

Press release-Skelmanthorpe Community Action Group.

Kirklees operates an undemocratic planning process.

Skelmanthorpe Community Action Group accuses Kirklees Council of operating a planning process that is not only heavily weighted against individual objectors but is also undemocratic.

Christopher Ward Chairman of SCAG comments *"Many of our members are very unhappy about a recent planning application by Bovis Homes to build 44 houses on what were, until recently, the village allotments. They feel it's bad enough that Kirklees should allow the change of use to allow a developer to purchase the land, even worse the plans Bovis Homes have submitted for developing the site seem to take no account of the nature of the village or the traffic problems they will create"*.

Having objected to the plans and followed the planning review process we are horrified by the way the system operates. If the public knew how decisions are being taken that can both change the place they live in and affect their way of life, they would demand that the system be changed. Its hard enough for objectors to attend the planning meetings to express their views, given that most have to work, and meetings are held during the working day. Kirklees increases the difficulty by holding the meetings in Dewsbury. So for anyone from our area who wants to raise issues they will need to take at least a half day off work to do so.

Individual objectors are then given **three minutes** to present their case, a time limit that seems designed to ensure the objector won't be able to get a coherent message across, while it would appear all the other people involved have no such limitation. Given, so few people attend these meetings there is no real basis for this three-minute time limit. Surely it is more important for everyone's views to be heard when important decisions are about to be taken? The experience is likely to leave the objector feeling angry and frustrated that they didn't get a fair hearing and that everything is weighted in the developers favour, and national government targets.

Finally, we were horrified to find that the committee making a decision about building this large development in Skelmanthorpe contained only one representative from our area! So the majority of the people making the decision were not accountable to the people in our village, and having made one cursory visit to the site, know little or nothing about Skelmanthorpe! How can they possibly make a good decision on behalf of the public? The whole process is undemocratic; it's impossible to hold these people accountable for the decisions they are taking.

Anyone who attends these meetings will understand how large-scale developments of houses and factory units, that take no account of the communities they are foisted on, succeed in gaining planning permission. The people taking the decisions don't live in the

areas they are making decisions about and don't care about the outcome."

Fellow SCAG committee member, Wilf Ryden agrees "Before I attended this meeting I assumed the planning department existed to protect the public from inappropriate building, in terms of location, density and the design and materials to be used in construction. Now it appears that the planning department is more concerned with meeting building targets than protecting us from unsuitable developments.

A visible demonstration of this is the recent trend by developers to want to build large blocks of three storey town houses. Obviously this is highly profitable for them since they can squeeze more homes onto every acre of land. The planning department appears to be granting consent for these houses no matter the location under consideration, so they are appearing in villages where they stand out like sore thumbs, much to the anger of local residents.

What seems to have developed is a cosy relationship between large developers and the people managing the planning process, with the individuals who are going to be affected by the developments having virtually no say in the process at all. Clearly the man on the street is not being represented by the people elected to look after his interests, and when we are given only three minutes to speak for ourselves they clearly don't care what we think either."

SCAG intends to campaign for a change in the process. SCAG Vice Chairman Richard Graham comments, *"In January Kirklees is due to release proposals for meeting the government target for building 22,000 houses within KMC. These proposals will have a huge impact on a number of communities in Kirklees. We need to ensure that the process for deciding where these houses are built is more democratic than the one we recently witnessed.*