.

2) I do not think it is fair to charge more than 100% council tax on properties that are part of a deceased estate which is still in administration. Executors are not in a position to spend money on properties to make them suitable for rent and not in control of the time line of administration of the estate. Therefore the clock should only start ticking at the end of the administration period.

Your proposals appear to be more geared towards social engineering from a political standpoint rather than a reflection of the proper implementation of council tax based upon income and expenditure. As second home owners we use far less of the council services and accordingly should be expected to pay less. If anything the 10% discount should be increased.

I believe that provided the council tax bill for a property is being paid on time and in full, the Council has no authority with which to demand a levy for it being classified as empty. The proposals make no consideration for the reasons why a property might be considered to be empty, which I believe to be a significant oversight.

There are many reasons why properties remain empty for long periods and I feel that it is grossly unfair to try to 'blackmail & bully' all owners into a course of action that they do not wish to take and which is not necessarily in their interests. I believe that it is an unfairly discriminatory tax that is designed to alleviate the inaction and shortcomings of Government, both national and local, in foreseeing any shortages in housing.

I personally own two very small one-bedroom adjacent cottages that have been in my family for generations and which have great sentimental value. I am in the process of long term renovating them for my occupation after my retirement and now find myself in a position of possibly being forced to sell them against my wishes. I feel that this is an erosion of my rights as a law-abiding British citizen.

This response is submitted on behalf of the Trustees of XXXXX

The existing requirement to pay full Council Tax after a short vacant period is already a discouragement for most owners. Evidence is required to show that dwellings are left empty deliberately in this area in order to provide a case for additional penalties.

Any scheme should allow for legal or other constraints which limit or prevent reletting. XXXX is a Registered Charity providing Almshouse Flats for elderly ladies of limited means. One flat out of 25 has been vacant for 2 years (although just relet) but several others have been allocated during the period. The vacant flat has been included in all marketing efforts but is evidently less attractive than others in the complex. The Charity is restricted to a limited market and organisations of this type should not be penalised.

The council tax is supposed to be a way of paying for services, an empty house doesn't use council services. Why are you proposing to use it as a punitive measure?

If you are concerned about the lack of housing.

Why doesn't the council build more affordable housing? Why doesn't the council manage its own housing stock more effectively?

I will be sending in a separate letter giving my comments and observations.

I think the proposals are fair, after all, if you can afford two homes you can afford 10% extra. And if you can afford to leave a property unoccupied you can afford the 150/200%. This might provide more incentives for greedy property owners to rent out their homes to those who need them or let the council lease them.

Against; feel that 2nd properties should not be penalised any more than they already are.



Empty houses should have council tax reductions which would encourage people to renovate themselves over a period of time (without incurring large costs for hiring professionals). In my opinion encouragement rather than punitive measures are the way forward to ensure empty properties can be renovated and housing stock increased.

I think people should be encouraged to renovate houses by giving them incentives.

I can only comment on my particular circumstances and I am sure everyone's circumstances are different so each case should be judged differently. In my particular circumstances I was trying to sell my mothers house, she had died. I put the house on the market in February 2017 and it eventually transferred to the new owner in October 2018. During that period I paid council tax on the property, a cost I had to absorb myself along with house insurance, alarm insurance, oil for the winter months, grass cutting and general maintenance. The house sold a couple of times throughout that period but the sales fell through. I can understand the need to use all available empty properties but increasing the council tax doesn't make a house sell any quicker! I did not want to go down the route of renting the property out, it needed to be sold. Increasing the council tax could force people into doing something they really don't want to do which isn't fair. As I said earlier there must be many different reasons why properties are left empty and each case needs to be looked at individually.

No surcharge should be applied to empty property where the owner is actively trying to sell the property i.e. it is actively being marketed for sale at a reasonable asking price as valued by a reputable estate agent.

I would agree that those who have multiple (more than 2) homes should not be entitled to preferential treatment and perhaps should attract an increased charge.

However, my responses above are based on my (& my husband's) personal experience.

