



# Great Aycliffe Town Council NEWSLETTER



15th March 2019

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## SUMMER EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY



The Town Council has some great events scheduled for the Summer together with local organisations and groups who have been awarded funding to assist with the cost of organising their events.

The following is a list of dates for the Summer events programme, however, there may be others added so check our website for up to date information ([www.great-aycliffe.gov.uk](http://www.great-aycliffe.gov.uk))



<b>BREAKFAST WITH THE EASTER BUNNY AND EGG HUNT</b>	Oakleaf Sports Complex	Sun 21st April Morning	£1 games and egg hunt or £3.50 to include breakfast
<b>MUSIC IN MAY - LIVE BAND 'SMOKIN' SPITFIRES'</b>	The County, Aycliffe Village organised by Acle Scouts	Sat 4th May 6.30pm - 11pm	Evening, £20 per person
<b>SKATE COMPETITION &amp; DEMONSTRATIONS</b>	Town Park	Sat 25th May 11am - 4pm	Free
<b>SENIOR CITIZENS EXCURSIONS</b>	Various	Mon 3rd June - Tues 9th July	Free
<b>LIVE MUSIC FESTIVAL</b>	Town Centre organised by Aycliffe Radio	Sat 8th & Sun 9th June 12 noon – 6pm	Free
<b>PARTY IN THE PARK - DURHAM BRASS FESTIVAL</b>	Town Park in conjunction with DCC	Sun 14th July Afternoon	Free
<b>FUN IN THE PARK</b>	Town Park	Wed 24th July	Free
<b>FUN IN THE PARK</b>	Oakleaf Sports Complex	Fri 26th July Animal Theme	Free
<b>FUN IN THE PARK</b>	Woodham Park	Wed 31st July Adventure Theme	Free
<b>FUN IN THE PARK</b>	St. Oswald's Park	Fri 2nd August Teddy Bears Picnic	Free
<b>FUN IN THE PARK</b>	Moore Lane Park	Wed 7th August Circus Theme	Free
<b>FUN IN THE PARK</b>	Horndale Park	Fri 9th August Paw Patrol Theme	Free
<b>FUN IN THE PARK</b>	Aycliffe Village Park	Wed 14th August Disney Theme	Free
<b>FUN IN THE PARK</b>	Simpasture Park	Fri 16th August	Free



## Senior Citizens Excursions



The 'Trips' will commence on Monday 3rd June, 2019. To be eligible you **MUST** be a resident of the Electoral Parish and 60 years of age before the 1st April in the year of travel.

The application forms and full itineraries will be available from Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre, the Library, Council Offices, Oakleaf Sports and Golf Complexes and our website from **9.00 am on Wednesday 24th April**.

Venues for 2019 will be Scarborough, Berwick, South Shields, Keswick, Blackpool and Alnwick.

Just choose your venue and date of travel (from the schedule) and we provide a three-course meal with tea or coffee in

a good quality establishment. On most of the excursions we also have a comfort stop on the outward and/or return journeys.

Transport is by executive coach with toilet facilities. Some coaches have a wheelchair hoist to enable people with mobility problems to get onto the coach without using the steps at the front, or to enable wheelchair users to remain in their chair whilst travelling.

If you have a query regarding your entitlement to book an excursion, please telephone 01325 300700.



# Great Aycliffe Town Council 2019/20 Budget and Council Tax Setting Update

## Introduction

The Town Council has recently met to agree its Revenue and Capital Budget and set the Precept and Council Tax increase for the forthcoming 2019/20 financial year.

We appreciate that the budget that we set is important to our local community, both in terms of how our spending plans impact on the provision of services and investment in assets for the benefit of our town, and also in how the budget affects the level of council tax that local householders pay.

We are aware that the proposal to increase the Town Council element of the Council Tax bill by 5% this year has created a lot of interest, comments and debate in the local community, particularly on social media, in recent weeks.

The purpose of this newsletter article is to provide some background information around the budget setting process and the reasoning behind the 5% increase in the council tax, whilst also providing some factual information around the council tax system and the Council's financial situation, in response to some of the comments made on social media.

