

HARLOW TOWN CENTRE AREA ACTION PLAN

Welcome!

Thank you for taking your time to visit our exhibition.

Harlow Council is preparing an Area Action Plan (AAP) for Harlow Town Centre. The AAP will create a spatial planning framework which plans positively for managed change and helps to establish the conditions for a resilient and successful town centre. The AAP will sit alongside the Local Plan, which is being produced for the whole District.

We are now consulting on the Issues and Options stage which sets out an emerging direction of travel for the AAP. The exhibition explores how Harlow Town Centre can be a successful and sustainable place. It considers how the town centre can accommodate new homes; how these can be balanced with appropriate employment, community and retail space; and how this process can be used to improve the town centre's public spaces and streets.

What stage are we at?



How to comment

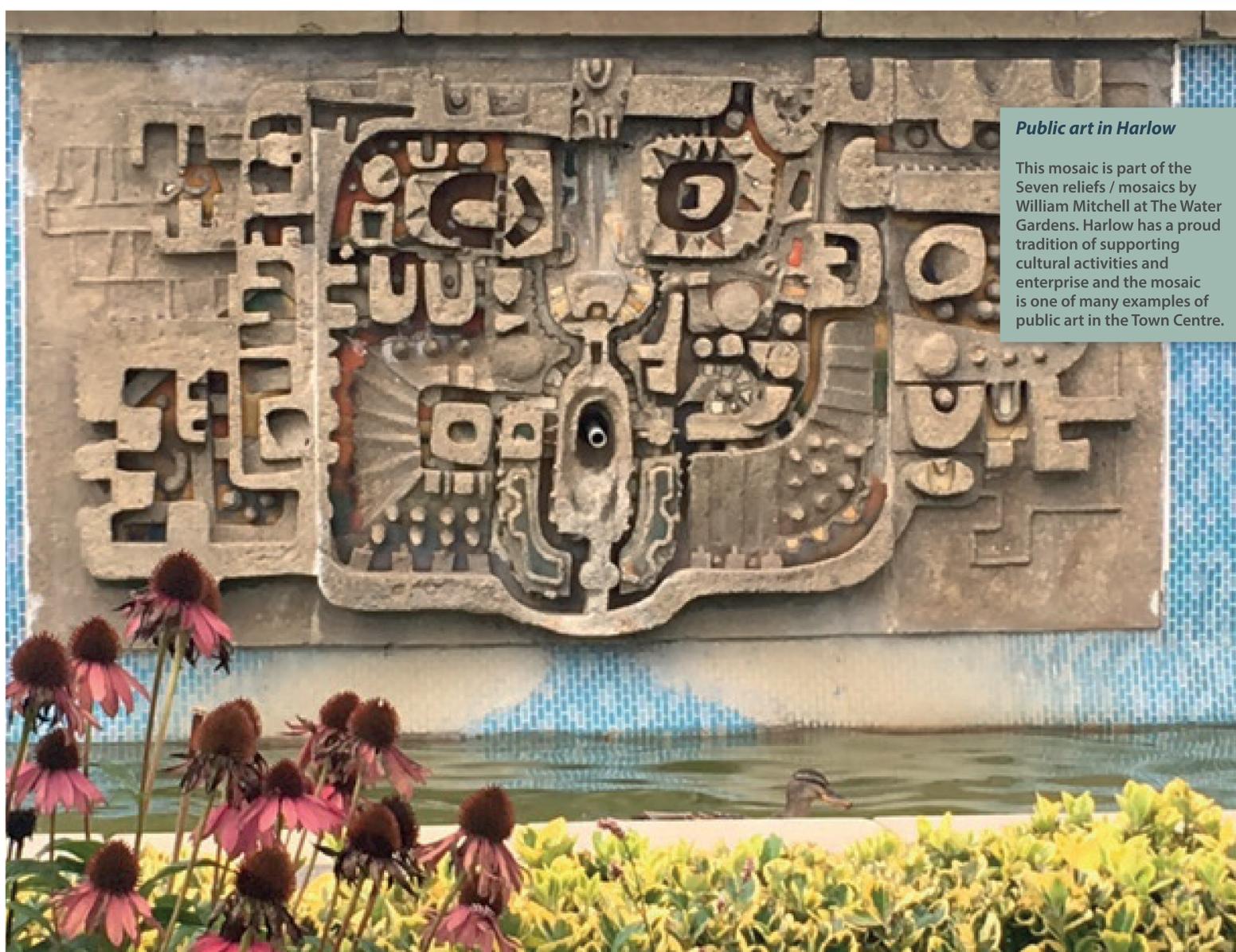


We would like to hear your thoughts on the emerging issues and options. You can submit comments online at: harlow.gov.uk/planning-policy

All comments must be submitted by 4pm on Friday 10 August 2018.

Next steps

Following your feedback, we will continue to develop the full draft of the AAP for review with stakeholders and publication for statutory representations. This will include more detailed principles and guidance for key sites in the Town Centre. We will be sharing our AAP report for consultation in late 2018.



