
Harlow North

The sustainable growth of a town

This document is part of a forty page prospectus

Harlow North: The sustainable growth of a town

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The Harlow North project is work in progress:
the images and plans in this prospectus are
for illustrative purposes only.

Making town *local*: achieving 'sense of place'

Harlow North will be designed – from the largest scale to smaller details – to create a real town. Its streets, public spaces, buildings, materials and details will draw upon local traditions and high quality contemporary design to create a settlement that has identity, variety, richness and a real *sense of place*.

Local distinctiveness

In their brilliant essay, *Losing Your Place*, Sue Clifford and Angela King of Common Ground describe local distinctiveness as being: "...essentially about places and our relationship with them. It is as much about the commonplace as about the rare, about the everyday as much as the endangered, and about the ordinary as much as the spectacular... Many of us have strong allegiances to places, complex and compound appreciation of them, and we recognize that nature, identity and place have strong bonds".

The emerging plans for Harlow North draw from local architectural patterns and traditions, informed by an understanding of local and regional context. Local towns, such as Hertford, Bishop's Stortford, Colchester, Bury St. Edmunds, Saffron Walden, Norwich and Wisbech provide case studies for understanding an East Anglian 'pattern language' which Harlow North can respond to. These places also help define how to make good streets. They provide references for

local materials that will weather well and look better as they age. They suggest distinctive architectural forms, proportions and types for reference in creating the new buildings in Harlow North.

Harlow New Town has a strong local sense of place. Several parts of Harlow are designated conservation areas and some of its buildings are highly regarded examples of their period. There is a commitment to procure high quality contemporary design in Harlow North that can refer to the best of Harlow New Town in the creation of a new local sense of place.

Responding to the historic landscape

Theme 7, 'The town and the landscape' explains in more detail how Harlow North would respond to the complex ecological and environmental conditions of the site. The landscape is also rich in archaeological artefact. It is a *historic* landscape: not just physically, but in association and meaning. By sensitively locating the patterns of new settlement around the existing topographical and historic landscape, rather than ring-fencing churches, moats or Second World War defences, both could be enhanced and given presence.



1. Colchester, Essex: a 1920s Ordnance Survey map showing a traditional street pattern. The Roman grid layout is still visible under mediaeval, Georgian and twentieth century buildings.
2. The Broadway, Old Harlow in 1906

Responding to existing villages

For generations, towns grew by incorporating existing settlement and landscape. The traditional town managed this in a sensitive way, largely because places grew slowly and were built with local materials. Growth of cities in the 20th century changed that as historic communities were swallowed up with little regard for the local or particular. In the post-industrial world, towns once again need to be grown carefully, and with respect for local distinctiveness.

The best way to respond to local settlement can only be worked out through collaborative planning that engages the local community in the design process itself.

There are two key potential options.

The first is to strengthen an existing village by locating new neighbourhoods around it in such a way that it becomes the centre of an inter-connected network of local centres. This is how towns like London evolved, where today many areas still retain a village character. Each has its own local high streets, parks, employment and housing but is connected to the wide city by public transport and major roads.

The second is to 'ring-fence' the village by locating new settlement away from it, and surrounding it with recreational parkland to protect it from future expansion. This is the most effective way to maintain the integrity of an existing village. But this approach makes it much more difficult to link effectively to the wider culture and economic activity of the town.

Local collaboration is an absolute requirement in making these choices. There is a firm commitment to a local Enquiry by Design process should the site be designated for development.



Eastwick, Harlow North: streets and squares



Eastwick, Harlow North: a new village green and pond (part of the sustainable urban drainage system) suggested as a way to enhance the existing village

3, 4 & 5. Colchester and Hertford: streets and square used as reference for the new development at Harlow North