## Current Financial Situation

The Council's is currently in a relatively strong financial situation with continued delivery of savings on the Revenue Budget in the current financial year, capital investment in pursuit of the delivery of the Council's Asset Management Plan, tax base growth from new housing development, and healthy levels of balances and reserves.

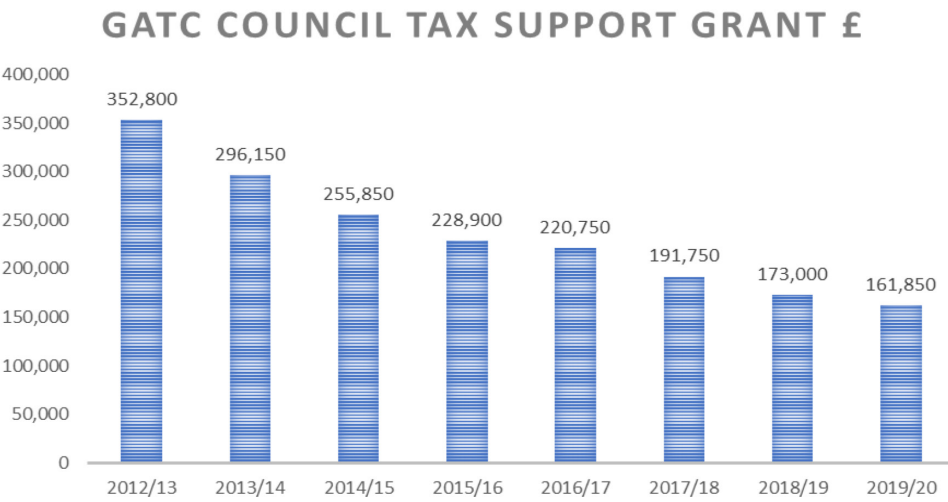
This healthy financial situation has been made possible by the careful management of the Council's finances over an extended period by Council Members and officers, underpinned by strong budgetary control, proactive financial planning, delivery of year on year efficiency savings, effective procurement and asset management, and the generation of additional income.

However, the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan highlights that the Council is facing an increasingly challenging future and as such must ensure that it prudently plans ahead for the difficulties that it will face in the coming years.

## Future Financial Challenges Faced

### Council Tax Support Grant Funding Cuts

The Council is suffering year on year cuts to the Council Tax Support Grant on which it is reliant. The cuts to this funding since 2012/13 are highlighted in the graph below:-



This funding is linked to the government's grant allocation for local government and current indications suggest the grant will be cut by a further £50,000 or 30% over the next four years.

## Increases in Staffing Costs

The Council faces significant increases in its staffing costs over the medium term linked to rises in the National Living Wage and the proportionately higher pay increases for lower paid staff implemented by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services via the Local Government Pay Agreement.

The latest local government pay agreement implements a minimum local government pay rate of £9.00 per hour, with annual increases of up to 6% for lower paid staff, and 2% for all other staff. The Council employs a high proportion of staff in the lower pay grades, and the pay award for 2019/20 will amount to a year on year increase in the Council's staffing costs of 4%.

On top of this, the Council has also needed to undertake a review of the lower end of its staff grading structure to deal with the significant erosion of differentials between jobs with varying levels of responsibility, caused by the above issues.

The ongoing increases in the National Living Wage and proportionately higher annual pay awards for low paid staff are likely to be an ongoing budget pressure for the Council in future years.

## Other Revenue Budget Pressures

The Council faces a number of other budget pressures including future pension contribution increases, inflation on running costs, possible pressure to take on services from Durham County Council and increasing requests for financial assistance from community organisations.

## Government Limit on Town Council Tax Increases

The financing of these funding cuts and spending pressures is made more difficult by the fact that the Council could be made subject to a Government limit in terms of how much it can increase the council tax without being required to hold a public referendum from 2021/22 onwards.

## Future Capital Investment Commitments

Another major financial challenge identified in the Medium-Term Financial Plan is the fact that the Council has potentially substantial capital investment commitments over the next five years of more than £1 million, whilst longer term commitments over the ten-year period of the Council's Asset Management Plan total more than £2 million.

