

Woodley Town Council Tax Precept - independently conducted by HM Research

Covid-19 Household Consultation Report

1. Introduction

Woodley Town Council is facing the likelihood of a financially challenging year in 2021/22. In 2020/21 the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the temporary reduction or closure of services and facilities run by the Council. This has caused a significant decrease in income, although furlough is being claimed, where appropriate. Costs have been reduced as a result of lockdowns and events that have not taken place and the Council only spending on essential or contractual costs as far as possible.

2. Purpose of Consultation

To continue to deliver services next year the council are considering an increase in the level of Town Council tax (the precept) in the 2021/22 financial year. In planning for this, Woodley Town Council conducted a consultation with all households in the town to gauge residents' responses for such an increase.

3. Method

The Consultation was carried out between 9th October and 16th November 2020.

A simple two question self-completion questionnaire distributed to all 10755 households in Woodley (see below). Response was by post using a freepost return card or online via the Woodley Town Council Website. Although there was no invitation to do so, it was possible to write comments on the cards but not on the website survey.

Respondents were asked to select a preference from one of four levels of increase in precept. There was purposely no option for 'no increase' on the card that was distributed, nor on the website questionnaire.

Respondents were also asked for their postcode to help validate responses and allow for some simple analysis of response by locations within the town.

4. The Consultation Question

We have four options to increase the precept in 2021/22. This will be added to your Council Tax. Which one do you choose?

For a Band D house:	Amount of Increase per week per household	What this means, (Depending on how the Covid-19 situation develops)	Please tick one box to show your choice
Option A	£0.43p per week	We would have to reduce/close Town Council Services	
Option B	£0.65p per week	We would have to reduce some Town Council Services but could run some	
Option C	£0.87p per week	Some services may be reduced but we could run most services as they used to be	
Option D	£1.09 per week	Services could run as they used to be	

What is your Postcode? _____

5. Response Rate

There were 2384 responses; 22.17 % of Woodley households. 60% responded by post, 40% online. Of those replying by post, over a third opted to use a stamp on their freepost card to save the Council money.

In postal responses, 12 cards were returned with no preferred option or specific comments about options. These were removed from the statistical data, but any comments made have been included in this report. A further two online responses, were sent from postcodes in Woodley near Manchester. These were removed from the data, including the total response rate, as they seem to have been completed in error and were not local residents.

107 (7.64%) of card responses had handwritten comments asking for no increase even though this was not an option in the question. This is considered to be a large enough response to be noted in this report. The results in this report are therefore differentiated to show the outcome when only preferences for options A-D are analysed, and also when a request for no increase is included.

Table 1 Number of Responses by Type

	Number	% Response (Sample size 10755)	% of 2384 responses
All Responses	2384	22.17	100
*Valid responses Options A-D only	2265	21.06	95.01
*Valid responses including 'no increase'	2372	22.05	99.50

	Number	% of 10755 sample	% of 2372* valid responses
*Valid card responses	1412	13.13	59.3
Valid online responses	960	8.93	40.5

* 12 responses removed because no preferred option was given

6. Results

6.1 Preferred Options

For an example of a property in Band D for Council Tax The options given for a precept increase were:

Option A £0.43p per week

Option B £0.65p per week

Option C £0.87p per week

Option D £1.09 per week

20% of respondents option for the lowest level of increase – Option A.

23% preferred option C and 43% for option D, the highest level of increase. However, it is notable that the most comments were from people opting for the lowest level of increase or asking for no increase at all and saying that this would cause hardship.

When ‘no increase’ handwritten responses are excluded, there is little difference between postal and website responses. However, postal returns had an 8% lower response for Option A, which appears to be because of people asking for no increase instead.

Table 2 Preferred options

Option	Number of responses	% Response A-D only	% response Options A-D plus ‘no increase’
None	107	-	4.51
A	479	21.15	20.19
B	241	10.64	10.16
C	536	23.66	22.60
D	1009	44.55	42.54
Total	2384	100.00	100.00

Table 3 Preferred Option by Response Type

Option	Number of Online Responses	% Online responses	Number of Postal Responses	% postal response Options A-D only	% postal responses including no increase
None	-	-	107	-	7.58
A	236	24.58	243	18.62	17.21
B	96	10.00	145	11.11	10.27
C	205	21.35	331	25.36	23.44
D	423	44.06	586	44.90	41.50
Total	960	100.00	1305	100.00	100.00

