

Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee

10 March 2026



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	Allotments - Fees & Charges Consultation
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Emma Gee, Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services
Report author	Graeme Rasdall-Lawes, Neighbourhood Services Manager
Lead Councillor	Councillor Karen Rowland, Lead Councillor for Environmental Services & Community Safety
Council priority	Deliver a sustainable & healthy environment & reduce Reading's carbon footprint
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the Committee note the findings of the 2025 Allotment Survey, as summarised in Section 3 and detailed in Appendix 1.2. That the Committee approve the proposed Allotment Fees Pricing Structure set out in Section 3.29, to be implemented from April 2027 following the statutory 12-month notice period.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report informs the Committee of the findings from the allotment fee consultation with plot holders, as outlined in Section 3 and detailed in Appendix 1. The consultation reflects a highly engaged community, with concerns about affordability balanced by acknowledgement that the service must move towards financial sustainability.
- 1.2 The report also seeks approval of the proposed allotment fees pricing structure set out in Section 3.29, designed to secure the long-term viability of the service while maintaining fairness through the continued use of concessionary discounts.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 The Council's approved Corporate Plan sets out its priorities for Reading and provides strategic direction for staff in delivering services that meet the needs of communities across the Borough, while operating within the agreed budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 2.2 The Allotment Service must ensure the most effective use of resources in delivering a high-quality, best-value public service, supporting the Council's aim of maintaining sustainable finances over the medium and longer term.
- 2.3 Reading Borough Council administers 20 allotment sites across the Borough, comprising more than 1,600 worked plots across 41.5 hectares of land.
- 2.4 Under Section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, the Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient allotments for residents who wish to cultivate and harvest produce.

2.5 This proposal seeks to deliver a balanced and affordable budget that supports the long-term sustainability of the Council’s finances. The Council’s Vision underpins the Strategy: “to ensure that Reading realises its potential and that everyone who lives and works in Reading can share in the benefits of its success”.

2.6 In the context of the declared climate emergency and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, allotments remain an important, cost-effective, local and sustainable food source for residents, and their continued provision and use should be supported.

3. The Proposal

Background

3.1 The Council manages 20 allotment sites across the Borough, comprising more than 1,600 worked plots over 41.5 hectares of land. Half of these are Statutory sites and therefore benefit from a degree of protection under the Allotments Act 1925. The remaining ‘Temporary’ sites have no long-term security beyond the requirements of the planning system.

3.2 Section 10(1) of the Allotments Act 1950 establishes two key principles:

- Councils must set rents that reflect what a tenant might reasonably be expected to pay for comparable land used in a similar way.
- Councils may charge a lower rent where justified by individual circumstances, such as financial hardship or disability.

The legislation places no obligation on councils to subsidise allotments.

3.3 In recent years, the Council has streamlined the allotment fee structure and applied incremental fee increases. These changes were reported to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee (6 July 2023) and the Policy Committee (11 March 2024). Twelve months’ notice was issued to implement the revised fees from April 2025. Despite these adjustments, a significant subsidy from Council taxpayers remains necessary.

3.4 For the financial year ending 31 March 2026, allotment rental income was projected at approximately £66,193, against an estimated annual service cost of £167,598.