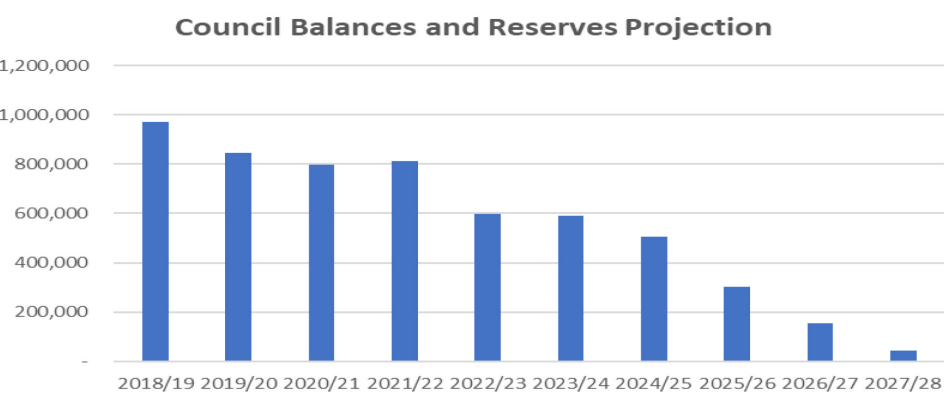


These capital investment commitments relate to essential investment in Council and community assets such as buildings, works vehicles and machinery, parks and play areas, office equipment and street equipment

The funding of this capital investment and ensuring that sufficient balances and reserves are available over the longer term is a key budget challenge facing the Council.

## Forecast Fall in the Council's Balances and Reserves

The funding of this capital investment presents a risk that Council balances and reserves will fall significantly and could even run out by the end of the next decade, if they cannot be replenished by Revenue Budget savings, capital receipts or council tax base growth.



The issue of how to ensure the replenishment of the Council's earmarked capital reserves is one of the major challenges that needed to be addressed by the Medium-Term Financial Plan and was therefore a key consideration in the setting of the 2019/20 Revenue and Capital Budget.

A major part of the reason for implementing a 5% increase in the town council proportion of the council tax bill was to put in place an annual contribution to capital reserves to facilitate the replenishment of the Council's balances. If the Council had not taken this action it is likely that its balances and reserves would have run out within five years.

## The Council's 2019/20 Revenue and Capital Budget

The 2019/20 Revenue Budget was prepared on the principle of protecting and maintaining all current services, facilities and events next year.

The setting of the 2019/20 Revenue and Capital Budget also needed to recognise the longer-term budget pressures faced and the need to maintain contingency resources, whilst addressing the key risk identified in the Medium-Term Financial Plan relating to the forecast reduction in the level of the Council's balances and reserves and ensuring the replenishment of those balances moving forward.

As a result, the Council agreed to set its 2019/20 Net Revenue Budget, as represented by the Precept at £1,661,050, an increase of £90,050 or 5.7%.

Full details of the Council's 2019/20 Revenue and Capital Budget, including the background to the budget setting and key increases and decreases, can be viewed on the finance section of the Council website.



# 2019/20 Council Tax Increase

The Town Council proportion of the overall Council Tax bill is calculated using the Council Tax Base for the Parish. This is a statutory calculation of the total number of chargeable properties in the area for council tax purposes and is calculated by Durham County Council as the council tax billing authority.

The Tax Base calculation takes the total number of properties in the Parish and adjusts this to reflect property values in the area, as well as the number of households in receipt of council tax benefits, exemptions and discounts, and the council tax collection rate achieved by the County Council.

The Precept divided by the Tax Base provides the Band D Council Tax figure.

Durham County Council notified the Council that the Council Tax Base for 2019/20 has increased by 48 properties from 6,743 to 6,791, driven by new housing development in the Parish.

**The 2019/20 Council Precept of £1,661,050 divided by the 2019/20 Tax Base of 6,791 results in a 2019/20 Band D Town Council Tax of £244.59 per year.**

**This represents an increase of £11.62 per year or 97p a month on the 2019/20 Band D Council Tax.**

However, it is important to note that around six out of every ten of the properties in Great Aycliffe fall within Council Tax Band A and therefore pay only two thirds of the Band D Council Tax.

