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Subject: Harlow Council Development Management Document
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MY comments on this consultation Document focus on Harlow's Town Centre because the English Heritage and CABE Urban Panel's report following their 2006 visit strongly emphasised that "the defects in the town centre must be corrected first before development outside it is encouraged".

Nevertheless the Council this March agreed a massive increase in population in and around Harlow without any proposals for a strategy to improve the town centre which has continued to decline since the Urban Panel's visit eleven years ago.

After the Government stopped further development by the HDC in 1980, dissolved the Corporation, sold off the land, stripped the town of its lucrative assets, leaving the Council with the housing and pavements, the Council's spending has been kept to a minimum.

In its present condition there is plentiful evidence in the Press and Social Media that many citizens of Harlow regard their town centre as without attraction and it is not likely to attract a new population around who will simply use the new infrastructure to drive elsewhere with no benefit to Harlow.

Recent developments have shown that Harlow is at present unable to attract high class retail units and the retail marketing world is changing. Consumers are increasingly looking to spend their money on 'experiences' rather than 'things'. A radically different solution is needed to give Harlow Town Centre the attraction it needs.

The Council does own the last significant public space since the Civic Square disappeared - the Market Square and adjoining paved areas. Over these a Crystal Palace / Winter Garden pavilion could arise containing, for example, quality restaurants, art and handicraft shops, designer clothes boutiques (a specialist market providing a quality shopping experience) exhibition space for Enterprise Zone products or activities, space for musical events, together with

exotic planting areas. Such an ever changing, transparent, sparkling yet protected environment at all times of the year would have special attraction.

The last scheme designed by Sir Frederick Gibberd in 1978/9 was a glass-walled Winter Garden in West Square to which the Council "made no objection but decided not to support it financially" (see page 147 of A Civic History of Harlow Council by Ron Bill). Naturally without financial support it came to nothing.

The type of Pavilion I have described could be quickly constructed and ~~be~~ relatively light but the cost of commissioning the design and constructing such a building, which needs to be of the highest quality, would be considerable. If, the Government really regards Harlow as acting as the centre of the expansion it now requires, having recently designated it a "Garden Town" and referred to its "new elevated position"; if these are not merely words, should it not be prepared to help Harlow meet this challenge of making the Town Centre attractive by providing the financial means?

No developer will do this; the initiative needs to come from the Council under its new executive. Many in the town are already longing for the Council to embrace a new vision and will work ~~wi~~^{for} them to achieve it.

"The unique artistic inheritance which Harlow has should not be underplayed". This final quote from the Urban Panels report is relevant because this aspect of Harlow's life has continued to flourish throughout its seventy years. Since the Development Corporation's work was stopped the Arts Trust has continued to place sculpture throughout the town; I took over the lease of the Gibberd Office and ran it as a town centre gallery for three years; the Playhouse had exhibitions; the Gibberd Gallery opened in 2004 and the art community at Parndon Mill has thrived, as have the Gibberd Garden and the ARC in Old Harlow. Clearly there is abundant creative talent in the town to underpin such development as I have described.

Harlow needs a rebirth if it is not to become a dormitory town. I hope the Council will rise to the challenge.

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