



# Harlow Retail Parks Study 2025



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Monitoring of Retail Parks

1.1.1 In order to inform the preparation of planning policies, and reflecting the duty placed on the Council as Local Planning Authority to review the socio-economic and environmental conditions of the district, the Council assesses the uses of the Retail Park units in Harlow. This provides analysis of changes that have occurred in the uses of the units.

1.1.2 The Retail Parks are designated in the Harlow Local Development Plan, which was adopted December 2020. The monitoring of Retail Parks is important to provide a barometer on the vitality, viability and success of Harlow's retail areas. Such monitoring also allows the identification of trends and the measurement of success of the local planning policies which seek to manage the proportion of uses within the Retail Parks.

## 1.2 Harlow's Retail Parks

1.2.1 There are five designated Retail Parks in Harlow, all located ~~to~~in the north of the district:

- Harlow Retail Park
- Princes Gate
- Queensgate Centre
- St James Centre
- The Oaks

# 2 National Legislation and Policies

## 2.1 Use Classes Order

2.1.1 Uses of land and buildings are categorised into various uses known as 'use classes' which are defined by The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).

2.1.2 With effect from 1 September 2020, the UCO was significantly amended and classes were changed. The uses most commonly found in retail areas are listed below.

Class E – Commercial, Business and Service

- E(a): display or retail sale of goods, other than hot food [formerly A1]
  - Examples include shops, hairdressers, pet shops, sandwich bars and retail warehouses

- E(b): sale of food and drink for consumption (mostly) on the premises [formerly A3]
  - Examples include restaurants and cafes
- E(c): provision of financial services and professional services (other than health or medical services) [formerly A2]
  - Examples include banks, building societies, estate agents and employment agencies
- E(d): indoor sport, recreation or fitness
  - Examples include gyms [formerly part of D2]

Sui Generis – certain uses which do not fall within any use class – includes units for:

- Theatres
- Amusement arcades/centres or funfairs
- Launderettes
- Fuel stations
- Hiring, selling and/or displaying motor vehicles
- Taxi businesses
- Retail warehouse clubs
- Nightclubs
- Casinos
- Betting offices/shops
- Pay day local shops
- Hot food takeaways (sale of food and drink for consumption (mostly) off the premises) [formerly A5]
- Public houses, wine bars and drinking establishments [formerly A4]
- Cinemas [formerly part of D2]

2.1.3 The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) states that a change of use does not require planning permission if the new use and former use are in the same use class. If they are not in the same use class then the change would require planning permission

2.1.4 Under permitted development rights enacted by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended), changes of use between certain classes do not require planning permission.

2.1.5 Changing uses between those classified as Sui Generis, however, would require planning permission, because each use classified as Sui Generis technically occupies a use class of its own.

- 2.1.6 Units housing McDonald's, KFC, Tim Hortons and Subway were previously classified as Sui Generis in this Study. However, to ensure accordance with the Retail Frontages Study and general good practice, as of the 2025 version of this Study these units have been reclassified and historic data and maps have been amended accordingly.
- 2.1.7 Units housing McDonald's, KFC and Horton's – which are predominantly restaurants with a 'hot takeaway' element – have been reclassified as E(b). Units housing Subway – which is generally considered to operate as a 'sandwich bar' rather than a 'hot takeaway' – have been reclassified as E(a).

## **2.2 National planning policy and guidance**

- 2.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.
- 2.2.2 Chapter 7 Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres states 'local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan' (paragraph 91) and also states 'when considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre.'
- 2.2.3 Applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale, so that opportunities to utilise suitable town centre or edge of centre sites are fully explored' (paragraph 92).
- 2.2.4 The NPPF goes on to state that for retail and leisure development outside town centres which is not in accordance with an up-to-date plan, an impact assessment should be undertaken where the development is over a proportionate, locally-set floorspace threshold (2,500sqm gross by default) (paragraph 94).
- 2.2.5 However, paragraph 15.28 of the Harlow Local Development Plan (HLDP) states that proposals for retail and leisure uses outside of the Town Centre which exceed 500sqm in size will be required to be supported by an impact assessment.
- 2.2.6 The National Planning Practice Guidance ('Town centres and retail' chapter) provides further information on the sequential test and impact assessment.