Public art in Harlow

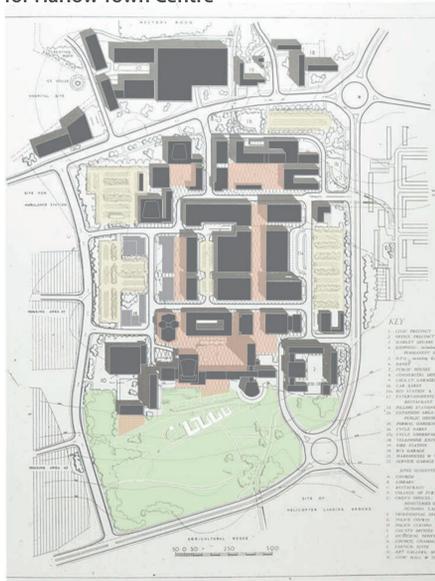
This mosaic is part of the Seven reliefs / mosaics by William Mitchell at The Water Gardens. Harlow has a proud tradition of supporting cultural activities and enterprise and the mosaic is one of many examples of public art in the Town Centre.

Harlow's evolution

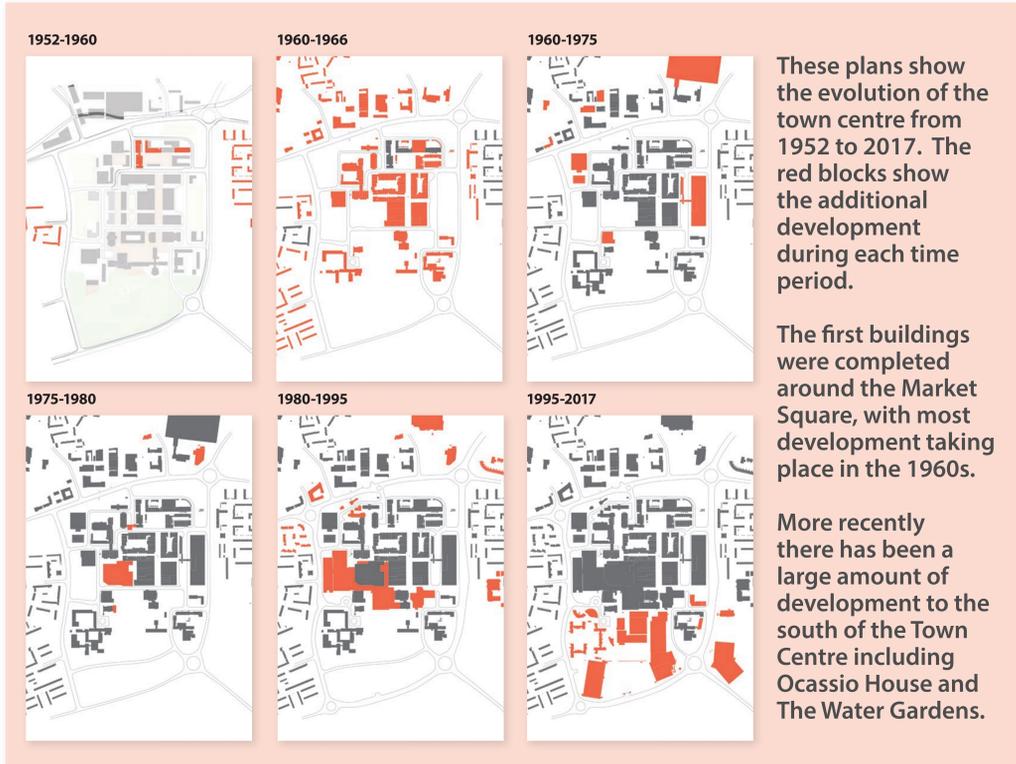
Frederick Gibberd's vision and masterplan for Harlow New Town reflected the New Town ethos of the 1940's, drawing inspiration from the earlier Garden City movement and the drive to provide high quality and spacious homes with access to clean air and open space.

Since the conception of Harlow New Town, the Town Centre has undergone several stages of expansion. The original plan intentionally separated residential areas from the Town Centre. This now has a negative impact on the current operation of the Town Centre, and contrasts with historic market towns which are active in the evening because people live in the centre.

Gibberd's original masterplan for Harlow Town Centre



- Pedestrianised public realm
- Parking
- Green space



These plans show the evolution of the town centre from 1952 to 2017. The red blocks show the additional development during each time period.

The first buildings were completed around the Market Square, with most development taking place in the 1960s.

More recently there has been a large amount of development to the south of the Town Centre including Ocasio House and The Water Gardens.