**The 2019/20 Band A Council Tax is £163.06 per year which equates to around £14 per month or £3 per week. This is an increase of £7.75 per year or 65p per month.**

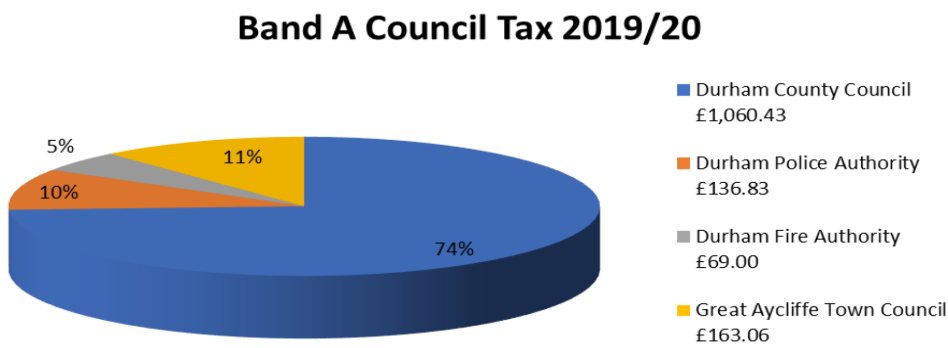
The Council appreciates that any increase in the monthly outgoings of our local taxpayers will not be popular, and the decision to increase the Town Council Tax has not been taken lightly.

**However, we hope you will agree that a monthly increase of 65p is a modest price to pay to ensure that all of the important services provided by the Town Council to the community of Great Aycliffe can be protected for another year, whilst ensuring that a sufficient level of contingency sum and replenishment of council balances is maintained to help steer the Council through the difficult times that lie ahead.**

We feel it is important to clarify that the Town Council makes up only a small part of the total Council Tax bill that we all pay.

A breakdown of the 2019/20 Council Tax is shown below demonstrating that 11p in every £1 of the total Council Tax comes to the Town Council.

Of the remaining 89p in every £1, 74p funds Durham County Council, 10p funds the Police and 5p funds the Fire Service.



It is also important to point out that over the last ten years, the Council has kept the increase in the Town Council Tax well below the rate of inflation with an average increase over the period of 1.75% including not increasing the Council Tax for four years between 2010 and 2013, as shown in the table below:-

Year	Band D	Increase	% Rise	Band A	Increase	% Rise
2010/11	£205.81	-£0.31	-0.15%	£137.21	-£0.21	-0.15%
2011/12	£204.10	-£1.71	-0.83%	£136.06	-£1.15	-0.83%
2012/13	£204.10	£0.00	0.00%	£136.06	£0.00	0.00%
2013/14	£204.10	£0.00	0.00%	£136.06	£0.00	0.00%
2014/15	£209.18	£5.08	2.49%	£139.45	£3.39	2.49%
2015/16	£213.32	£4.14	1.98%	£142.21	£2.76	1.98%
2016/17	£217.57	£4.25	1.99%	£145.04	£2.83	1.99%
2017/18	£221.89	£4.32	1.99%	£147.93	£2.89	1.99%
2018/19	£232.97	£11.08	4.99%	£155.31	£7.38	4.99%
2019/20	£244.59	£11.62	4.99%	£163.06	£7.75	4.99%
Total Increase		£38.47	17.45%		£25.64	17.45%
Average per Year		£3.85	1.75%		£2.56	1.75%

# National Council Tax System

It is also important to clarify how the national Council Tax system works and how this system disadvantages councils in the North of England.

Council tax is calculated based on property values, via a calculation known as the Tax Base. As highlighted earlier, the Tax Base calculation reflects a number of factors including the number of properties in the Parish, the value of those properties, numbers of empty properties, single person households and the number of households in receipt of council tax benefits or reductions.

The higher the property values in an area and the lower the incidence of empty properties and council tax benefits, the higher the Council Tax Base will be.

The opposite is true in less affluent areas.