Figure 1 Number of responses by preferred option and response method

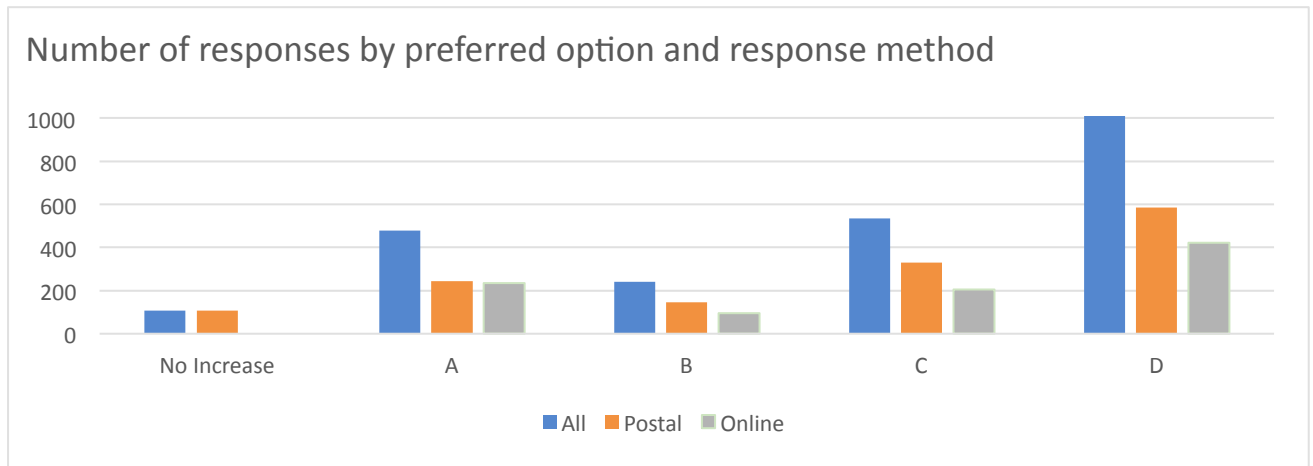
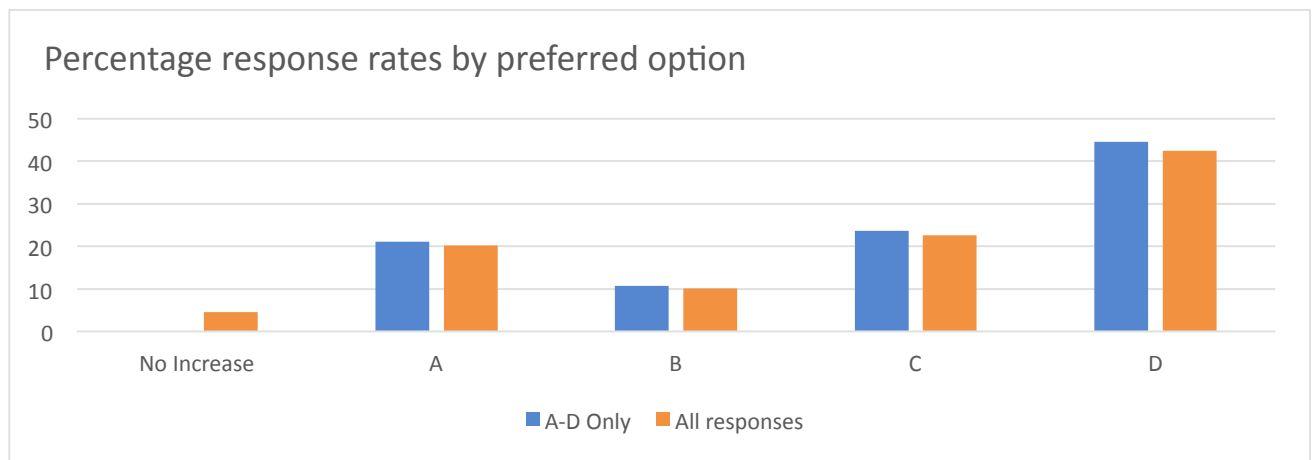