3.5 For the 2026/27 financial year, allotment fees will increase by 3.25% in line with inflation.

The table below sets out the 2025/26 rent matrix for plots of 125sqm

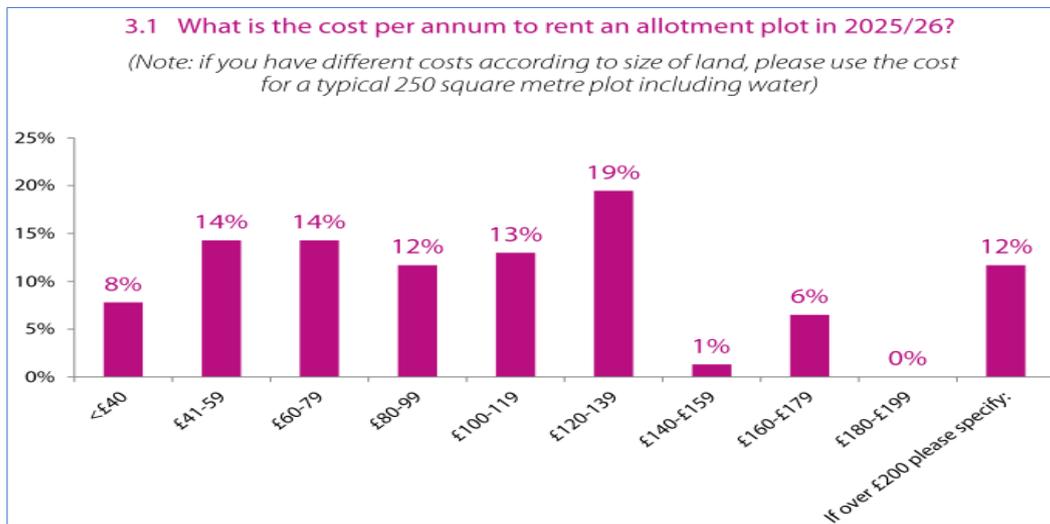
Site Category	Full Fee	40% Discounted Rate
A Water supply across site	£54/year £1.04/week	£32.50/year £0.63/week
B Water supplied on site but may be a distance from the plot	£39.00/year £0.75/week	£23.50/year £0.45/week
C No water supply	£27/year £0.52/week	£16.50/year £0.32week

APSE State of the Market Commentary

3.6 Each year, the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) conducts a survey of local authority allotment services, providing insight into sector trends, operational

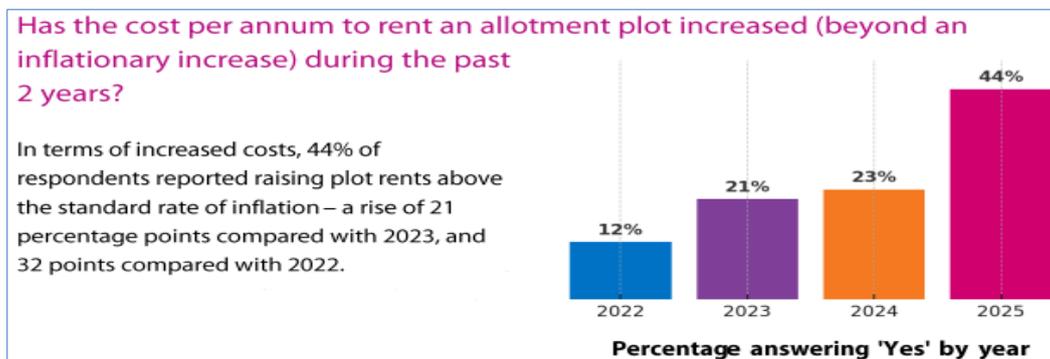
challenges and emerging best practice (Appendix 2). The 2025 survey, undertaken between June and August, highlights the increasing financial pressures faced by councils and the range of strategies being adopted nationally to improve cost recovery and long-term service sustainability.

- 3.7 48% reported that they charge less than £100 p.a. in rent for a 250m² plot (inc water). 19% charge over £140 with the bulk of those councils located in urban areas.



- 3.8 Over 63% of councils reported that they continue to subsidise allotment services, despite efforts to move towards full cost recovery. A further 56% indicated that they had not increased annual charges beyond inflation during the past two years. Among those authorities that had applied increases above inflation, 65% still reported that their allotment service remained subsidised.

- 3.9 44% of respondents reported raising plot rents above the standard rate of inflation. The overall trend suggests a sector-wide move towards reducing subsidies and, where possible, achieving at least cost-neutral provision.



- 3.10 Nearly half of responding authorities reported plans to introduce further incremental rent increases over the next two years, reflecting the ongoing financial pressures facing local government and the need to align charges with budgetary requirements.
- 3.11 Concessionary discounts remain widely available, with 60% of councils maintaining reduced rates for eligible groups. However, several authorities indicated that these schemes are under review to ensure long-term financial sustainability.
- 3.12 In addition, 42% of councils have introduced or expanded charges for ancillary services, including water supply and site improvements.
- 3.13 Taken together, these findings highlight the continuing challenge for local authorities in balancing affordability for residents with the need to ensure the financial viability of allotment services.

