



What could a Parish Council mean for Market Harborough

What are the current local council arrangements in the area?

At the moment, Market Harborough is served by two Councils – Leicestershire County Council, who provides services such as adult and childrens social care, public health, museums, schools support, libraries, roads and footpaths, and Harborough District Council. There are 10 Harborough District Councillors serving the Market Harborough area, and 2 County Councillors.

Across Harborough, the District Council provides a wide range of services such as bin collections, other environmental services, planning and housing, car parks, licensing of businesses and many more. There are also services that it provides in Market Harborough, that it may not provide in other parts of the District. This includes the cemetery, allotments, looking after the Town Centre, parks and running events like Harborough in Bloom. Residents of Market Harborough pay extra council tax, called “special expenses” for these services that in other parts of the District are paid to a parish or town council.

The local governance arrangements in the area are likely to change

The government have confirmed that they plan to merge together district and county councils across the country into “unitary councils” which will provide all the services currently provided by Leicestershire County Council and Harborough District Council. We expect that the government will announce their preferred option for how this will work in our area in early summer, but it’s expected that in future, there will only be 2 or 3 unitary councils in the County, serving at least 400,000 residents.

Why is a review of whether to have a Parish Council being undertaken now?

In November, Harborough District Council received a petition from over 1,800 residents calling for a review to be undertaken.

Some people feel it is a good idea to undertake a review now so that if a new Parish Council is created, it can get up and running before changes are made to Leicestershire County Council and Harborough District Council.

On the other hand, some people are worried about making changes whilst the future of Leicestershire County Council and Harborough District Council is uncertain.

What can a Parish Council do?

Parish Councils don't have any specific functions they have to provide, however it could take on running services that are currently provided to the Town by Harborough District Council such as management of parks, running events, looking after the Town Centre, running the cemetery and allotments.

In addition, Parish Councils can also provide grants to community organisations and help fund new local facilities.

Some people see that one of the main reasons to have a Town Council is that it can act as an additional powerful voice for the local community. It is the most local form of government and is made up of Councillors who live or work in the Town. It will get to have a say on planning applications in the area and can get involved in a wide range of issues that may affect local residents. They feel this could be very important if the reorganisation of Leicestershire and Harborough goes ahead meaning Market Harborough is part of a bigger organisation where there are fewer elected representatives in the area.

Why might some people be opposed to this?

Some people are concerned that this may be another layer of local government and it could impact on people's council tax. The government have said that when there is a new Council for Harborough and Leicestershire, it will need to have area committees (although it is not known how big these will be or how they will work). People may argue it is better to wait until after the picture for reorganisation at the upper levels of local government is clearer before deciding on a Parish Council.

Will my Council Tax be affected if there is a Parish Council?

At least in the first year, it is likely that there will be an increase in council tax for residents. The Town Council will need to:

- a) Pay for its first elections

- b) Employ staff, initially a Town Clerk but it's likely they will need other staff such as a finance officer and deputy clerk
- c) Have insurance
- d) Hire and equip an office and meeting rooms (space could be rented in the Symington Building from Harborough District Council)

Whilst we cannot calculate this figure exactly, it might be expected that this would cost approximately £150,000 in year 1, which would equate to an extra £14.50 on an average council tax payer's bill.

If Harborough District Council transfers services to a Parish Council, this should not have a significant impact on the council tax as the level of special expense Harborough charges residents will fall, and the Town Council's council tax will rise to match this.

Beyond the first year, the picture is very uncertain because:

- a) The Parish Council will then be able to make its own decisions on the level of council tax and how it provides services. They may choose to do things differently, which could cost more or less.
- b) The reorganisation of Harborough District Council and Leicestershire County Council is expected to happen in 2028. It is expected reorganisation will cost money but generate savings in the long term. The new unitary council will set its own council tax level.

As a result, it's really hard to say in the long term whether or not council tax bills will be significantly affected by this change.

Will the Parish Council take on the running of services in the area?

It's likely that if a Parish Council is created, Harborough District Council will look to transfer some of the services it currently runs in the Market Harborough area to the new Council. Harborough District Council can include some services and assets if it sets up a Parish Council in the autumn of 2026; or it can wait until the new Council is up and running to discuss with the new Town Council what it would like to do. The services could continue to be delivered in the same way, unless the Town Council decides to run them differently. Harborough District Council would work with the Town Council to make sure that residents are not disrupted by any transfer of services.

If you feel passionately that a new Parish Council should run specific services in your area, then please highlight this in the consultation.

When would a new Council come into effect?

If residents agree to a new Council, then we want to try to bring this into being in April 2027. The District Council will look after things until the new Council is elected in May 2027.

Creating a new Council in 2027 has two advantages:

- a) It will be at the same time as the other parish and town elections, and the planned elections to the new unitary council elections – this will save residents costs rather than running “stand alone” elections just for the new town council
- b) It is expected the new unitary council will come into being in 2028. Setting up a new Council in 2027 will ensure Harborough District Council has a year to work with the new Council to help it establish itself.

Does my part of Market Harborough have to be in the new Parish Council?

We have been asked to review setting up a new Parish Council for the whole of the unparished Market Harborough area. However, we recognise that some residents, particularly on the edge of the town, may feel that’s not right for their part of the area.

If that’s the case, we’ll need to hear from you as part of the first round of consultation, which gives you the opportunity to put your case for why the area you live in is different and needs separate arrangements in place.

If there is clear demand to look at some areas separately, we can then include that in the second round of consultation we plan to undertake.

Is it a Parish Council or Town Council?

If Harborough District Council decides to create a new Council, it will be called a Parish Council. Once it begins to meet, it can then decide to call itself a Town Council. The only difference between a parish council and a town council is that a town council can appoint a mayor, rather than having a chair of the parish council.

How many Councillors would the new Parish Council have, and what areas would they represent?

There is no set criteria on the number of Councillors a new Parish Council should have. There is historic guidance that a town the size of Harborough should have about 22 or 23 Councillors, however this would be quite large compared to a lot of Councils. Wellingborough, which is larger than Market Harborough, was set up with 23 Councillors, and Daventry, which has a similar population size, has 16 Councillors. It

might therefore be expected that a figure of 14-20 would be appropriate. Parish Councillors do not get paid for their role.

It's normal that a town of Market Harborough's size would be divided into wards, so that each ward elects a small number of Councillors who would represent your area specifically.

If the first phase of consultation indicates that a Parish Council may be preferred, then we will consult on the number of councillors and the warding arrangements as part of the second round of consultation.

Would the Parish Council be political?

It's possible that people may want to stand to be Parish Councillors and represent a political party – it depends on what they and the Council decide to do.