We have a second home that we have been completely converting & refurbishing for almost 4 years. The extent of the work obviously results in considerable financial investment, which has required us both to work full time. As a consequence, we have only been able to do the necessary works at evenings, weekends, or when we can afford to bring someone in.

As I already own a separate property on which full council tax is paid, we have been living there while the work has been being done. In cases like this there should be NO penalty to the homeowner.

Additionally, we have never been advised of the 10% discount for second home - which I would have expected to be applicable as we do not have the property for rental purposes.

How can you charge more for supposed services when a property isn't receiving services? If you were providing more services then yes the charge should be applicable but when a property isn't drawing any resources from the parish council or from the county council or from the police for example then what in actual fact is this extra charge paying for??

Latitude should be allowed when the ability to let depends on structural improvements to access.

Proposals are short-sighted. Council tax is for the purpose of covering the cost of providing public services and not for imposing penalties on any particular members of the community.

The discount on second homes recognises the reduced use of local services by properties not permanently occupied. If the full rate is imposed there may be an increased expectation for the provision of services. i.e. a property occupied as a second home in NW Leics by a family member for convenience seldom if ever requires a dustbin collection due to the limited occupation. If full Council Tax was to be applied there would be the expectation for the standard times of collection which would effectively increase costs to the Council.

Council Tax Ref: XXXXXXXX

You are simply penalising people without any reasonable cause. If they are trying to sell their property and it is proving difficult because of its very high overheads your idea is the last straw that breaks the camel's back. Firstly the fact that you offer 10% council tax discount on second homes is not true because I have never received any such concession from the council. In fact you offer 25% discount for single person occupancy but yet have charged me the full rate even though I have not lived there for some time. At least you should offer 25% discount off the council tax and NOT PENALISE the owner by levying the extra 25% discount.

Your idea of the additional 50% premium after 2 years of the property being empty and 100% premium on top of the existing full council tax being charged is simply absurd and grossly unfair. Just put yourself in that position and see how you would feel.

My property is not an ordinary house but an apartment in a 2 star listed building so you cannot tar everyone with the same brush. The property because of historical covenants and lease terms is difficult to rent because of its very high overheads and not all tenants would be able to maintain its upkeep.

I understand that the "Proposed changes to Council Tax" letter you have sent me must be a part of your general mailing so please confirm if this would apply to the apartments in XXXX.

I look forward to your response.

The former family home is being repaired and modernised so that it can be let. Repairs have been carried out to the roof, guttering, chimney and fascias. If the proposed increases in council tax are imposed then there will be less money available to carry out the refitting of kitchen, bathroom, rewiring and heating etc. The time needed to carry out the works will be delayed resulting in the house not being available to let as early as it might be.

Therefore I disagree with the proposed increases to council tax. Not everyone is a skilled property developer. The council could help by providing lists of contractors who they are aware of that carry out the necessary works. This would not oblige the council to warranty the contractors work but would be of help to owners.

I'm neutral on the 10% discount to owners of second homes.

I fully support the proposal to increase the charge on empty properties as it would be a strong stimulus to people like myself to let them out.

Implementing massive increases on empty properties without knowing the full reasons on genuine individual cases is totally unjust and unfair and smacks of big brother mentality..

The proposed changes to council tax for empty properties are totally wrong and will cause a great deal of worry and hardship to the people affected. Houses may be left unoccupied for many reasons; it may be due to ill health or lack of money and not due to wealthy landlords who have multiple properties and money to burn! Each case should be taken as an individual not merely a blanket tax pushed on all to punish indiscriminately. If this proposal goes ahead I can see it pushing some of the homeowners over the edge. Money is tight and mortgage rates, insurance etc all very costly, a rise in council tax will leave a lot of people short. Everyone is an individual and sadly we don't all have perfect lives with well paid jobs, expenses paid and large pensions to look forward to; at the other end of the scale are the working men and women who wear steel toe capped boots and overalls, no pension, broken relationships and broken hearts.

This is an additional comment to my previously completed consultation reference : XXXX

The council could be proactive by agreeing deadlines for the carrying out of specific works that would be necessary to make the property habitable. During that time the increased rate of tax would not be levied. This would offer a positive incentive rather than a wholly negative approach.

changes should be consistent throughout the country not just NWLDC.