Allotment Survey – Winter 2025

3.14 The consultation sought responses from all plot holders, the questionnaire covered the following categories:

- Allotment usage
- Fees and the impact on plot holders
- Policy opinions
- Allotment benefits
- Management preferences

The consultation and implementation timeline for the revised fee schedule is set out in the table below.

7 th November 2025	Start 6-week consultation phase.
19 th December 2025	Conclusion of 6-week consultation.
22 nd December 2025	Analysis and weighing up commences.
16 th January 2026	Outcomes and proposals for final preferred rent/discount model are collated.
10 th March 2026	Report provided to HNL advising of consultation outcome and proposal.
Prior to 1 st April 2026	The Council gives all tenants 12 months written notice of changes to rent.
1 st April 2027	New rents and discounts can be implemented.

3.15 A total of 226 individuals participated in the consultation, either through the online survey or by completing a paper version. Responses were received from all 20 allotment sites across the Borough, ensuring broad and comprehensive representation. Throughout the consultation period, participants were supported by site representatives and the Allotments Team, who were available to facilitate engagement and respond to any queries.

3.16 65.5% of respondents have held a plot for 4+ years (38.5% for 10+ years), and usage is very frequent: 95.6% visit weekly or more (55.8% several times a week, 32.7% weekly, 7.1% daily). This indicates a mature, committed community with strong utilisation of sites.

3.17 A consultation on proposed changes to allotment rents and concessions was undertaken between 7 November to the 19 December, with 226 responses received from plot holders across all 20 allotment sites. This represents strong engagement from a well-established and active allotment community. The full survey results, including detailed data tables and analysis, are provided in Appendix 1.

Views on Rent Increases and Affordability

3.18 Feedback on the proposed rent increases was mixed, with respondents evenly split between supporting and opposing an increase, with a significant proportion unsure, 39.4% Agreed, 38.9% Disagreed and 21.7% were unsure, as shown in Appendix 1 (Section B). Affordability concerns were a recurring theme, particularly for those on low or fixed incomes. However, many respondents also acknowledged the need for the service to be financially sustainable and less reliant on Council subsidy.

- 3.19 A majority indicated they were unlikely to give up their plot if the increases were implemented, though around a quarter said they might be forced to do so. This highlights the importance of maintaining concessionary support for vulnerable groups.

Concessions, Plot Policy and Site Management

- 3.20 Support for retaining the 40% concessionary discount was strong (68.6%), with most respondents viewing it as appropriate (Appendix 1, Section B). 61.9% of respondents also supported limiting concessionary rates to one plot per household. Views on broader plot allocation policies such as limiting households to one plot or encouraging smaller plots to reduce waiting lists were more divided, indicating no clear consensus.

Perceived Benefits of Allotments

- 3.21 Respondents identified a wide range of benefits associated with allotment use, including physical and mental wellbeing, access to fresh produce, community cohesion, biodiversity, and opportunities for learning (Appendix 1, Section B). Nearly 91% rated their allotment as important or very important to their wellbeing, reinforcing the wider social and environmental value of allotments beyond their financial cost.

Alternative Approaches Suggested

- 3.22 A substantial number of respondents proposed alternatives to a significant rent increase (Appendix 1, Section B). Common suggestions included improving plot occupancy and enforcement, reducing water costs, expanding self-management, increasing transparency on service costs, and exploring grants or sponsorship. Officers will assess how these measures, whether implemented individually or in combination, can potentially be applied to minimise the impact on future plot holder's fees.

