



Dear HCS Members

Here is our first newsletter since lockdown began – in another time long ago when things were different. The special occasion for this effort is not simply ‘it’s about time’, but the fact that Harlow is celebrating its 75th birthday this year, and we thought we should mark the date with some stories, views and opinions from our members. John Curry has already led a group of members and friends on a longish early Spring walk starting from Moot House – where the first Council offices were based for a time – taking in the listed Crescent of three-storey houses at the top of Orchard Croft and skirting the new industrial Hub and the many works in progress there. John writes all this in much more detail than I can, and with more authority. He has promised another walk in midsummer. Tony Evans, our Chair, has explained the new Harlow Plan and HCS’s detailed appraisal of it, as well as other Council matters in 3 separate pieces throughout the newsletter, so you can pace yourselves and indulge in some memories of life in the New Town, a glimpse of Frederick Gibberd’s Diary written on the day the deed was done (FG didn’t do anything special on that day – an interesting fact in itself), a closer look at New Hall and some nice words about Harlow written by ex-residents etc. So, settle yourselves down and remind yourselves of our history, our good days, bad times, interesting and heart-warming reminders of a sense of belonging and fellowship perhaps forgotten. We also remember those who were with us before recent events who have died but will not be forgotten: our Chair, Stan Newens, founder of HCS, John Graham, architect, Sue McDonald, Gerda Rubinstein and many others. We salute you.

We were overwhelmed by the number of pieces that were sent to us. Consequently, we have decided to divide the 75th Anniversary edition into two parts; we'll send part two in a week or so. Meanwhile, here is part one.

I'd say 'Enjoy!' but I really don't like that exhortation. So, I'll just say – remind yourselves of what an exciting new venture it was, and how lives have been changed.

Barbara Burge

Harlow Town Plan

In January this year Harlow Council held a consultation on a draft Town Plan which set out a vision for 2047, which will be Harlow's centenary year.

The Council and Harlow Community needs to set the development framework and agenda, given that there are multiple developers, planning authorities, organisations and agencies involved, with no single overall body, such as the old Development Corporation. We support the creation of a long-term vision for the town, to evolve and be maintained as the context changes.

The draft plan covered a range of key issues:

- Growth management to meet the town's needs
- Types of housing needed
- Climate change and transport infrastructure
- Regeneration of the town centre
- Sports and leisure facilities and green open spaces
- Improving health and wellbeing
- Neighbourhood regeneration – shopping centres, hatches and estates
- Waste & recycling services and facilities.

We set up a working party to review the draft plan. We broadly supported the vision and welcomed the plan, which we consider to be positive and aspirational. We suggested it be renamed 'Harlow 2047 Vision'. However, in our view it is not a plan as such since it doesn't have measurable objectives, resources and activities – nevertheless it is important and useful to set the agenda and themes to be developed.

Most of the themes in the consultation document are not those that the Council controls directly. The document should indicate how the Council will seek to influence and gain the buy-in of the organisations and stakeholders that currently control the areas covered by each theme.

Community Engagement is an area that should be addressed at the beginning - how we realise the vision and develop informed, empowered and active community involvement in local decision making. It should say how the Council's Community Engagement Strategy will be further developed. We note that an updated Engagement Strategy was presented to the Council Cabinet on 24th March. We will review this in due course.

The document is a first draft that we understand will be expanded, and we believe there are some important additions to be made. The draft vision is focussed on development planning, economic development and infrastructure. To be truly holistic, we believe it should be extended to include all significant areas that are integral to the quality of life in the town. In our view, there are some important areas not covered or which should be expanded, such as: Education, Arts, Culture and Heritage, Social Infrastructure and Development, in particular support and facilities for families and young people. We gave our views on each section of the documents and suggested additions for each of these further areas. You can read the draft plan [here](#), and our response [here](#).

The draft plan contains commendations such as 'one of the best', 'enviable', 'exemplary', 'world class'. These are fine as a shorthand for aspirations, but we said that there should be more in each supporting theme about what these mean in practice, how they can be assessed objectively and be used to shape the achievement of the vision. For example, the statement 'Harlow's cycle network will be completely rebuilt and extended to a world leading standard' could be expanded to add 'that connects all areas of Greater Harlow, is separated from pedestrians, is well maintained, well-lit and safe'.

