

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK WORKSHOP

Introduction

This document has been created following the joint workshop held between the Boards of Harlow 2020 and Harlow Renaissance on 11th June 2008. It outlines some thoughts on establishing a long term vision for Harlow to take forward the existing Community Strategy within the context of producing Harlow's Local Development Framework (LDF). It seeks to provide some input to Harlow Council in their delivery of the LDF by creating some shared aspirations that can help to shape the Council's Core Strategy and the development of the Issues and Options stage of the LDF.

It seeks to create a vision to 2031, since the revised Regional Spatial Strategy in 2011 will run until then. By this time, Harlow could be developing to something approaching twice its current size. We therefore have a single opportunity now to lay the foundations for using this growth as a positive, transforming force to create a stronger Harlow.

We believe that it will be important for Harlow's LDF to set a strong vision of what success will look like and then to create the spatial framework to enable its delivery. This paper seeks to contribute to and shape that outcome.

Overall direction

It will be important that Harlow is seen as having a strong Unique Selling Point and that it does not develop as a 'clone town'. Harlow's growth is not simply about building more houses, but about using the opportunities presented by this growth to create a better and more sustainable town. We feel strongly that Harlow should be seeking to recreate the image that it had upon its foundation and in the early years of its development – vibrancy, innovation, a strong sense of community and the provider of opportunities.

Harlow has strong defining features – its green wedges and open spaces, the extent and quality of its public art heritage, its reputation as a family town as well as its geographic location. All these features can be used to stress the competitive advantage of Harlow.

A development framework that enables some modest improvements to the town will not be successful. If by 2031 Harlow has a population of c150,000 but the same economic stagnation and the same social problems then we will have failed. We now have the opportunity to be bold and transformational and recreate the earlier spirit which the town embraced. However, we also need to be mindful that competition for resources is strong, even within Essex, and that therefore we must build a strong and unique identity for the town to create an offer that will result in sustained economic growth.

“Harlow – see something different”.

This is also about setting out a clear competitive advantage for Harlow – we will be competing with other locations across Essex as well as the wider region. We have to establish for Harlow a set of clear propositions which demonstrate why Harlow should be a preferred location for business. This will encompass the right space, the mix of housing, the education and skills standards as well providing good transport connections.

The rest of this paper follows the five themes of the LDF and proposes some thoughts in relation to each of them to help shape the next stage of the process.

Placeshaping

- Harlow should retain the best of the past whilst continually creating something new. Harlow had a reputation for showcasing the best in contemporary design and architecture and we should continue to aspire to this. Newhall is continuing this tradition in a 21st century context and more examples of this should be promoted.
- The LDF should contain a clear message that whilst future developments must be sympathetic to the town’s past and its setting, Harlow has a firm commitment to quality contemporary architecture.
- Preservation of aspects of the town’s ‘New Town Heritage’ will be important but we must also strive to enable the best in inspirational architecture for civic buildings and housing.
- We can build on many of the principles of the original Gibberd masterplan to deliver the growth of Harlow, in particular the creation of identifiable neighbourhoods. More work needs to be done on what a modern neighbourhood looks like, particularly in relation to its services and facilities, but as in the town’s original development phase, the neighbourhood concept can be a valuable tool in creating a sense of community – local shops, health facilities, good public transport are all seen as key.
- New neighbourhoods must be integrated into the remainder of the town and not set up as separate developments. This applies equally to existing developments such as Church Langley and Newhall where we should seek to ensure that they are presented as being fully part of Harlow.
- A vibrant town centre with a strong and diverse evening economy (restaurants and an enhanced leisure offering) are essential attributes to being able to attract young professionals to the town. This must also include a significant residential element and a broader retail mix.
- The Green Wedges are an important feature in Harlow’s distinctiveness and should be preserved. However, this should not necessarily rule out re-shaping some of the green spaces where this can create better use of land to enable appropriate development. Ultimately the overriding principle is that the provision of quality green space should be maintained even if there are changes to the shape of this.

Housing

- The LDF must encourage a diversity of housing types and tenures to develop Harlow into a mixed town that enables a wide population base.
- Whilst there is an undoubted need for additional social housing (rented and shared ownership), there is perhaps an even greater need for the executive or aspirational housing that is lacking in many parts of the town.
- It will also be equally important to ensure that different housing types are spread across the town to create genuinely mixed communities. Newhall is already working well to integrate social housing and private housing so that they are indistinguishable and we can also learn from other mixed developments across the UK and Europe.
- We recognise that this will have major implications for development within the existing town but feel that this opportunity must be grasped to create transformational change. Planning policies should therefore encourage mixed developments within the existing urban areas as well as in any urban extension.