Conclusions and Overall Analysis

- 3.23 The consultation highlights a community that is both deeply invested in its allotments and concerned about the impact of rising costs. Many respondents expressed understandable worries about affordability and favoured phased or modest increases. However, the feedback also shows clear recognition that the allotment service must be financially sustainable and cannot continue to rely on ongoing Council subsidy. Several respondents noted that, even with a significant increase, allotments remain comparatively good value when set against other leisure activities, and that more realistic rents could help improve plot turnover and reduce waiting lists.
- 3.24 Since the consultation began, the Allotments Team has observed a marked rise in applications for concessionary discounts. This trend reinforces the importance of maintaining a robust concession system to protect vulnerable groups and ensure continued access for residents on low or fixed incomes.
- 3.25 Alternative approaches were considered, including applying annual inflationary increases in line with CPI. While this option would have been more popular with many plot holders and avoided a single sharp rise, it would not address the existing structural subsidy within the service. Incremental inflation-only adjustments would prolong the financial deficit, restrict investment in site maintenance and improvements, and delay progress towards the Council's objective of reducing reliance on subsidy.
- 3.26 The proposed increase is therefore intended to ensure the long-term sustainability of the allotment service and maintain its ability to deliver essential benefits for residents. It provides a clear and proportionate correction to the current funding imbalance, while retaining the 40% concessionary discount to ensure support remains targeted at those most in need, including pensioners, people with disabilities, and those in receipt of benefits.

3.27 Taken together, the survey findings and financial analysis demonstrate the need for a balanced approach that secures the future of the service, protects vulnerable households, and maintains the health, wellbeing and environmental benefits that allotments provide for the Borough.

Proposed fee charges for financial year 2027/28

3.28 The table below sets out the proposed rent matrix for plots of 125sqm from April 2027.

Site Category	Full Fee	40% Discounted Rate
A Water supply across site	£111.50/year £2.14/week	£67/year £1.29/week
B Water supplied on site but may be a distance from the plot	£80.50/year £1.55/week	£48.50/year £0.93/week
C No water supply	£56.00/year £1.08/week	£34/year £0.65week

3.29 The survey and detailed analysis are shown in Appendix 1.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1 The Allotment services contribute to the Council's 2025-2028 Council Plan themes around:

- **Promote more equal communities in Reading** – The allotment fees pricing structure supports fairness and inclusion by maintaining concessionary discounts while ensuring the long-term viability of the service. This approach helps keep allotments accessible to residents on lower incomes and promotes more equal participation across the borough.
- **Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce Reading's carbon footprint** – By effective management of allotment sites including improved maintenance, responsible waste management, and enhanced biodiversity supports the borough's environmental goals and contributes to Reading's net zero ambitions. Allotments also provide residents with a local, low carbon, and cost-effective source of fresh food, reducing reliance on commercially transported produce.
- **Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children** – the allotments play a vital role in supporting the health and wellbeing of adults and children by providing access to green spaces for physical activity and stress relief, opportunities to grow fresh produce for healthier diets, and fostering social inclusion and intergenerational engagement. Allotments also provide educational opportunities for children, helping to build environmental awareness and lifelong healthy habits.
- **Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future** – reducing the current subsidy for the allotment service strengthens financial sustainability and resilience in line with the Council's Financial Strategy. A more balanced funding model ensures the service can continue to operate effectively while reducing pressure on the Council's wider budget.

4.2 This decision will help improve the quality of life for Reading residents by ensuring that allotments remain a well-managed and sustainable resource for the future. By generating income to maintain sites, address waste issues and enhance biodiversity, the service contributes to a cleaner, greener town and supports the Borough's climate commitments.

- 4.3 Allotments provide valuable access to outdoor space for exercise, relaxation and the growing of fresh food, offering recognised physical and mental health benefits for adults and children. They also create opportunities for learning about nature, food production and healthy eating, with positive impacts that can last throughout life.
- 4.4 Keeping the service financially sustainable enables the Council to continue providing allotments without relying heavily on subsidies, thereby freeing up resources for other priority services. Retaining discounts for residents on low incomes ensures that allotments remain accessible to all, helping to reduce inequality and support fairer, more inclusive communities. Allotments also contribute to Reading's cultural and social fabric by bringing people together, fostering community cohesion and supporting long-standing local traditions.
- 4.5 The introduction of Abavus software in 2026 will significantly enhance the organisation and administration of allotments. The system will give plot holders direct access to their accounts, enabling streamlined communication, simplified invoicing and real-time updates on plot status. This move represents a major step forward in modernising processes and improving operational efficiency, delivering a better experience for both plot holders and service administrators.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 The proposals have no direct or immediate sustainable development impacts. However, the Survey provides an important starting point for the development of future waste-minimisation and environmentally focused policies. It is anticipated that this work will extend beyond waste-related issues to include measures on water conservation, herbicide and pesticide use, the management of bonfires, and actions to enhance biodiversity across allotment sites.