The vision is for 2047, which is later than the date the Council has set to achieve carbon net zero emissions and just before the national target of 2050. Given the scale of reductions required to meet the targets, it is evident that planning for and mitigating climate change must be a central concern of everything that the Council does. We believe that addressing climate change must be given even more urgency and prominence than is already the case in the draft vision.

Tony Evans

A Walk in the Sunshine

Friday 25th March 2022 marked 75 years since the signing of the Designation Order by Lewis Silkin MP, Minister for Town & Country Planning in the Attlee government,

Harlow Civic Society organised a walk to mark the occasion, on what turned out to be a beautiful spring day. Warm sunshine, daffodils, primroses and cherry blossom greeted 30 or so walkers who assembled outside Moot House at The Stow that afternoon. Moot House was chosen as a starting point for a number of reasons. Firstly, in 1947 the house was probably the only habitation in the rural



landscape here. It had been built in 1860 by the Arkwright family as the vicarage for St Mary at Latton church and now stood empty. The church would have been visible from the house, but now The Stow shopping area has taken away that view. Secondly, the vacant building soon became the de facto town hall in the early days of the New Town, with Epping and later Harlow Councils holding meetings there. It also became the cultural centre when Netteswell & Mark Hall Community Association took over the building for the benefit of new town residents. Thirdly, on the forecourt of Moot House stands 'Chiron' the first of the Town's sculpture collection, commissioned to mark the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953.

Moving off at about 2.00pm we admired the terrace of houses at Orchard Croft as we walked across the green to Latton Street. Before the arrival of the new town this was a public road that ran approximately south – north from Potter Street, a small village on the A11 London – Norwich road, to Netteswell village.



Frederick Gibberd, who had been appointed Master Planner for Harlow, saw that this road and others of a similar nature would make ideal cycling and pedestrian routes, as a new road network would be required for vehicular traffic.

And so our group continued along Latton Street, passing the housing areas of Cooks Spinney & Blackbush Spring until we arrived at Momples Road. Here we



stopped to admire the outstanding architecture of Ladyshot, so bold! It was designed by F R S Yorke, one of many young architects appointed to design areas of our town.

Continuing south along Latton Street we reached the point where Todd Brook flows west beneath our route. The brook continues west, right across the town and is the main artery to the east – west green wedge, a main feature of Gibberd's plan. Whilst straddling Todd Brook we took the opportunity to admire Pennymead Tower and the curving block of maisonettes, Quarry Spring. The view from these buildings across the meadows is to be envied. Frank Brown, who had lived in the tower told us of his early years in Harlow, residing in Pennymead Tower. Heavenly, probably sums it up!

Proceeding southwards we soon reached Puffers Green with the instantly recognisable Clock Tower house of 1863. It is currently shrouded in scaffolding while routine maintenance is carried out on this charming landmark. Listed grade 2, it was built by the Arkwrights, who were the major landowners here until the arrival of the New Town. Onwards, via New Town underpasses beneath Second Avenue and the A414 and then through Pytt Field, unremarkable, except for some well-designed 1960s bungalows. We then headed north, along through Gardiners, formerly the A11, and bordering Church Langley, the 1990s addition to our town. Diving through yet another underpass, beneath Church Langley Way, we soon returned to the old A11 and reached Kao Park.

Kao Park is part of Harlow's rejuvenated, science-based industrial zone. The site, once occupied by STL (Standard Telephone Laboratories), is the location where Sir Charles Kao and his team developed fibre optic cables, so important to the development of the internet. Now the site is occupied by long term, Harlow-based companies such as Raytheon, Arrow Electronics and Pearsons.



It is also home to Kao Data, a computing centre said to be the most powerful in the UK. Two more such facilities are in the planning and construction phases on adjacent sites. A sure sign of industrial faith in the future for Harlow. Gazing at a building full of computers is probably not the most uplifting of experiences, but it is part of the future for our town.

We moved on, less swiftly now, northwards along London Road to Newhall, the ongoing private development in Harlow, turning into Maypole Street to admire the 'black houses'. These were designed by the Alison Brookes architectural practice and were shortlisted for the prestigious Stirling Prize for Architecture in 2013. Clearly an effort is being made to produce an attractive townscape in Newhall.