Analysis of the town centre

Strengths

- ✔ Harlow's strategic location
- ✔ Only 30 mins to London by train
- ✔ Lots of people live nearby
- ✔ Ample town centre parking
- ✔ Recent private investment
- ✔ Harlow College Campus
- ✔ Voluntary and community sector
- ✔ Public art and sculpture
- ✔ The Water Gardens

Weaknesses

- ✘ Excess retail space with vacancies
- ✘ Lack of large and high end shops
- ✘ Few quality small independents
- ✘ Missing vibrant night-time offer
- ✘ Limited commercial leisure offer
- ✘ Lack of employment space
- ✘ Location of transport facilities
- ✘ Low quality public spaces
- ✘ Poor town centre connections
- ✘ Library site a barrier

Opportunities

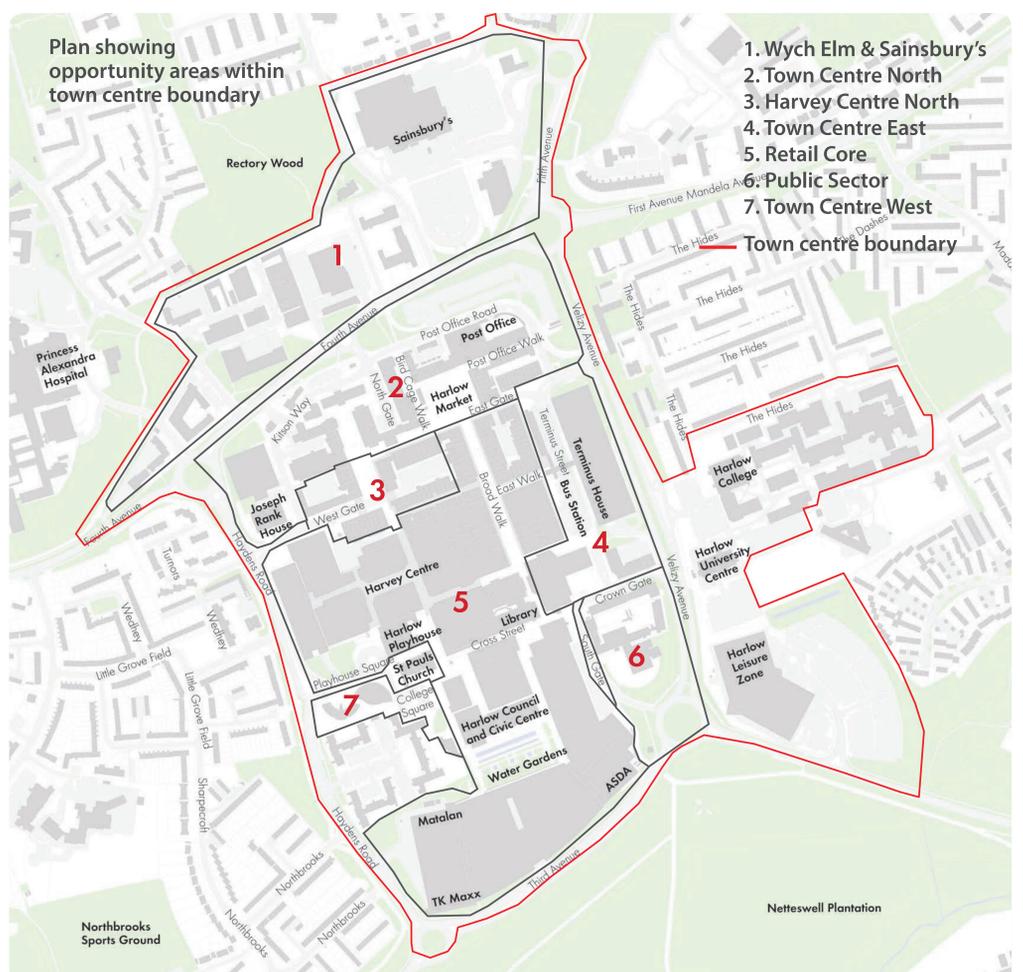
- Potential development sites in northern town centre area
- Council role in regeneration
- Population growth
- Consolidation of shopping area
- Consolidation of services
- Better town centre linkages
- New evening economy uses
- Planning permission granted for town centre west redevelopment
- Improve shops along Broad Walk
- Improve public transport
- Wider Harlow opportunities

Threats

- ⊖ Limited certainty of developments
- ⊖ Investment delivered in isolation
- ⊖ Lack of a department store
- ⊖ Competition from other centres
- ⊖ Changing trends in shopping
- ⊖ Office to residential conversions

Opportunity areas

There are seven 'opportunity areas' in Harlow Town Centre which are areas identified for their key development opportunities and public realm/movement improvements.



Vision

In the future, Harlow Town centre will be a successful, sustainable place which serves as the commercial centre for the existing town of Harlow and the planned Garden Town of Harlow and Gilston. The town centre will play an important part in helping Harlow and Gilston to step up to a more active economic role within the London Stansted Cambridge Innovation Corridor.

In order to do this, the town centre will have a strong mix of shops and services; offices and employment space; civic and leisure uses; and a thriving evening economy and cultural offer. The town centre will also have a decent range of homes that can support a mixed and balanced community.

The town centre will be accessible to all, by public transport, cycle, on foot and by car and will help the District to minimise reliance on private cars in the future.

What are we trying to achieve?



A unified centre which re-balances the northern and southern areas



A town centre which supports wider economic growth in the District



An appealing retail and leisure offer which limits expenditure leakage to competing centres



A high quality public realm and environment with active public spaces.