6. Community Engagement and Information

- 6.1 The Allotment Survey on rents and discounts was not a statutory requirement, but it was considered good practice and an important opportunity to ensure plot holders were fully informed about the challenges of running an allotment service during a period of significant financial constraint. The volume and breadth of feedback received has been central to shaping the proposals set out in this paper.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1 The survey was primarily conducted online and via email, with hard-copy forms provided for those without digital access. Site volunteers distributed additional paper forms to fellow plot holders and supported individuals who required assistance in completing them. While the proposals set out in this report may impact low-income households, there is no evidence of differential impact on people with any specific protected characteristic. The survey did not include questions relating to protected characteristics.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 There are no other relevant issues to report.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1 Rights and responsibilities relating to the provision of allotments are defined in the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908.
- 9.2 The provision of allotments is a statutory service. Under Section 23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, councils have a duty to provide a sufficient number of allotments for residents who wish to cultivate and harvest produce.
- 9.3 The Allotments Act 1922 introduced security of tenure for plot holders, ensuring they cannot be easily evicted and establishing minimum notice periods and compensation arrangements for tenants.

- 9.4 Section 10(1) of the Allotments Act 1950 sets out two key principles for rent setting:
- rents must reflect what a tenant might reasonably be expected to pay for comparable land used in a similar way; and
 - councils may charge a lower rent were justified by individual circumstances, such as financial hardship or disability.
- 9.5 Relevant case law provides further guidance on rent setting. The High Court has confirmed that councils are under no obligation to subsidise allotments and that rent increases are lawful where they are proportionate and reasonable, including where they are intended to recover a greater share of service costs. Case law also establishes the requirement to give tenants at least 12 months' notice of any proposed rent increase and emphasises the importance of consultation, including early and ongoing engagement with tenants.
- 9.6 Collectively, these legislative provisions ensure that councils meet their responsibilities to provide allotments while safeguarding the rights and protections afforded to tenant.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1 The financial implications arising from the proposals set out in this report are set out below:

This table sets out the revenue implications:

Running Costs	2025/6	2026/7	2027/8
	£000	£000	£000
Expenditure	£168,000	£173,460	£179,100
Income from: fees and charges	-£67,000	-£69,177	-£132,000
Total income	-£67,000	-£69,177	-£132,000
Net Cost (+) /Saving (-)	£101,000	£104,280	£47,100

NOTE: Inflation of 3.25% has been applied to the running costs for 2026/7 and 2027/8

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1 The Council is required to give plot holders 12 months' written notice of any changes to the rent and discount structure. To introduce the new rent levels from 1st of April 2027, the decision to increase rents must be taken and communicated to plot holders by no later than 31st of March 2026.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1 There are none.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Allotment Survey

Appendix 2 - Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) survey

APPENDIX 1 – ALLOTMENT SURVEY

Plot holder opinion was sought through November and December 2025

- 226 (16% of plotholders) participated in the consultation, either through the online survey or by completing a paper version. Responses were received from all 20 allotment sites across the borough, ensuring comprehensive representation. Participants were offered support from site representatives and allotment team staff throughout the process to facilitate engagement and address any queries
- This response rate is a testament to Site Liaison Representatives (SLRs) who broadcast the survey via their own on-site efforts.
- The survey asked for opinions on:
 - Allotment usage
 - Fees and the impact of plot holders
 - Policy opinions
 - Allotment benefits
 - Management preferences
 -

Responses were broadly representative in that all sites provided feedback.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

