

LEDBURY TOWN COUNCIL

NOTES TO SUPPORT 2026/27 DRAFT BUDGET BRIEFING 5 FEBRUARY 2026

1. Introduction and Strategic Context

This draft budget has been prepared with a clear strategic objective: to build a stronger, more inclusive community, with an increased emphasis on children and young people. Investment in youth provision, community facilities, and preventative and support services is central to the Council's vision for the coming years.

While this focus delivers long-term social value, it inevitably places additional demands on staffing levels, and the need for a broader range of supporting resources. Consideration is given to the appropriate operational capacity and capability of the council to ensure effective delivery of council objectives.

The draft budget therefore reflects a deliberate shift toward enhanced service delivery, ensuring the Council is adequately resourced to meet rising expectations and statutory responsibilities while remaining financially resilient. The draft budget also takes into account relevant observations and emerging pressures, particularly around staffing resilience, service demand, and future cost pressures.

2. Overview

The draft budget sets out projected expenditure for 2026/27 and 2027/28. Overall, the budget demonstrates:

- A steady increase in total expenditure over the medium term, reflecting inflationary pressures, service expansion, and increased staffing requirements.
- Growth in the council's core capability and expertise inevitably has an impact on overall operating costs, as the Council strengthens its capacity to deliver community-facing services and to take-on additional responsibilities.
- Targeted increases in specific service areas aligned with the Council's strategic priorities¹, particularly youth engagement, community development, and place-based services.

This approach supports both immediate service needs and longer-term planning, providing transparency around future financial commitments.

¹ Priorities continue to be informed by our Town Plan (<https://www.ledburytowncouncil.gov.uk/uploads/Ledbury%20Town%20Plan%20-%20Final%20Print%20Version%20-%20May%202016.pdf>) and are set out in our Corporate Plan (<https://www.ledburytowncouncil.gov.uk/uploads/Corporate%20Plan%2017.09.2020.pdf>)

3. Investment in Community and Young People

A key driver of the draft budget is the Council's commitment to community capacity building, with an increasing emphasis on local youth services. This includes:

- Expanding or enhancing youth activities, facilities, and engagement initiatives.
- Supporting safe, accessible community spaces that encourage participation and social cohesion.
- Investing in preventative services that reduce longer-term demand on statutory and crisis-led interventions.

4. Investment in addressing hardship, inequalities and the environment

Alongside its focus on young people, the draft budget also supports investment in addressing hardship, inequalities, and environmental sustainability. This reflects the Council's wider role in supporting vulnerable residents, reducing barriers to participation, and improving quality of life across the community.

Budget provision recognises the need for targeted initiatives that respond to cost-of-living pressures, promote inclusion, and support environmental improvements, all of which contribute to long-term community resilience and wellbeing.

5. Investment in events, culture and the local economy

In parallel, the budget provides for investment in events, culture, and the local economy. Community events, cultural activities, and local economic initiatives play a vital role in fostering civic pride, strengthening social connections, and supporting local businesses. They bring the community of Ledbury together and represent longstanding local celebrations which connect our residents to the town and its traditions and history.

These activities also contribute indirectly to economic vitality by increasing footfall, encouraging local spending, and enhancing the attractiveness of the area as a place to live, work, and visit.

The draft budget therefore recognises events and cultural activity not as discretionary extras, but as integral components of a thriving and sustainable local community.

6. Investment in Council capability

The draft budget makes clear financial provision for increased investment in grants – both one-off and sustained multi-year provisions. Continuing to take a focussed partnership approach to support and enhance the plans and projects that local groups and organisations develop to grow and to expand,

as well as encouraging these groups to work more closely with one another in delivering for local people.

Financial investment is also made in growing the town's markets offering, expanding support to events, strengthening services for visitors and support for the town centre economy

In order to deliver on these ambitions, there is a need also to invest in the council's own capabilities. The draft budget reflects this by recognising staffing as a core enabler of effective community capacity building.

The budget also reflects changes proposed to the mix of services delivered through local contracting rather than in-house by members of staff.

7. Planning for Future Service Transfer Opportunities

This narrative also recognises the increased level of consultation and engagement with the County Council which reflects closer joint working – particularly with larger parishes. Consideration is also given to develop the capability to respond to emerging opportunities to take on valued local services and property assets. Areas that may be considered include, but are not limited to:

- Additional play areas and playgrounds.
- Public conveniences and open spaces.
- Other local property assets or services where parish or town-level management could deliver improved outcomes for residents.

While these transfers may offer opportunities for greater local control and improved service responsiveness, they also carry significant financial implications. The draft budget and medium-term projections therefore:

- Acknowledge the possibility of increased operating and maintenance costs.
- Reflect changes to the skills and capacity needed to assess risk and plan for changes to service mix and delivery.
- Create increased flexibility in the council's ability to deliver in-house and contracted service.

8. Medium-Term Financial Outlook

In addition, it is recognised that the council needs to ensure that it is adequately planning and providing for discharging its ongoing responsibilities for publicly owned assets. These include the town's cemetery, Town Council Offices, Marriage Room, Painted Room Museum and iconic Market House. Also, its Charter Markets, the operation of St Katherine's Square and Bye Street loos, the maintenance and investment in the Recreation Ground, amenity spaces in Deer Park and the nature conservation and enhancement of Dog Hill Wood.

Consideration will also need to be given in the coming year to the council's future accommodation requirements.

Provision is made in this budget for these responsibilities to be managed and discharged and future needs to be assessed and options carefully considered. The medium-term financial outlook recognises that property management and ownership responsibilities are a strategic issue which may need to be addressed to support efficient service delivery and long-term organisational resilience.

The draft budgets for 2026/27 and 2027/28 illustrate the ongoing impact of the Council's strategic direction. Expenditure and income growth over this period reflects:

- Continued investment in community and youth services.
- Capacity building and increased operational resilience.
- Some prudent provision for the delivery of additional responsibilities.

By setting out these projections clearly, the Council is better placed to manage risk, plan for future funding requirements, and make informed decisions about service expansion, asset use, and accommodation needs.

9. Conclusion

The draft budget represents a purposeful and forward-looking financial plan. It balances ambition with realism and seeks to mitigate risk and uncertainty, whilst recognising that building a strong, inclusive and balanced community requires sustained investment in people, services, and infrastructure.

The budget addresses current service pressures while preparing for future opportunities and challenges.

Overall, the budget provides a robust framework to support the Council's strategic objectives while maintaining transparency and accountability over the use of public funds.

The proposed parish precept uplift in 2026-27 for a Band D property in Ledbury is 8.74%.

NOTE:

Percentage precept increases for other town councils in Herefordshire for 2026/27 are proposed as follows:

Hereford City - 16%
Leominster – 6.7%
Ross – 10%
Bromyard – 16%