An inclusive and accessible destination with excellent transport links.



A strong cultural offer which is supported by residents and visitors to the town centre.



Community facilities which support the town's population.



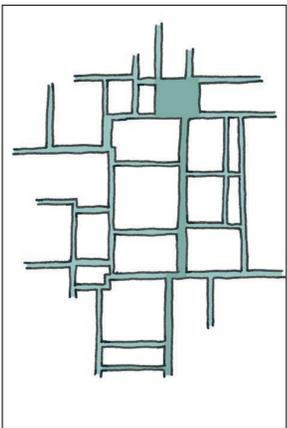
A cohesive place with uses and design proposals which complement one another



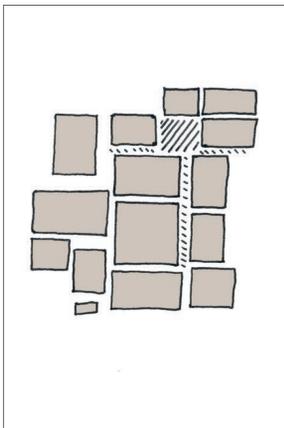
A commitment to respond positively to the defining elements of the Gibberd masterplan

Spatial objectives

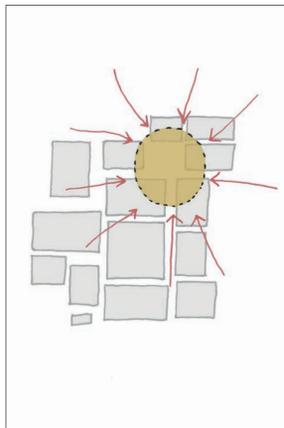
1 Respect the original 'rectangular' plan



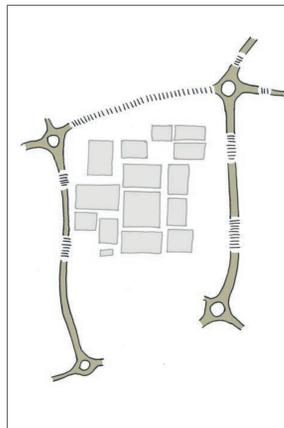
2 Respond to the urban structure



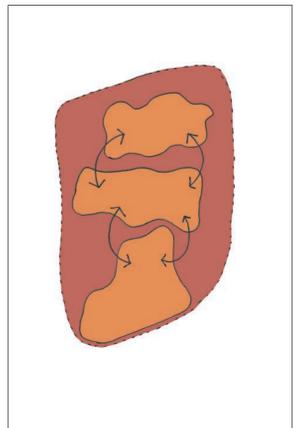
3 Rebalance the focus of gravity northwards



4 Change the street character of the inner ring road



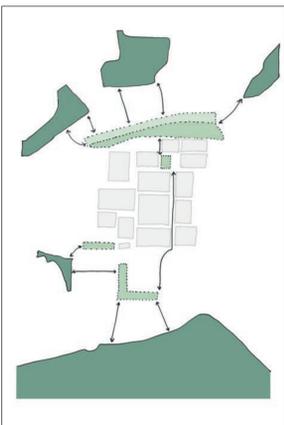
5 Establish a unified centre



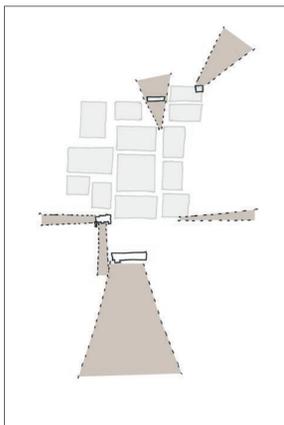
6 Establish building fronts and doors on the approaches to the centre



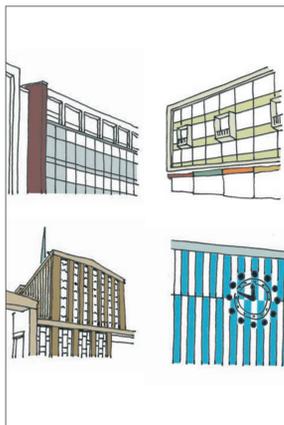
7 Connect to and draw in green spaces



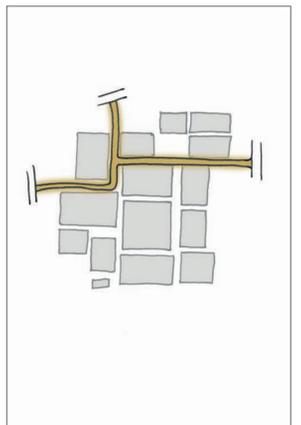
8 Frame views of key buildings and spaces