### 3 Local Policies

#### 3.1 Harlow Local Development Plan (HLDP)

- 3.1.1 The Harlow Local Development Plan (HLDP), which was adopted in December 2020, sets out the long-term planning vision for the district and guides future development across Harlow to 2033. It includes a number of policies relating to Retail Parks in Harlow.
- 3.1.2 The Retail Hierarchy, which reflects the role and function of the district's retail centres, is set out in Policy RS1 with Harlow Town Centre being where retail development should be directed in the first instance and where Retail Parks are at the bottom of the hierarchy.
- 3.1.3 Retail Parks are protected as a provider of bulky retail goods in Policy RS3 which ensures they do not provide direct competition with the town centre. Policy PR10 sets out the criteria that development in Retail Parks must meet, which is as follows:
- a) the sequential approach is satisfied;
  - b) the development is in Use Class A1 and is for the sale of bulky goods, or provides leisure activities;
  - c) any sub-division does not result in any separate retail unit being less than 1,000sqm in size

### 4 Findings

#### 4.1 Harlow Retail Park

Use Class*	2015	2016	2019	2023	2024	2025
E(a) [A1]	50% (2 units)	75% (3 units)	75% (3 units)	75% (3 units)	75% (3 units)	50% (2 units)
E(b) [A3]	25% (1 unit)	25% (1 unit)	25% (1 unit)	25% (1 unit)	25% (1 unit)	25% (1 unit)
Vacant	25% (1 unit)					25% (1 unit)

\* former Use Class is listed in square brackets

- 4.1.1 Harlow Retail Park has consistently performed well since 2015. There was one vacant unit during the 2015 survey, however, this was filled the following year and stayed occupied. In 2025 a different unit became vacant – the first recorded vacancy in a decade.

## 4.2 Princes Gate

Use Class*	2015	2016	2019	2023	2024	2025
E(a) [A1]	100% (5 units)	100% (5 units)	100% (5 units)	80% (4 units)	80% (4 units)	100% (5 units)
Vacant				20% (1 unit)	20% (1 unit)	

\* former Use Class is listed in square brackets

4.2.1 Princes Gate has consistently performed well since 2015. However, there was one unit that was vacant during the 2023 survey which was due to B&M moving to the Queensgate Centre and was not filled at the time of the 2024 survey. By the 2025 survey this had been filled.

## 4.3 Queensgate Centre

Use Class*	2015	2016	2019	2023	2024	2025
E(a) [A1]	68% (13 units)	74% (14 units)	74% (14 units)	75% (15 units)	75% (15 units)	70% (14 units)
E(b) [A3]	11% (2 units)	11% (2 units)	16% (3 units)	15% (3 units)	15% (3 units)	15% (3 units)
Sg	5% (1 units)	5% (1 units)	5% (1 units)	5% (1 units)	5% (1 units)	5% (1 units)
Vacant	16% (3 units)	11% (2 units)	5% (1 unit)	5% (1 unit)	5% (1 unit)	10% (2 units)

\* former Use Class is listed in square brackets

4.3.1 Queensgate Centre has varied in performance since 2015. There were 3 units that were vacant in 2015 and 2 units continued to be vacant in the 2016 survey.

4.3.2 By 2019 there was only one vacant unit (1), which by 2023 had been subdivided into 3 units to become units 1a, 1b and 1c. Another unit became vacant around this time, while two units (3a and 3b) merged to become unit 3, providing B&M a larger space to move to from Princes Gate. A further unit became vacant by the time of the 2025 survey.

#### 4.4 St James Centre

Use Class*	2015	2016	2019	2023	2024	2025
E(a) [A1]	74% (14 units)	68% (13 units)	53% (10 units)	63% (12 units)	63% (12 units)	63% (12 units)
B2	16% (3 units)	16% (3 units)	16% (3 units)	16% (3 units)	16% (3 units)	16% (3 units)
B8	5% (1 unit)	5% (1 unit)	11% (2 units)	5% (1 unit)	5% (1 unit)	5% (1 unit)
Vacant	5% (1 unit)	11% (2 unit)	21% (4 units)	16% (3 units)	16% (3 units)	16% (3 units)

\* former Use Class is listed in square brackets

4.4.1 St James Centre has varied in performance since 2015, with a higher rate of vacant units than other retail parks, particularly since 2019. Unlike Harlow's other retail parks, St James Centre occupies units housing B2 and B8 uses.