We then returned to the commercial/science district called Harlow Innovation Park to see one of the Town's latest sculptures outside new office buildings that are available to let. Twofold by Nick Hornby is an impressive steel sculpture that can be viewed from various angles and was much admired by our group.

The penultimate leg of our walk was along the A414 to Felmongers in Mark Hall South. It is typical of the early New Town, with a good variety of accommodation and green spaces. We then crossed Momples Road and walked past Solo Flight, surely one of the Town's favourite sculptures. The juxtaposition of the sculpture and the ancient church of St Mary at Latton on the other side of First Avenue is one the joys of the townscape.



Route of 75th anniversary walk, 6.5 km

Back at last to The Stow, the sun still shining, weary legs carried us through the pedestrianised shopping centre, pausing only to polish the bronze sculpture Not in Anger. We returned to Moot House having travelled through 75 years of Harlow New Town in a couple of hours. My thanks to all who kept me company, especially those of you whose recollections of life in Harlow added greatly to the event.

Another walk will take place on Saturday 18th June, starting at 10.30. We will walk to the Town Park and back, a distance of about 3 miles. I hope that you will be able to join me then. Details to follow.

John Curry

Harlow Women's Institute - A bridge between two worlds

Mrs Newman Gilbey (*see below) of Mark Hall was the first President of Harlow Women's Institute. The first meeting in July 1919 was held at Mark Hall

Laundry which was situated on Netteswell Road, now a cycle track. Mrs Phillips of Mayfield Farm, the wife of Harry Phillips, who was the Farm Bailiff for Moor Hall, was Secretary. The WI in Essex dates back to 1917.

After Mrs Gilbey stepped down as President she continued to support the WI. Members were invited to Mark Hall for garden parties. Other owners of large houses also invited the WI to use their grounds, eg The Wayre and Hill House, Mulberry Green and Hillingdon at Churchgate Street.

Life was very different then. Harlow was the local shopping hub for the villages (little more than hamlets) which were later to comprise the new town of Harlow. Kirkaldy's Marine Engineering Works at Burnt Mill was the biggest employer. Employment in agriculture, the Essex Hunt, domestic service in local large private houses still gave Harlow a pre-war, rural feel, but the WI provided women in Harlow with an interest beyond their homes and an opportunity to develop new skills.

The WI Hall in Garden Terrace Road was opened in December 1920 together with its neighbour The War Memorial Institute. In the early 1920s Harlow WI was raising money for its building fund. Little has changed since then - the WI in 2022 is still trying to raise money for its building fund!

During the Second World War the WI Hall was used as part of the war effort. Members then met at the nearby Victoria Hall.

The WI Hall has been used for many events over the years. Couples celebrated their wedding receptions and engagement parties there and many groups met in the Hall as the new town developed. In recent years WEA, adult ballet, the Caledonian Society, children's dance school, bridge players, dog training, ballroom dancing, Shakespeare reading group, exercise classes have all used the hall. Old Harlow Gardening Club holds its annual show there in August.



In 2019 Harlow WI celebrated its 100th birthday

Harlow WI, formed in a small-town setting, has survived into the new town age. The hall has undergone improvements over the last few years with the help of grants and it is hoped to continue this work when fundraising allows.

(*) Married women in 1919 were often referred to under their husband's name, e.g. Mrs. Jabez Smith. The WI does not have a Chair. 'President' is used. Other WI Groups have existed in the area covered by the new town but Harlow is the only one surviving (April 2022).

Jean Wright

Stale Cakes and Handy Milk

Ron Bill believed in Harlow from the day he arrived in 1956 until his death in 2014 aged 84.

He was a housing officer with Harlow Development Corporation for many years. Later, he joined Harlow Council and contributed through his various jobs for the Housing and Community Services Departments to make the town as good and fulfilling a place for everyone as he could. Away from work he was driving force in the Film Society, a local historian and walks organiser, a founder member of Harlow Civic Society, a proud Socialist. Whatever he involved himself in, Ron certainly 'walked the walk' contributing much more than just 'talking the talk'.

The piece below has been taken from one of Ron's books. It describes his job as it was in the late 1950s in 'Coming to Harlow: The Rent Man Cometh.'