Revalue properties to current trends. Do not discount 2nd homes or empty homes - charge full.

We should encourage landlords and buy to invest to get tenants in as quick as possible.

**Please let us know of any further suggestions that you may have that may help the council to make savings or reduce spending?**

Should link in with other district councils and remove duplicated jobs. Having been employed for many years on removing waste in large companies, I can see without even trying that there is a huge amount of opportunity to improve local councils and services. You really need to start operating smarter instead of just reducing services. Get a real understanding of your WASTE.

cut red tape  
get rid of fat cat bosses at the top  
look at non value added services

Send your letters by email if people opt to receive this - reduce postage and also have an electronic trail. Better for the environment. Would be easier for my filing too.

People's hedges and trees that over hang public footpaths and damage the tarmac and making it very difficult for the council to resurface footpaths etc. Should receive a leaflet to require them to trim back to there boundaries, also shouldn't expect the council to weed the edges that join there property to the footpaths.

New build properties don't require the services, refuse, police etc

instead of making a complete month charge as a blanket. i think there should be different levels of fees those who don't use the services much and say fill loads of rubbish and those who recycle well etc? not sure how to police this but there are definitely people that abuse the system!

This is an indirect suggestion but perhaps you can pass it on to an appropriate official.

As I've said above, I live in S. London and only visit Ashby about once a month. Hence I notice changes somewhat abruptly and can make comparisons with my experiences 'down south'.

I notice from my recent visits to Ashby that much money has been spent on increasing car-parking space in North Street. Yet, as a cyclist, I have not been able to see anything in Ashby that would encourage cycling. If there is any cycle parking in Ashby it is not signposted. I end up chaining my bike behind the war memorial which is not really appropriate. There is enough wasted and unattractive tarmac outside the CO-OP, for example, to create some bike parking.

Perhaps if cycling was encouraged, expenditure on car-parking could be reduced (not to mention health-benefits, CO2 reduction, etc.). London is far ahead on this.

I also feel that as part of recent housing developments in and around Ashby the council should have driven a harder bargain for planning gain and increased the amount of green space/ recreational areas in Ashby. I hope this will be the case with the development proposed for, e.g. Smisby Road.

The above is the (possibly rambling) view of someone who was born in Ashby in XXXX and has moved away yet still wishes to see the town thrive but not at the expense of losing its charm.

Stop wasting money and resources on those who are unappreciative of the efforts and sacrifices being made for them on behalf of others in society.

Please refer to the article "100 ways to cut the Council Tax without cutting key services" at <https://www.conservativehome.com/localgovernment/2009/02/100-ways-to-cut.html>

Don't spend what you haven't got. Freeze wages especially at the top, make redundancies, ensure works are done to a high standard, basic management stuff really.

This question suggests that the proposals relate to increase in revenue rather than a problem of housing. If so this is unfortunate.

I will be sending you a letter with my comments and observations.

Stop using bailiffs to chase people who cannot afford to pay and stop making people bankrupt that cannot pay. Forcing bankruptcy on people causes families to lose their homes or be unable to rent one.

No idea.

Remove charges for taking all waste to council tips, overall this will reduce charges for council employees to retrieve unlawfully deposited waste from other locations, also this will keep many areas looking tidy and safe.

In most part our council seems to be quite efficient in its services. Refuse collection is fantastic and recycling seems to be taking a bigger part in our everyday life.

Spend on essentials only and not egotistic schemes

Without knowing how your system works and the financial spend it is difficult to make suggestions.

There are many ways that the council could sensibly save money and in everyday life we comment on these things but it is difficult to bring them to mind at present.

As this survey is for housing it may be appropriate to mention the xxxxxxx, this was an old peoples' housing complex that has been empty for many years. I believe that this is owned by the council and could be turned into flats to house many people and provide income to the council. Alternatively it could be used as a council run nursing home; the cost of caring for old people is high and surely better spent contributing to council funds rather than a private care home business.