Figure 2 Percentage response by preferred option



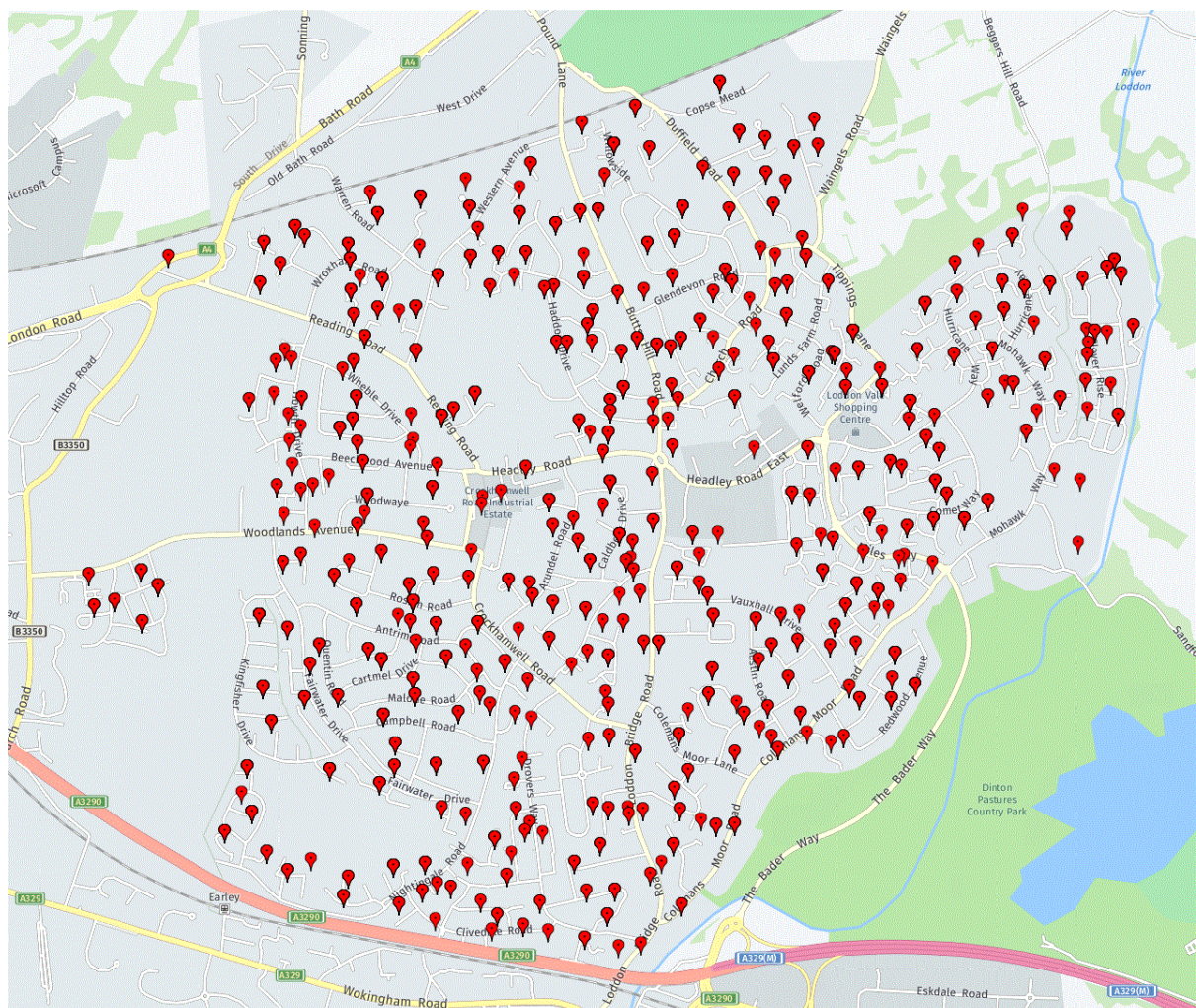
7. Geographical Analysis

Based on postcodes supplied, all parts of Woodley were well represented by responses with no area being omitted.

There were responses from almost all streets in the town. There does not appear to be a significant difference in response type depending on location.

The pattern responses received across the whole survey, and by response type are shown below. It should be noted that these diagrams show a centre point of every postcode from which at least one response was received rather the number of responses by postcode.