#### 4.5 The Oaks

Use Class*	2015	2016	2019	2023	2024	2025
E(a) [A1]	80% (8 units)	90% (9 units)	90% (9 units)	89% (8 units)	89% (8 units)	78% (7 units)
E(b) [A3]	10% (1 unit)	10% (1 unit)	10% (1 unit)	11% (1 unit)	11% (1 unit)	11% (1 unit)
Vacant	10% (1 unit)					11% (1 unit)

\* former Use Class is listed in square brackets

4.5.1 The Oaks has consistently performed well since 2015, although a unit became vacant between the 2024 and 2025 surveys, which is the first time there has been a recorded vacancy in a decade.

4.5.2 Between 2019 and 2023, units 7a and 7b – occupied by McDonald's and Carphone Warehouse – merged to become unit 7. The latter moved into a space within the Currys unit in Harlow Retail Park.



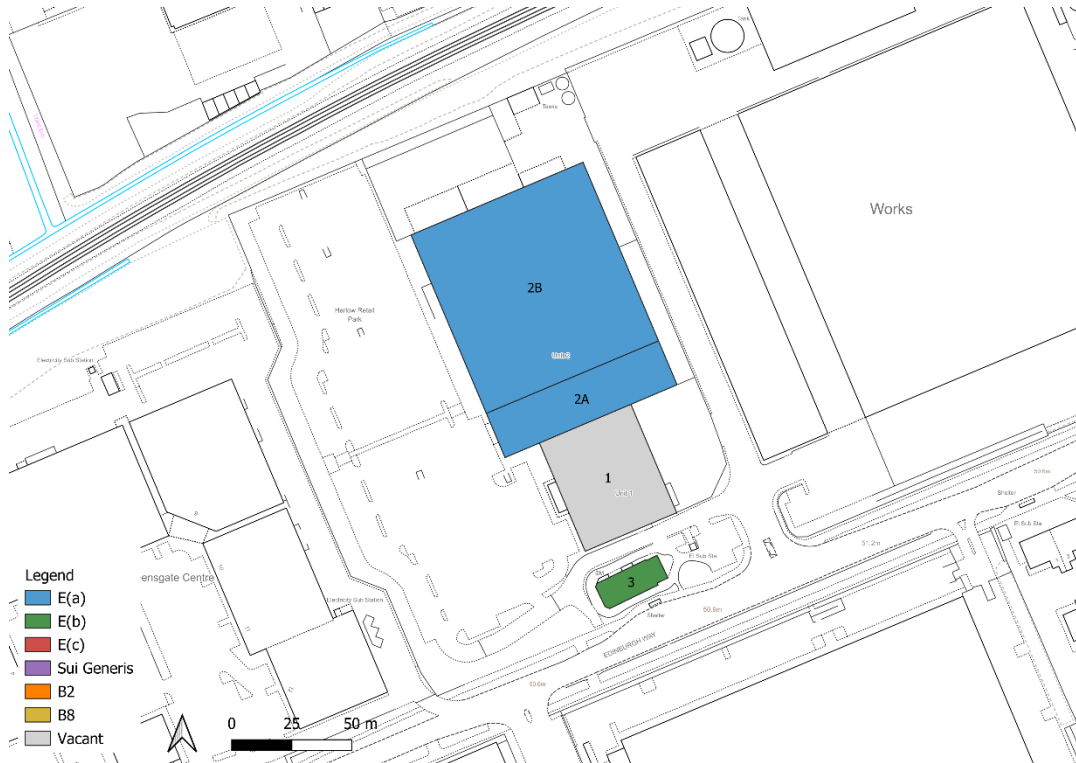
## **5 Conclusion**

- 5.1.1 Harlow's retail parks have performed well over the last decade, despite challenges being experienced by the wider retail industry, such as impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, changing retail habits and increasing operational costs.
- 5.1.2 The predominate use across the retail parks is E(a). There are also some restaurants (E(b)) which provide hot takeaway elements, one unit in use as a cinema (Sui Generis) and some units, in St James Centre, in B2 and B8 uses.
- 5.1.3 The next survey for this Study will take place in April 2026.