9 Celebrate and reflect design heritage



10 Reinstating limited access through the town centre



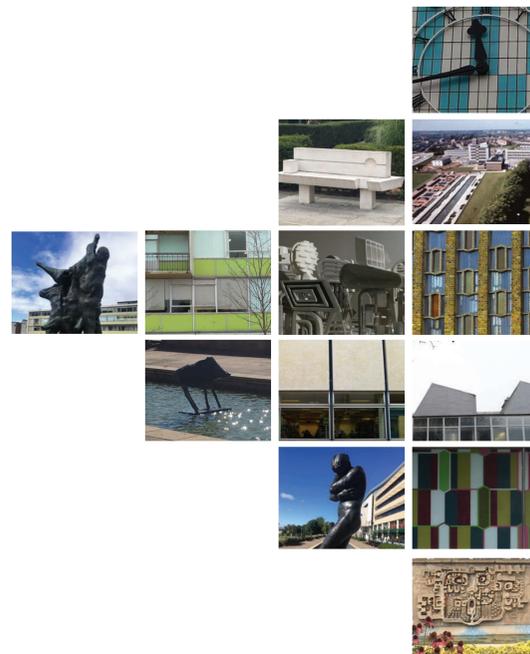
Overview

The Issues and Options stage represents the first stage of formal consultation on the Area Action Plan for the Town Centre. It identifies the key issues, challenges, and opportunities facing the Town Centre and sets out different options for the AAP to consider and explore.

The Issues and Options have been structured within 11 policy themes which are summarised on Boards 4-7. For more detailed information, please see the draft AAP document which is available online at harlow.gov.uk/planning-policy

The policy themes are:

1. Strategic Growth
2. Movement
3. Public realm
4. Urban design
5. Heritage
6. Retail, leisure and evening economy
7. Offices and workspace
8. Public and community infrastructure
9. Homes
10. Creative uses
11. Delivery



Policy themes

Strategic Growth

There is optimism about the role that wider growth will play in strengthening the Town Centre. The Town Centre benefits from a strategic location with significant investments already planned.

Issue

What is the overall strategy for growth in the Town Centre? How will this influence the approach to individual opportunity areas and planning policies?

Option 1.1 - Baseline

Do nothing on top of the existing plans.

Option 1.2 - Medium intervention

Regenerate Market and Stone Cross area and improve environmental quality.

Option 1.3 - High intervention

Bring forward other sites for Town Centre uses and residential growth.

Movement

The Town Centre lacks a strong northern gateway, the main routes lying to the east, south and west. The original street pattern avoided internal streets so the centre feels closed and insular. Movement proposals should consider changing travel patterns to promote healthy lifestyles.

Issue

How could the future pattern of streets and movement contribute to the regeneration of the Town Centre? What interventions could be progressed for different modes of transport?

Option 2.1 - A north-south axis route which would reunite the north and south of the town, with a Bus Rapid Transit interchange in the centre.