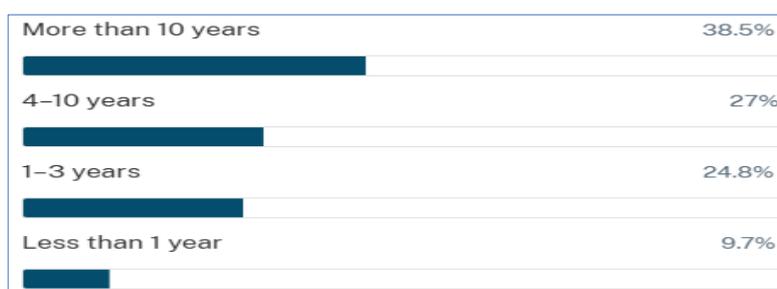
Section A

Data Gathering - Allotment Usage

ANALYSIS.

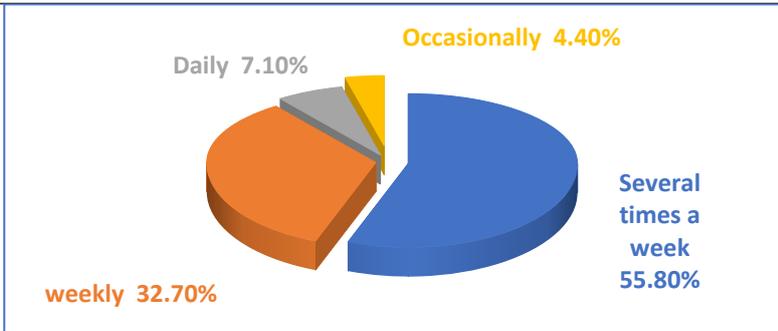
The survey results demonstrate a well-established and highly committed allotment community. A significant proportion of respondents 38.5% have held their plots for more than ten years, indicating long-term stability and deep-rooted engagement with their sites. A further 27% have been tenants for between four and ten years, and 24.8% for one to three years, showing a healthy mix of longstanding and newer plot holders. Only 9.7% have held a plot for less than a year, suggesting low turnover and strong continuity across the service.

Tenancy Length



Frequency of Use

Patterns of site use reinforce this picture of commitment. Seven per cent of respondents use their plots daily, while a further 55.8% visit several times a week. An additional 32.7% attend weekly, with only 4.4% describing their use as occasional. This high frequency of attendance demonstrates that plots are actively cultivated and valued as part of residents' weekly routines.



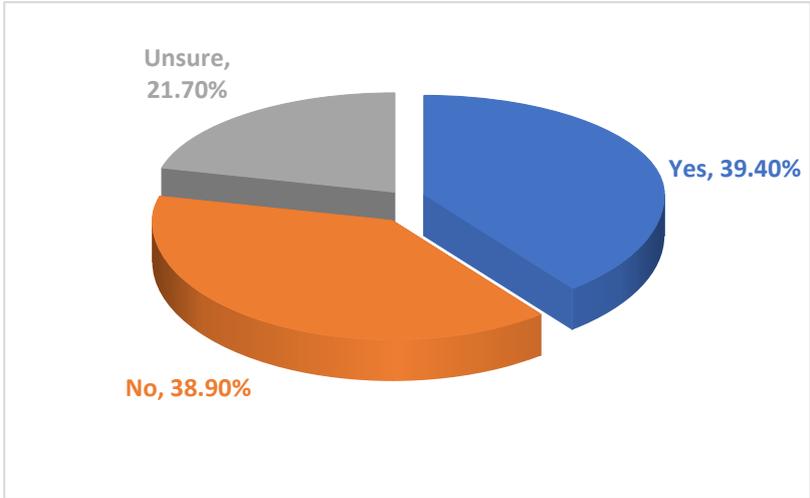
Taken together, these findings indicate a mature, stable and highly engaged allotment community, with strong utilisation of sites and a clear commitment from plot holders to maintaining and making full use of their allotments.

Section B

Fee increases and affordability	AGREE	DISAGREE	UNSURE
Of those that expressed an opinion	39.4%	38.9%	21.7%

ANALYSIS.