Economic Prosperity

- Policies to retain the town's major employers must be a priority and we should seek to build upon the town's existing strengths such as electronics and pharmaceuticals. The existence of a nationally recognised journalism training facility perhaps also offers other opportunities to develop a media portfolio with Harlow's quick transport links to central London and to the Olympic site and its post-Games broadcasting and media centre.
- Harlow's proximity to the growing east London and Docklands economy also provides opportunities for the development of new sectors, particularly financial services and the creative industries. Harlow's transport connections enable this and we therefore should seek to ensure that Harlow has the employment space provision to encourage new business development.
- We need to make Harlow a magnet for attracting talented employees (e.g. housing) and in this way we will be able to do more to attract and retain major companies. The LDF must therefore make the links between the spatial requirements for executive housing and the economic development impacts that this will have.
- Harlow should proactively position itself as providing opportunities relating to Stansted, in both employment and business location. Proximity to Stansted provides opportunities to create further links with international research functions as well as emerging markets in the Far East whilst there are capacity constraints at Heathrow and Gatwick.
- Harlow must also diversify its business base to reduce any potential negative effects of downturns in the global economy. Therefore, policies to encourage

the establishment and sustained growth of Small and Medium sized Enterprises should be encouraged.

- Harlow should look at new employment zones to ensure a balance of provision across the town e.g. near Junction 7 and to the north east of the town to link with a potential new motorway junction.
- There must be a strong emphasis on growing local talent and skills development, particularly higher level skills in new technologies to respond to the potential new jobs that will emerge over the next couple of decades. Equally, there must be a focus on interpersonal skills since this will increasingly be an underpinning requirement for all employment.
- Harlow should seek to promote flexible working arrangements – staggered hours and more working from home will not only assist with congestion but will also help to improve health and family life.

Infrastructure

- The northern bypass and new motorway junction are essential to the growth of the town and to ensuring its economic success.
- Gibberd's original plan allowed for the future expansion of key roads into dual carriageways and this should be examined for implementation.
- Consideration should be given to examining potential better locations for key services e.g. hospital, fire service, police. Cramped town centre locations are not necessarily the best locations for these in terms of accessibility, particularly looking at the long term growth of Harlow over the next 20 years. The LDF provides a unique opportunity for us to identify the most appropriate locations to site public services and amenities for access and to accommodate growth over the longer term.
- In relation to healthcare, with a population of potentially 150,000, there will be need for significant additional primary care services and this provides another opportunity for Harlow to innovate by creating new forms of primary care. For a town of this size, it is hard to see how the existing hospital site will be able to deliver and within the lifetime of the plan it is likely that a new hospital will be required in a more appropriate location.
- In terms of education, provision should be made for all secondary schools to have sixth forms. This is not only about dealing with population increase but also the desire, with higher level jobs to be available, for more of our young people to have experienced higher levels of education. The development of Anglia Ruskin's University Campus in Harlow is to be welcomed and the LDF should seek to enable future expansion of HE provision within the town.

Cohesion and Community

- Urban planning can have a significant impact upon the health of local residents and therefore the LDF will need to be assessed for its potential

impact. Health needs an integrated solution since it cuts across all aspects of the LDF.

- Harlow's cycleways are a good feature of the town for both transport and healthy living. They should be encouraged and an expanded town must seek to expand the cycle network.
- Raising aspiration is key to future success and will assist in economic prosperity by, for example, reducing teenage pregnancies. The LDF must therefore be an aspiration document, demonstrating in spatial terms the ambition that Harlow has for its town and its community.
- Effort should be made to welcome different communities since diversity will inevitably increase. New communities will have much to offer Harlow as the town continually changes. New skills and experiences can help to revitalise the town and we should seek to harness new talent to assist in the transformation of Harlow.

Concluding Comments

Harlow's LDF can play a critical role in helping to transform the town for the better. It should not just be about accommodating growth, but about enabling transformation. Within Harlow 2020 and Harlow Renaissance Ltd there is a desire to re-create a dynamic and forward looking town that will capitalise upon its location to provide a prosperous future for Harlow's communities. The spatial framework that the LDF will create provides a critical component of achieving this and delivering quality jobs, quality homes and a diverse and active leisure economy. The above comments are intended to provide some thoughts on the vision that the LDF should seek to deliver. We hope that they are useful to Harlow Council in shaping the next stage of the LDF process and we commend them to you.

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