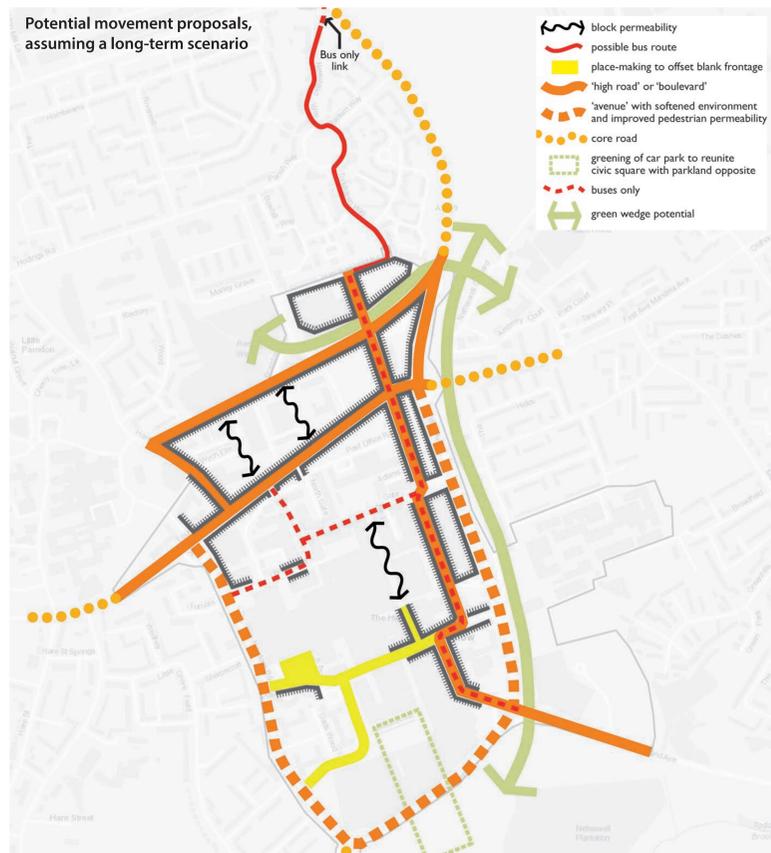
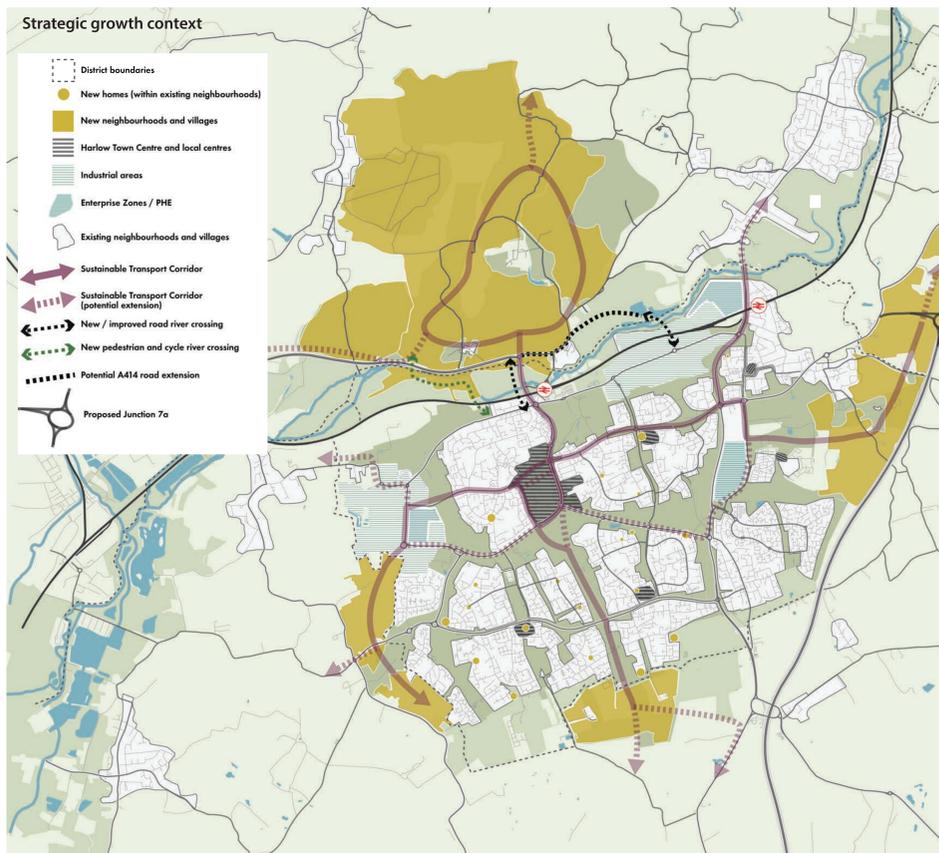
Option 2.2 - Pedestrian and cycle improvements including the creation of a "boulevard" along Fourth Avenue.

Option 2.3 - Increase the number of on-street bus stops, reducing the need for a substantial bus station.

Option 2.4 - Introduce all-movement junctions and improve roundabouts to make them more pedestrian friendly.

Option 2.5 - Rely on Local Plan policy with reduced parking in areas of good public transport accessibility.

Option 2.6 - Establish specific town centre car parking policy including consolidating surface car parking and specifying lower parking standards in new development.



Issues and options

TOWN CENTRE AAP 5

Public realm 3

The public realm is of varied quality in the Town Centre. Some areas are cluttered, and poor quality benches, bins and signs create a negative perception. There is a proud tradition of sculpture but the setting of public art is not always fitting.

Issue

How should spaces and connections be improved to support the experience of visiting the Town Centre? Which spaces should be prioritised?

Option 3.1 - A general policy with guidance for streets and spaces, referring to elements of Gibberd's masterplan.

Option 3.2 - Prepare site / area specific guidance including illustrative material for specific streets and spaces.