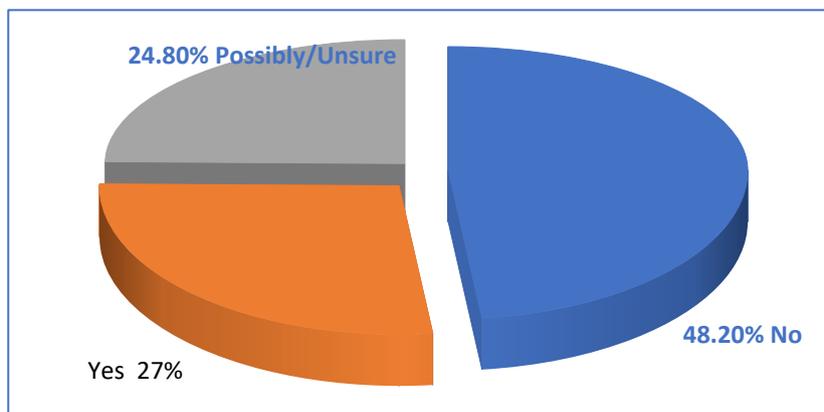
Views on raising rents to cover service costs are evenly balanced but divergent, with 39.4% in favour, 38.9% opposed, and 21.7% unsure. When asked how a rent increase would affect their ability to keep a plot, 38.1% said they would find it difficult but would try to continue, 36.7% felt they could continue as normal, and 19% indicated they might have to give up their plot.



When asked directly about the likelihood of giving up their plot if the increase were implemented, a majority (56.7%) said they were not likely to do so (31% unlikely, 25.7% not at all likely). A smaller proportion (27.9%) said they were likely or very likely to give up their plot, while 15.5% were unsure.

Unlikely	31%
Not at all likely	25.7%
Somewhat likely	17.3%
Not sure	15.5%
Very likely	10.6%

Nearly half of respondents (48.2%) said a rent increase would not create specific challenges in maintaining their plot. However, 27% said it would, and 24.8% were unsure. Among those who anticipated challenges, affordability particularly for those on low or fixed incomes was the most frequently cited concern.



Most respondents (59.7%) said they would not reduce their plot size to lower costs, and a further 22.6% said this was not applicable because they already held a small plot.

Concessions, Plot Policy and Site Management

Support for retaining the 40% concessionary discount is strong, with 68.6% saying the current level is “about right.” Smaller proportions felt the discount was too high (14.6%) or too low (6.6%).

A clear majority (61.9%) agreed that concessionary rates should be limited to one plot per household. Views on limiting households to a single plot more generally were mixed: 42% in favour, 37.2% opposed, and 20.8% unsure.

Opinions were similarly divided on encouraging smaller plots to reduce waiting lists (39.4% yes, 38.1% no, 22.6% unsure).

Perceived Benefits of Allotments

Respondents highlighted a wide range of benefits derived from their allotments, demonstrating the social, environmental and personal value of the service beyond revenue considerations.

These included:

- sharing produce and supporting charities
- education and learning for adults and children

- affordability and access to organic produce
- financial savings
- wildlife observation and biodiversity
- beekeeping
- multicultural participation
- reducing chemical intake

Most respondents consider their allotment highly important to their wellbeing, with 69.9% rating it “very important” and a further 21.2% rating it “important.” This underscores the strong role allotments play in health, lifestyle and community cohesion.

Self-Management and Local Control

Views on greater self-management through allotment associations were mixed.

- 35.8% would support and actively participate
- 27.4% would support but not participate
- 16.4% oppose
- 20.4% are unsure

This indicates moderate interest in increased local control, but not a clear mandate.

Alternative Approaches Suggested by Respondents

Respondents proposed a wide range of alternatives to avoid a significant rent increase. The strongest themes included:

- improving plot occupancy and reducing the number of abandoned or underused plots
- reducing water costs through efficiency measures
- expanding self-management to reduce council overheads
- greater transparency on current service costs
- phased or modest fee increases rather than sudden rises
- improved waste management, including composting
- exploring grants, sponsorship, fundraising and selling surplus produce or compost
- using community skills for maintenance

Several respondents argued that allotments should be subsidised as a public good due to their health, social and environmental benefits.

Overall, respondents favoured cost-saving measures and alternative income streams over steep fee increases.