Mag Barrett

"I hope that in this memoir I have shown some of the many varied responsibilities of the Harlow Housing Staff Team."

New lettings on Thursday mornings

On house-letting days –Thursday mornings – it was for many a dream come true (their Utopia?). Everyone got a welcome when they collected their keys and were besieged outside each housing office by Radbourne and Co-op Diaries, bakers and merchants, Eastern Gas and Eastern Electricity reps trying to sell their cookers and services that people would need. Some gave free milk, which was always handy for office tea that day!

Charles Hall Furnishers had an arrangement with Harlow Development Corporation that furniture items could be purchased and repaid on a weekly basis with the rent. Separate cards were issued for these payments.

The Development Corporation and Harlow Sports Trust devised a scheme for a voluntary 1d (one penny) per week on individual rents to go towards the upkeep of the first Sports Centre to be built in the UK (Harlow Sport Centre as the first purpose-built multi-Sports Centre became a model for those that followed.)

The pennies had to be accounted for separately so that the amount due to the Sports Trust could be accurately accounted. Sometimes considerable time would be expended if daily or weekly accounts were 1 or 2 pennies out in the balance, it had to be 100% correct! None of the contributors received any refunds when the Sports Centre was later sold for a reported £26 million for housing developments – the first major Green Wedge to be lost.

Fridays were spent chasing up repairs, visiting tenants who owed rent, and seeing that one's housing areas were in good shape. Every Friday afternoon I would visit the Corporation's launderette at Tanys Dell to collect and bank the week's takings. When the Corporation experimented with collection of rents in Common



Rooms, two of us would sit all day in *Glebelands Common Room* recording payments, with the cash box on the table, and, at the end of the day, put the cash in a satchel and wander back to the Stow office. Every night there was overtime from 5.15 to 8.15pm. This would start with a total exodus to Pearce's bakery shop to get a cheap bag of stale cakes. On my initial salary of £375 per year, the overtime was a welcome addition to the housekeeping and house furnishing funds. Our house rent was £2.3s. a week, from a take home pay of about £6.5s.

(Extract from Coming to Harlow – the Rent Man Cometh by Ron Bill published October 2014.)

Meeting with Planners

In January we held our first in-person meeting since the start of the Covid pandemic, with officers from the Council's planning team: Andrew Bramidge, now Director of Regeneration and Planning, his deputy, Tanusha Waters and Forward Planning Officer Paul McBride. Attendees from our committee were John Curry, Tony Evans and Isobel Urquhart.

Andrew explained that the Planning department and the more strategic Regeneration area are now merged into one, which it is hoped will provide more coherence and will cover issues such as town centre development, neighbourhood renewal and the council's housebuilding programme.

We discussed several issues: affordable housing; Council housing; the Town Plan; plans for Net Zero; the new hospital; the application for the new eastern Stort Crossing (later approved by East Herts and Harlow); Town Centre developments, including the iconic Market House; and the Quality of New Social Housing.

Paul told us that the Council's Design Guide is being revamped and it is intended that it will include stipulations relating to high quality architectural design and sustainable build. Andrew asked about the current status of our Architecture and Design Award – and it was encouraging to hear his interest in the renewal of the initiative and in having further conversations about this. We all agreed to meet quarterly.

Tony Evans

Harlow Civic Society

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Harlow Civic Society

Photography courtesy of Alastair Howe, used with thanks

Latest News and Events

was founded in 1999 to appreciate, encourage and conserve Harlow as a balanced community with a unique architectural design and heritage. We seek to uphold the ideals that went into

[Walk on 75th Anniversary of Designation Day](#)
[Season's Greetings and More Consultations](#)
[Harlow 2047 Town Plan Consultation](#)

Harlow Civic Society is Online

We are at:

<http://www.harlowcivicsociety.org.uk>

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Harlow Civic Society Committee

Tony Evans – Chair

Phil Hardcastle – Treasurer

Isobel Urquhart – Secretary

Barbara Burge – Press

All contributions to the Newsletter to Barbara Burge, b_a_burge@yahoo.co.uk

Harlow Civic Society welcomes new members. For information about joining contact the Treasurer by email at contact@harlowcivicsociety.org.uk or use the contact form on our web site.