Public realm opportunities based on the long-term framework



Urban Design 4

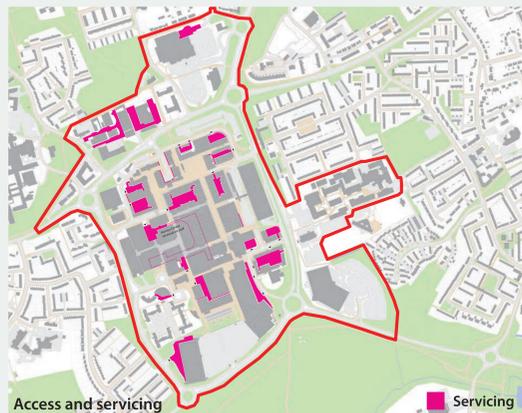
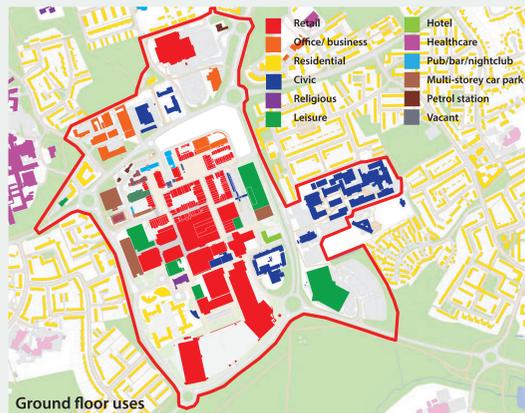
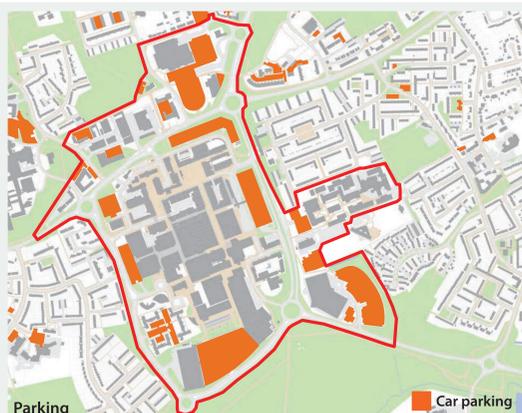
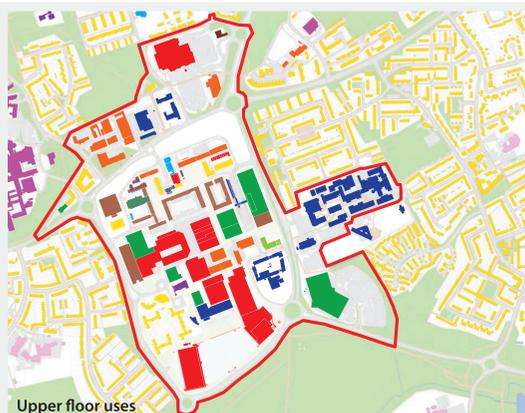
There is a high degree of separation between local neighbourhoods and the Town Centre which often lacks life and activity in the evenings. Low quality arrival points with an absence of building fronts has a negative impact.

Issue

How should the AAP facilitate high quality design which responds positively to the existing character and context of the Town Centre?

Option 4.1 - Town-Centre wide urban design guidance on character, height, scale and massing.

Option 4.2 - Site-specific guidance for key opportunity areas.



Heritage 5

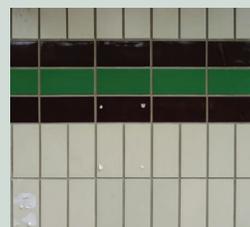
The Town Centre has an important story to tell in terms of its heritage. St Paul's at College Gate is the only listed building, however, several buildings have distinctive historic character, including a number from the original Gibberd masterplan.

Issue

How should the AAP reflect, and better reveal the significance of designated and non-designated assets?

Option 5.1 - Rely on existing historic environment policies in the Local Plan.

Option 5.2 - Define Town Centre specific heritage policy which seeks to protect and enhance the historic character and setting of Harlow.



Retail, leisure and evening economy 6

There is interest in attracting a more diverse mix of shops including some smaller units, and establishing a stronger leisure and evening economy offer, including cultural attractions. Currently the Town Centre suffers from a lack of higher-end retailers and a limited commercial offer which constrains its overall performance.

Issue

How should the AAP meet the identified need for retail floorspace in the Town Centre? How can we make the Town Centre more competitive and viable?

Option 6.1 - Rely on existing Local Plan policies and existing primary and secondary frontage designations.

Option 6.2 - A Town Centre specific policy which manages and supports the overall performance of retail, leisure and evening economy through area specific guidance.

Option 6.3 - Site based proposals and illustrative material for areas of the greatest focus for activities and uses.

Option 6.4 - Establish a clear policy position in relation to cultural uses and features including public art.



Offices and workspace 7

The town centre has experienced a decline in the office market, with a number of buildings coming forward for conversion to residential under Permitted Development Rights. It is important to consider the role of offices and workspace in the context of Harlow's Enterprise Zone status and the arrival of Public Health England.

Issue

What role will office space and workspace have in the future in the Town Centre? Should the Town Centre be positioned as an accessible location for services and amenities and as a residential location to support the sustained economic position of the District?



Option 7.1 - Promote the Town Centre as an office location, welcoming investment in existing stock or new office floorspace.

Option 7.2 - Promote a complementary role of the Town Centre in supporting employment growth throughout the District, in particular developments such as Harlow Enterprise Zone and Public Health England.

Option 7.3 - Promote the Town Centre as a location for SMEs and smaller businesses, potentially as part of the Enterprise Zone supply chain.

Public and community infrastructure 8

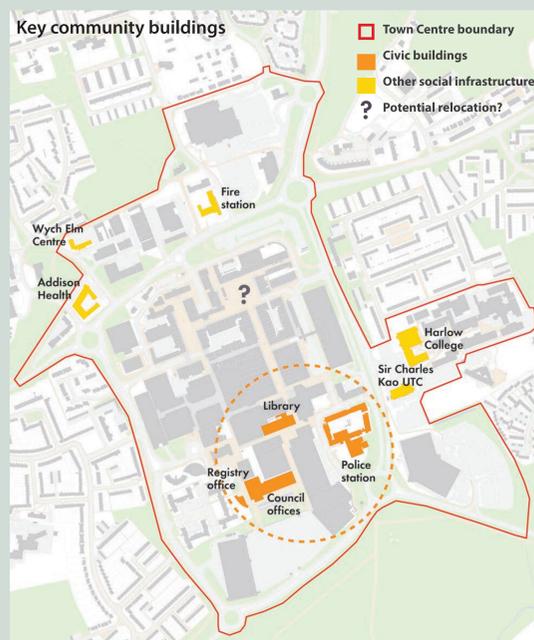
The AAP seeks a more efficient and co-ordinated approach to the location of community facilities in the Town Centre and recognises an opportunity to relocate some civic functions northwards.