General Comments and Concerns

Many respondents expressed strong opposition to the proposed rent increase, citing affordability concerns particularly for those on low or fixed incomes and frustration with perceived poor site maintenance and limited council investment.

Common themes included:

- dissatisfaction with abandoned plots not being reallocated promptly
- calls for stricter enforcement of tenancy agreements
- demands for greater transparency on how fees are calculated and spent
- concerns about security and site conditions
- requests for smaller plot options
- calls for improved communication
- preference for phased or modest increases rather than sudden hikes

While a minority supported the increase particularly if concessions were better targeted the

overall sentiment was clear: respondents opposed large fee rises without corresponding improvements in service quality, management and transparency.

Specific Comments in Favour of an Increase

A small number of respondents supported higher fees, often framing allotments as a valuable hobby and emphasising fairness in cost recovery. Themes included:

- allotments remain good value even with substantial increases
- the service should not rely on council subsidies
- higher rents could discourage inactive tenants and reduce waiting lists
- concessions should be targeted more precisely, particularly to those on Pension Credit

Even among supporters, there was concern for vulnerable groups and a desire to retain concessions for those on low incomes.

Specific Comments Against an Increase

Most respondents who commented were strongly opposed to a significant increase. Key concerns included:

- affordability and the risk of plot abandonment
- potential loss of community cohesion
- the essential role of allotments in food security, wellbeing and social connection
- the belief that allotments should not be expected to be revenue-neutral
- the view that steep increases would disproportionately affect low-income households
- calls for phased increases and alternative funding options

Many respondents stressed that allotments are a vital community asset that should be preserved and remain accessible.

Other Options Considered but Not Recommended

1. Inflationary Increase Only

Applying an annual inflationary increase in line with CPI would maintain gradual adjustments and avoid sharp rises but would not address the significant gap between income and service costs.

2. Incremental Increase

Implementing a smaller increase (e.g., 25% or 50%) phased over one or two years was considered but would still fall short of achieving the required level of cost recovery.

Conclusion

The consultation demonstrates a wide range of views on the proposed rent increase, with many respondents expressing understandable concerns about affordability and calling for phased or more modest rises. At the same time, a significant proportion recognised that allotment services must be financially sustainable and cannot continue to rely on ongoing Council subsidy. Several respondents also noted that, even with a substantial increase, allotments would remain comparatively low-cost and good value relative to other leisure activities, and that realistic rents could help improve plot turnover and reduce waiting lists.

Since the consultation began, the Allotments Team has seen a marked rise in applications for concessionary discounts. This reinforces the importance of retaining the 40% concessionary rate to protect residents on low or fixed incomes and ensure that those most in need continue to have access to allotments.

The proposed increase is intended to address the significant structural deficit within the service and secure its long-term sustainability. Alternative approaches such as limiting increases to inflation or applying smaller incremental rises were carefully considered but discounted. These options would not correct the current funding gap and would require repeated annual increases, creating prolonged uncertainty for plot holders and delaying essential investment in site maintenance, waste management and biodiversity improvements. They would also perpetuate reliance on Council subsidy, contrary to the Council's Financial Strategy.

By contrast, a single, clearly communicated adjustment provides stability and transparency, enabling the service to plan effectively and maintain the environmental, health and wellbeing benefits that allotments deliver for residents. Even after the proposed increase, allotment rents remain low in absolute terms approximately £2.14 per week and compare favourably with other leisure and wellbeing activities accessed by similar demographic groups.

Retaining the 40% concessionary discount ensures that the increase remains fair and inclusive, safeguarding access for those who may be most affected by rising costs.

Overall, the evidence indicates that allotment fees in Reading remain materially out of line with the true cost of provision and with comparable leisure charges. The proposed increase from April 2027, following the statutory 12-month notice period, represents a necessary and proportionate step to reduce the funding imbalance, protect vulnerable groups, and secure the long-term sustainability of the service.

Taken together, the proposal reflects a balanced and evidence-based response to the consultation. It maintains the health, wellbeing and environmental benefits of allotments for residents while ensuring that the service is financially responsible, resilient and fit for the future.