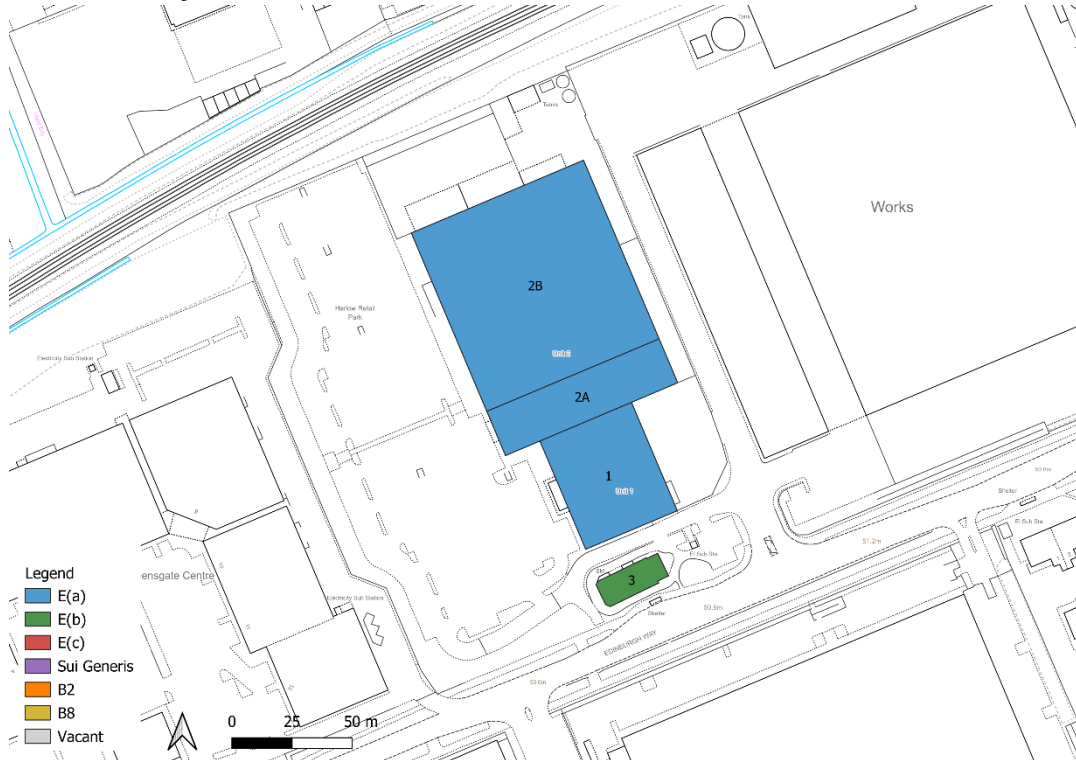
## 6 Appendix 1 – Retail Park Maps

### 6.1 Harlow Retail Park

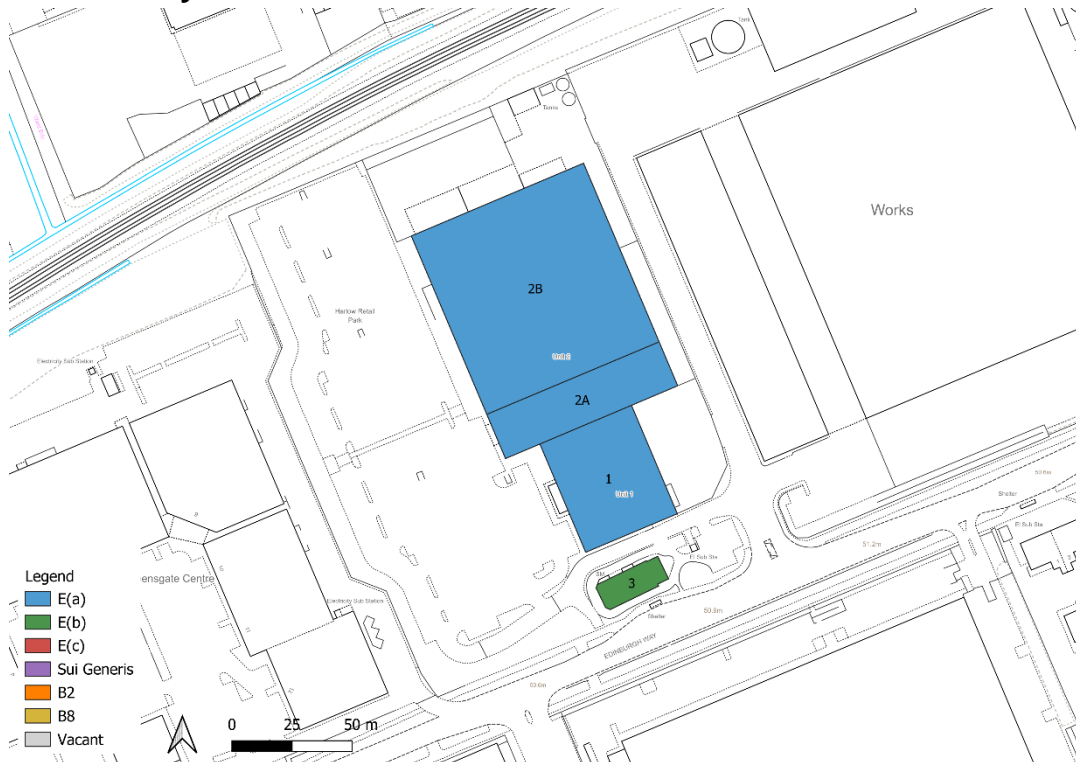
#### 2015 Survey



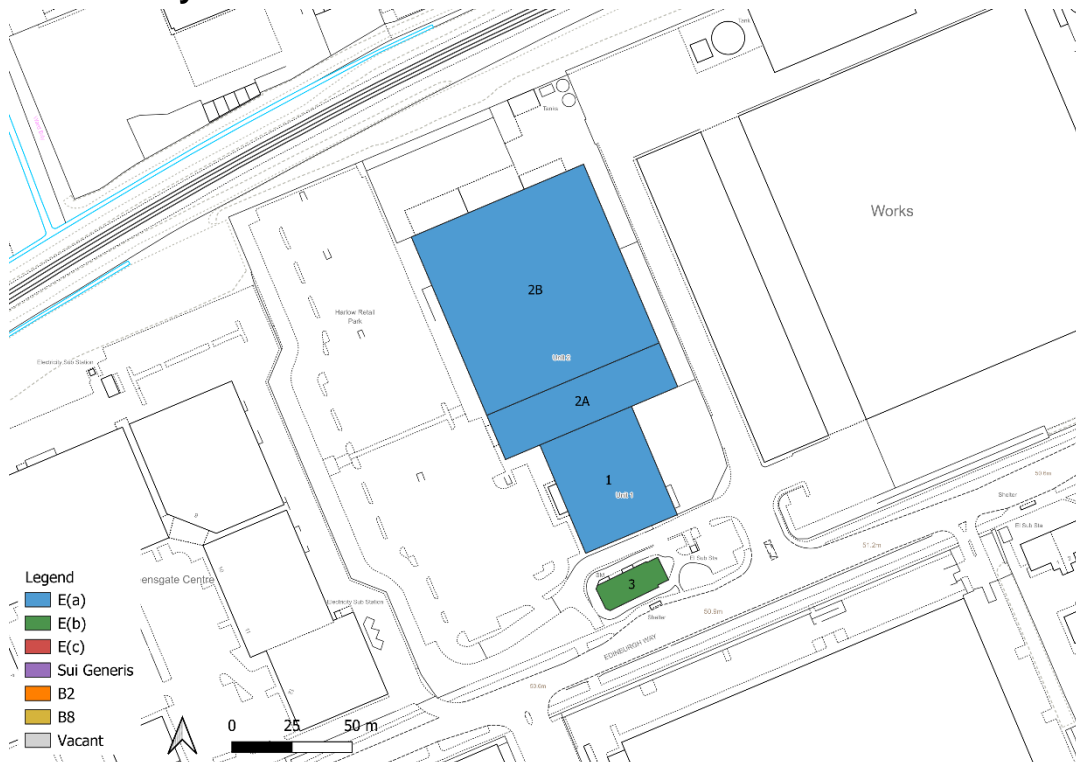
#### 2016 Survey



## 2019 Survey



## 2023 Survey



[illegible][illegible]

## 6.2 Princes Gate

### 2015 Survey



### 2016 Survey





## 2019 Survey



## 2023 Survey



Map of the Princes Gate Retail Park showing five buildings (1-5) and their surrounding environment. The map includes a legend, a scale bar (0-50m), a north arrow, and labels for 'Maraglate Spring', 'Princes Gate Retail Park', 'Oaks Retail Park', 'Play Area', 'Factory', 'B2', 'B8', and 'Vacant'.

**Legend**

- E(a)
- E(b)
- E(c)
- Sui Generis
- B2
- B8
- Vacant

## 6.3 Queensgate Centre

### 2015 Survey



### 2016 Survey





## 2019 Survey



## 2023 Survey



## 2024 Survey



## 2025 Survey



## 6.4 St James Centre

### 2015 Survey



### 2016 Survey



## 2019 Survey



## 2023 Survey





2024 Survey



2025 Survey



## 6.5 The Oaks

### 2015 Survey



### 2016 Survey



## 2019 Survey



## 2023 Survey



2024 Survey



2025 Survey

