**DEVELOPERS would lose their right to appeal when they are refused planning permission under a new law being proposed by John Howell.**

The Henley MP says housebuilders should not be allowed to have decisions overturned by a government inspector if their schemes conflict with a neighbourhood plan.

Mr Howell helped introduce neighbourhood plans in 2011 as part of the Government’s localism agenda.

They are usually written by volunteers under the supervision of parish or town councils and once they have been published, planning authorities are legally obliged to take them into account when deciding planning applications.

However, developers can still appeal when a decision goes against them.

Mr Howell says this is unfair on communities which have already put time and money into preparing a plan and are unable to afford to fight an appeal.

During the first reading of his Private Members’ Bill in the House of Commons last week, he cited the case of a proposed development in Sonning Common.

Gallagher Estates, of Warwick, wanted to build 95 homes on land off Kennylands Road which was earmarked for just 26 in the village’s neighbourhood plan.

When South Oxfordshire District Council refused planning permission, the company appealed despite widespread objections.

The appeal was refused but only after the district council and protest groups spent £90,000 opposing it.

Mr Howell told MPs: “The application was inconsistent with the neighbourhood plan and there were no mitigating circumstances. Residents had worked very hard on the plan and continue to do so. The question we must ask is why was the existence of the plan not sufficient?

“I am introducing this to provide reassurance to communities who spend considerable amounts of time and money producing a neighbourhood plan that their work is valued.” His Bill grants an exception for a developer that can prove an error in the council’s decision-making process.

In such a case, the company could apply to the High Court for a judicial review and, if successful, the planning application would have to be considered again.

The Bill wouldn’t apply if there is no neighbourhood plan in place or the planning authority has failed to secure an adequate supply of housing land, which nullifies all neighbourhood plans within its boundaries.

Mr Howell said the process of writing a plan was becoming more complex and time-consuming for ordinary people to carry out.

“I pay tribute to the volunteers who spend so much of their time putting them together,” he said.

“[An] appeal will need to be defended. It will require vast amounts of time from the local people who put the plan together.

“It may require the services of a QC or other specialists. Moreover, the chances of the plan being upheld are open to doubt.”

He said the Bill would send a strong message that neighbourhood plans should be taken seriously and it wouldn’t undermine efforts to address housing shortages.

Mr Howell said: “Only through such action will we return real democracy to this country… it could even make the allocation of land for more houses more attractive to towns and villages because they will be protected from rapacious interests.”

Mr Howell told the *Henley Standard*: “The issue has been raised with me on a number of occasions, specifically in relation to Sonning Common, and I believe this Bill will save time and money.

“Because there was a Brexit debate afterwards, I made my speech to a full chamber and was told afterwards that never before has a Bill introduced under the 10-minute rule been so popular. It just resonated with so many people.

“Uptake of neighbourhood plans is already very healthy but it would give extra confidence to those who’ve already committed to the process.”

The Bill is due to have a second reading on January 25