For example, in Great Aycliffe there are more than 12,000 properties, but our Tax Base is less than 7,000. This is because a high proportion of those properties are low value and in receipt of Council Tax Benefits.

There is therefore a clear advantage in the council tax system for council’s in more affluent areas.

In simple terms the higher the Council Tax Base is, the lower the council tax needs to be set. A lower Tax Base results in council tax needing to be set at a higher level.

Another important factor to note is that the Council Tax that must be statutorily reported is the Valuation Band D figure.

This is the reason why council tax bills appear to be higher in the North East and why Great Aycliffe Town Council’s Council Tax appears high in comparison to Council’s elsewhere in the county and country.

This is because 6 in 10 households in our Parish are currently valued in Council Tax Band A, with nearly 9 out of 10 households in Valuation Bands A to C.

The actual council tax paid by most households in Great Aycliffe is therefore much less than the widely reported Band D figure.

Conversely, most households in more affluent areas such as Sedgefield and City of Durham, are in the higher council tax valuation bands and therefore pay much more than the Band D figure.

Making comparisons based on the Band D figure can therefore be very misleading.

# Council Services and Subsidies

We also feel it is important to clarify that all Town Council services are run at a net cost to the council tax payer.

This is not uncommon in the public sector as Council’s tend to provide the services that the private sector will not provide i.e. those that do not make a profit, and are more likely to provide services free or at a subsidised cost e.g. parks, events etc.

Whilst for example the golf and sports complex are both run at a deficit to the local taxpayer, the same is true of every other service that the Council provides e.g. pre-schools, cemeteries, allotments, and events.

In fact, some of the services provided by the Council do not actually generate any income at all e.g. flower beds, the environment, parks and play areas.

# How to Get Involved and Hold the Council to Account

Whilst we do monitor the local press and social media, the Council can only respond formally to issues raised directly with it.

There are many ways to do this including telephoning, emailing or private messaging the Council via social media to raise an issue or concern, contacting your local Town Councillor, or attending a meeting of the Council and submitting a formal question via the Public Questions Section of the Agenda.

If an issue is not dealt with to your satisfaction the Council also has a formal Comments and Complaints Procedure.

# Transparency and Publishing of Information

The Council prides itself on its data transparency arrangements and goes over and above the statutory requirements for publishing information.

The agendas, minutes and supporting reports for all meetings are published on the Council website, as well as contact details for all members and officers, details of Council land and property, news, performance information, plans and targets.

There are specific pages for each service provided and a dedicated finance section under which all budgets, accounts, financial plans and policies, fees and charges, spending and income records, payments over £500, senior officer pay, procurement information, members’ allowances, and staffing structures are published.

The Council is also increasing the amount of information and news published on social media such as Facebook and Twitter, so please do ‘like’ or ‘follow’ us.





[www.great-aycliffe.gov.uk](http://www.great-aycliffe.gov.uk)

Sports Complex

School Aycliffe Lane  
Newton Aycliffe  
Co Durham  
DL5 6QZ  
Tel no 01325 300600



## MOTHER'S DAY LUNCH

Sunday 31st March

Served in the Function room between 12noon & 2pm

2 Course Carvery

£9.50 per adult - £6.50 per child (under 12's)

