

# Move to limit number of public speakers at Harborough District Council planning meetings

[www.harboroughmail.co.uk](http://www.harboroughmail.co.uk)



Harborough District Council Offices

Fewer members of the public will be allowed to speak at Harborough District Council's often packed and controversial planning meetings in future.

From the next planning meeting onwards, only three people will be able to speak in favour of an application and three against – previously the number was unlimited; anyone who applied in advance to speak could do so.

Previously large, controversial schemes - the biggest being the Magna Park extensions – could have from 10 to 30 speakers from the public.

The ruling Conservative group said the new rules would make often long and complex planning meetings more efficient and produce better planning decisions.

But opposition Liberal Democrats argued strongly that the changes were “an erosion of democracy”, and bad for Harborough.

Equally controversial, housing developments under 25 homes don't now need to go before planners at all. Objectors to these smaller schemes must get a councillor ‘sponsor’ to ask for the scheme to be brought before the Planning Committee.

The Planning Committee will also be reduced in number – from 12 councillors to nine.

The new rules were passed by the Conservative majority on the council. All Liberal Democrat councillors voted against the changes.

Cllr Simon Galton (Lib Dem) told Monday night's council meeting: “What we're proposing to do tonight is to take away public rights... part of the democratic process.

“There is huge interest in planning and the decisions we take... We're regrettably curtailing public involvement in planning.”

Lib Dem leader Cllr Phil Knowles agreed, adding: “Democracy needs to be done, and needs to be seen to be done.”

Former Planning Committee chair Cllr Rosita Page (Con) also said the changes “eroded the democratic process”.

But current committee chair Cllr Chris Holyoak (Con) said other councils were “agog” at Harborough’s ‘all speakers welcome’ policy.

Cllr Paul Dann (Con) said long agendas and meetings that last three-and-a-half hours proved that “planning needs streamlining”.

And Cllr Phil King (Con) said: “This isn’t about taking away people’s rights. Members of the public can still raise complaints and make objections or support. It’s about improving efficiency and the effectiveness of our decision-making and having better quality thinking at the planning committee.”