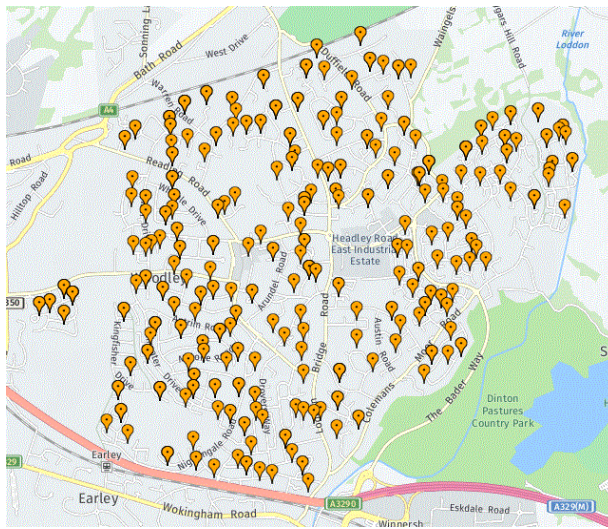
Figure 3 Responses by Postcode



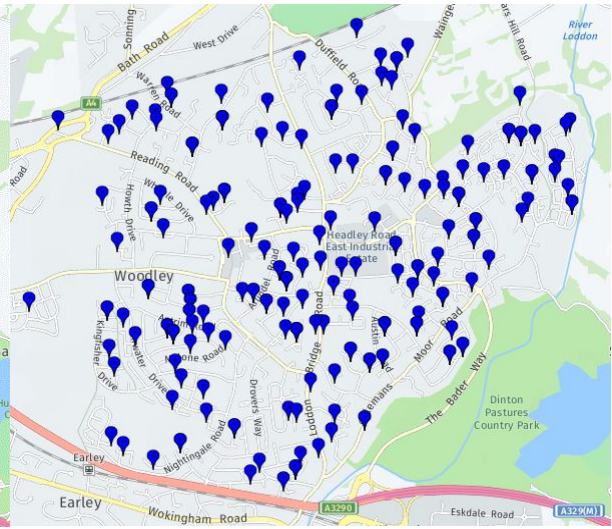
All Responses

Figure 4 Responses by postcode and preferred option

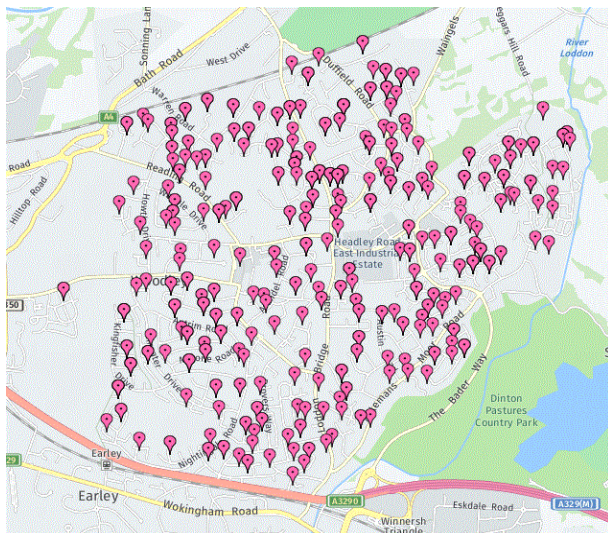
Option A



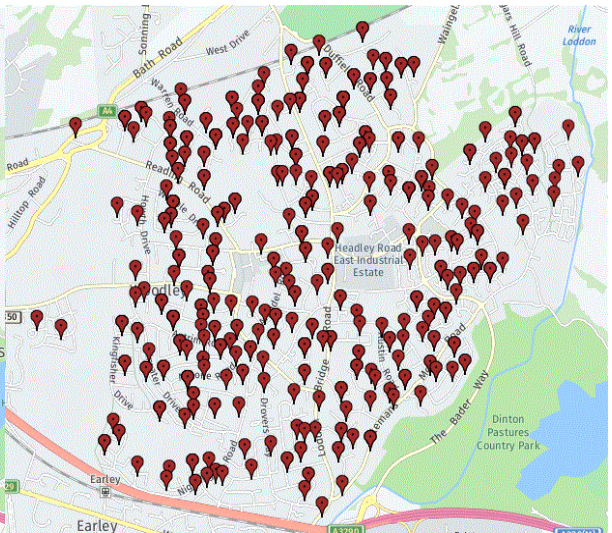
Option B



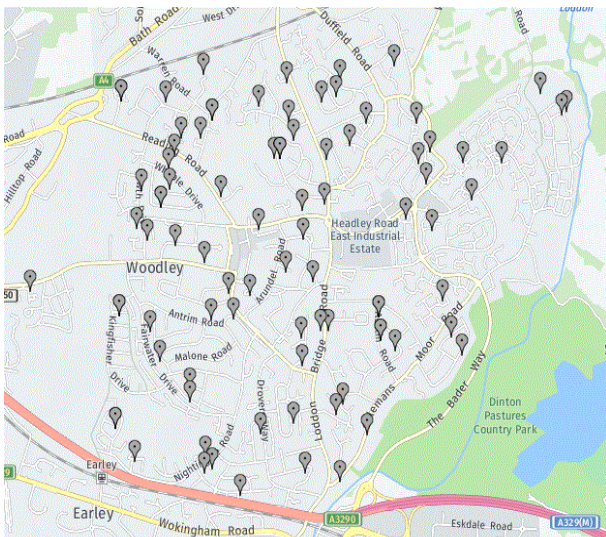
Option C



Option D



Request for No Increase



8. Comments Received

9. General

Comments were not specifically invited and were only possible on postal returns.