Issue

What approach should be taken to public and community infrastructure to contribute to the overall Town Centre experience and performance?

Option 8.1 - More convenient and safe pedestrian links so more residents, staff and students from education facilities, visit the Town Centre.

Option 8.2 - Specific policy supporting the co-location of facilities in convenient locations in more efficient buildings.



Homes

9

The Emerging Local Development Plan sets out a requirement for 12,000 to 15,000 new dwellings during the plan period. Although significant opportunities exist to deliver new homes in the Town Centre, a good proportion of growth is likely to come forward in surrounding areas. New homes located in the Town Centre could improve the overall viability of regeneration proposals and bring more people, and customers for businesses, into the Town Centre.



Issue

Should the AAP define a Town Centre-specific policy position in relation to housing?

Option 9.1 - Rely on the housing position as set out in the Local Plan.

Option 9.2 - Town centre specific residential policies which are likely to recognise the need for a mix more heavily weighted towards high quality apartments in the context of realising mixed and balanced communities.

Option 9.3 - Promote improved linkages between the surrounding neighbourhoods and the Town Centre.

Option 9.4 - Make reference to residential guidance and priorities as part of specific site guidance.



Creative uses

There is a strong tradition of cultural activities and enterprise in Harlow Town Centre which continues to have a positive impact on the Town Centre offer, creating diversity and bringing a different audience to a Town Centre location.

Issue

With a significant number of new homes planned for the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, and the relocation of Public Health England to the town, how can the Town Centre increase its cultural offer and creative industries base to serve the new population?

Option 10.1 - Review existing underutilised sites for possible arts spaces within the town. A general policy position with a presumption in favour of creative development could be established.

Option 10.2 - Review funding sources for a new theatre facility to replace Harlow Playhouse. It would be helpful to progress a specific project to assess whether the theatre is a viable longer-term proposition.

Delivery

The Harlow Town Centre Market Analysis report (Cushman and Wakefield, 2017) identifies a series of key priorities for delivery. Seven main areas of focus are identified, as follows, which have been cast as options below.

Issue

What are the key priorities for the AAP delivery strategy? Which elements can be used to drive the implementation of the overarching vision and objectives?

Option 11.1 - Explore the potential for consolidation of public sector accommodation requirements.

Option 11.2 - Produce a land assembly strategy for sites in the Town Centre.

Option 11.3 - Develop a clear vision and strategy for the Town Centre to guide landowners and developers.

Option 11.4 - Work with the Council and bus service providers to improve bus,

walking and cycling links between to the rail station.

Option 11.5 - Develop a strategy for public realm enhancements.

Option 11.6 - Work with businesses to develop a Business Improvement District proposal which promotes the Town Centre, including events.

Option 11.7 - The Council could develop a town centre specific policy position in relation to S106 agreements.



What are they?

The draft document sets out three spatial scenarios for the emerging direction of travel for area-specific guidance in the AAP. These scenarios could be phased rather than mutually exclusive, and build towards a high intervention scenario over time.

The aim of the AAP is to provide a long-term vision for change whilst allowing growth and interventions in stages.

Details of each phase are given on this board. The letters below correspond to the sites marked on the map.

Baseline scenario

- No major interventions over and above existing proposals
- Includes the cinema and reconfiguration of the former M&S unit
- Includes committed residential projects such as Terminus House and the Circle Housing site.

Medium intervention scenario

- Opportunities to regenerate Market Area
- Opportunities to enhance the environmental quality of Broad Walk between the Market area and the Water Gardens to the south.

High intervention scenario

- Opportunities to bring forward other sites for Town Centre uses and homes. This would establish a good mix of uses to support the health of the Town Centre in the longer term.



Summary of proposals

Baseline scenario

Interior refurbishment of retail:

- A Addington scheme
- B Former Marks and Spencer
- C Circle Housing residential development
- D Office to residential conversion of Terminus House and Redstone House

Medium intervention scenario

Improved public realm along:

- E Broad Walk
- F Bus station
- G Public green space at Town Centre North
- H Former cinema interior refurbishments
- I Office to residential conversion of Boots / New Look

New residential with ground floor retail at:

- J Post Office
- K Car park and Kitson Way
- L Multi-storey car park (mixed use blocks with re-provision of some parking)
- M Replacement of library with library / retail / residential uses

High intervention scenario

Improved public realm along:

- N Fourth Avenue
- O New green space north of Fourth Avenue
- P Town Centre North general

Mixed use blocks, re-providing some uses at:

- Q Wych Elm car park areas
- R Bus Depot / fire station area
- S Sainsbury's area
- T Police station / courts
- U College Gate car park edge
- V Residential blocks at Occasio House