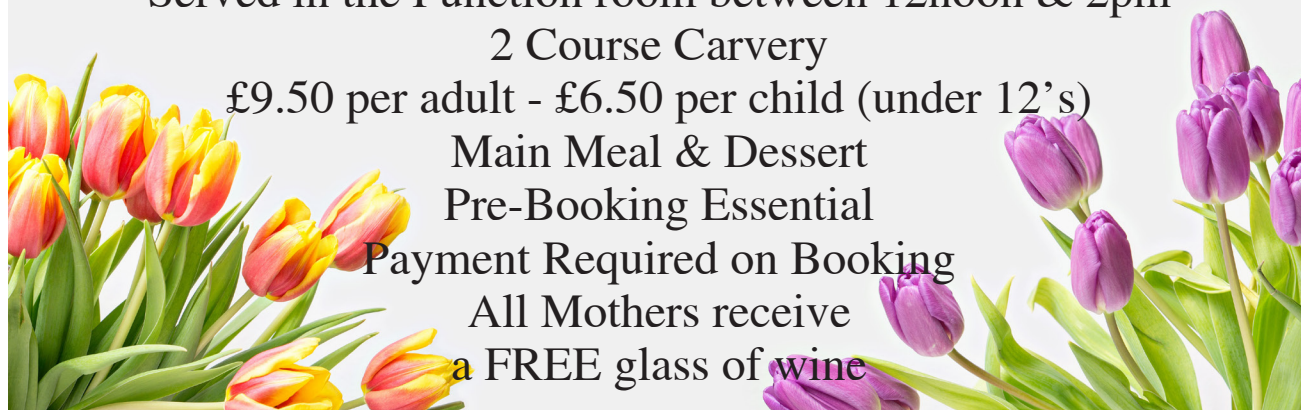
Main Meal & Dessert


Pre-Booking Essential

Payment Required on Booking


All Mothers receive

a FREE glass of wine





ACOUSTIC



LOOKING FOR  
MUSICIANS, COMEDIANS,  
AND POETS TO PERFORM ON:

**THURSDAY 4TH APRIL**

HAVE YOU GOT WHAT IT TAKES?

TO BOOK A FREE SLOT  
CALL: 01325 300600  
LIMITED SLOTS AVAILABLE  
BOOKING DEADLINE 1ST APRIL  
**NO** ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT IS ALLOWED

## Breakfast with the Easter Bunny

Sunday 21st April

Breakfast with the Easter Bunny plus Egg Hunt

10am - 12noon

£3.50 per child

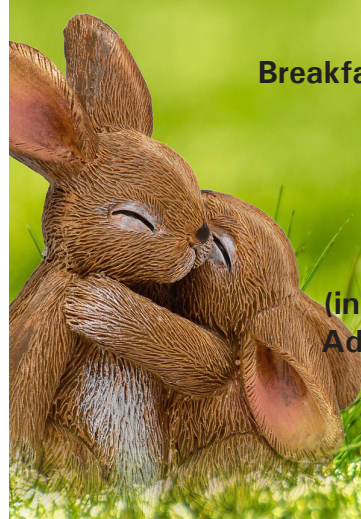
OR just come to our Egg Hunt

from 11am until 12noon

for £1 per child

(includes small gift from the Easter Bunny)

Adults may also purchase breakfast for £5



## BOWLS

### DROP IN SESSION

Starting Wednesday 1st May, 6.30pm - 8.30pm  
for 10 weeks

Never played before? Well, why not come along and give it a go! A great way to meet new people.

**BEGINNERS ONLY - £1 per week**

Just bring your own carpet slippers or bowling shoes, but don't worry if you don't have any, we have all the equipment needed.

Meals, snacks and hot drinks available from the bar.



## Special Offer

Play between 1pm and 5pm Monday to Friday  
£10 per round (adult) & £7.50 per round (concessions)

**Golf  
Memberships  
Unlimited  
'til 31 March 2020**

18-hole course, floodlit driving range, buggy hire,  
changing facilities & shop. Coaching from PGA Pro Ralph Givens.  
Bar and catering available at the Oakleaf Sports Complex.

Adult 7 day	£385	*19 - 24	£125
Adult 5 day	£340	Junior 15 -18	£50
Over 60 - 7 Day	£340	Junior (14 & under)	Free
Over 60 - 5 Day	£290	*In Full Time Education	

Visiting Party  
Package  
Available

Driving Range  
£2.50 small  
£4.50 large

Green Fees  
Mon - Fri £13  
Weekends £16

Tel: 01325 310820 or see [www.great-aycliffe.gov.uk](http://www.great-aycliffe.gov.uk) for further details

## PRE-SCHOOLS - VACANCIES

Please note that we currently have spaces available in our 'Tots in the Park' facility. We accept golden tickets, which entitle children up to 15 hours free childcare and in our pre-school room children can access both the 15/30 hour entitlement. Further information



or to arrange a viewing of our facilities please contact Julie Gale (Pre-School Manager) on 07968 379 009.