The most frequent comments came from those in difficult circumstances due to Covid-19 saying they cannot afford an increase in council tax. This was often due to reduced or no income, particularly where people have lost jobs. There was also disquiet at what some consider to be high council taxes already being increased in difficult times for all. The comments received can be summarised as follows:

[Circumstances caused by Covid-19 make it difficult or impossible to afford an increase in the precept:](#)

“Due to Covid and the associated financial pressures on families, the council should not increase council tax next year. 2021 remains uncertain and by increasing tax may put unnecessary stress/worry onto people.”

“Everyone has less income due to Covid and prices everywhere are increasing. If you increase it must be a minimum and you must adapt.”

[Requests and comments asking for no increase, or a reduction in precept:](#)

“I do not want any rise at all. My job was lost to Covid 19.”

“No increase. Like many people I lost my job during lockdown and do not have extra cash/ £0.00p per week.”

“We all face difficulties this year. I do not support any increase.”

[An increase in the precept would make things harder in already difficult times:](#)

“We are all going through cut-backs at this time, why make it worse by increasing council tax.”

“This is the wrong economic climate to ask households for more money.”

[The need for increase is accepted, but not happily:](#)

“Option A - under protest!”

“Option D - Not Happy!”

The increase should be during Covid only and reduced back afterwards.

“Call it the 'Covid precept' then when the pandemic is over/controlled it will be withdrawn.”

“When things return to 'normal' can I be assured you will reduce the precept needed or will there be further increases?”

“Will this be reduced once the income from facilities increased?”

The council should use reserves to pay for the losses incurred:

“Suggest you use your reserves at this difficult time. That is what they are for.”

Economies should be made to pay for the shortfall:

“The council should make changes to services so as to cut their budget.”

“Pay cuts for all.”

Council Tax has already increased a lot recently:

“None of the below. Overall Council tax has gone up about 20% over the last 4 years, well over a week's income for us.”

Council tax is too high already:

“We pay some of the highest council tax around and get very little for it.”

Respondents feeling they don't use the facilities, so should not have to pay for them:

“Can we have a refund as we do not use any local facilities?”

Wokingham Borough Council, should give a greater financial share to Woodley:

“I value the services provided by Woodley Town Council but feel this should be met by our huge contribution to Wokingham Council rates. I see most of our rates being spent to improve Wokingham and very little used to improve services in Woodley.”

“Woodley pays the highest council tax in Wokingham borough and as a resident I don't see that we get any benefit from that.”

“We pay the highest precept in Wokingham BC. Get our fair share back from them first!”

Ask central government for more money:

“Contact the government as other councils are successfully doing. Covid is not the fault of the community!”

9.2 Messages of support

There were also messages of hope and support, thanking the Town Council for its work and facilities, recognising that these are difficult times for all and seeing a precept increase as a way of protecting civic amenities. These comments showed that the services and facilities provided are valuable at a personal level as well as to the community:

“We 'protected the NHS' now protect our local civic amenities - please! We would also make a once off voluntary contribution of £50 if asked.”

“Good luck in the funding for Town Council Services or 2021/22. These are bad times for everybody.... I don't know what I would do without Woodford Park and the Woodley Town Council Amenities. Let's hope we beat this horrid Covid-19 in the coming months.”

9.3 Comments related to Wokingham Borough Council

Some comments showed a lack of understanding about the difference between services provided by Woodley Town Council and those that Wokingham Borough is responsible for such as:

- The cost of new recycling bags
- Streetlights – several suggestions that these should be turned on later/off sooner
- Roads need to be resurfaced (Reading Road)
- Issues with maintenance of paths and hedges
- Problems with litter.

“Maybe you should look at your staffing structure and how you actually spend our money. E.g. If you are wasting money on new recycling bags to keep cardboard dry saying the lorries need changing for the use of wheelie bins but that already decant our recycling into wheelie bins to load the lorry!!”

“Try switching streetlamps off 15 mins earlier.”