



*Parndon Wood – one of four Harlow Green Flag winners this year*

For more see: <http://www.harlowcivicsociety.org.uk/four-green-flag-awards-for-harlow/>

## Dear HCS Members

This is our second newsletter this year. The first was written in the early days of lockdown 1. Since then, we have had two face to face committee meetings and some zoom contact.

This edition is forward-looking and hopeful. We start with Tony Evans's detailed and thoughtful response to the government's White Paper 'Planning for the Future', which we agreed was in effect a developers' charter. At our October committee meeting we endorsed his view. That meeting also saw the arrival of a new committee member – Phil Hardcastle of Jocelyns. Phil has only recently returned from living in Australia and seems very keen to contribute actively on the committee. He will be working with our Secretary Isobel, who is recovering from ill health; we are very glad to welcome her back to the Committee.

As the perpetrator of the idea for our new plaque commemorating the Alburni Quartet, I will only say that progress will have to wait for better times. The plaque will cost approximately £1000, and we intend to have a fund-raising concert at the ARC, with Harlow Chorus and BBC recordings from the early days of the Quartet.

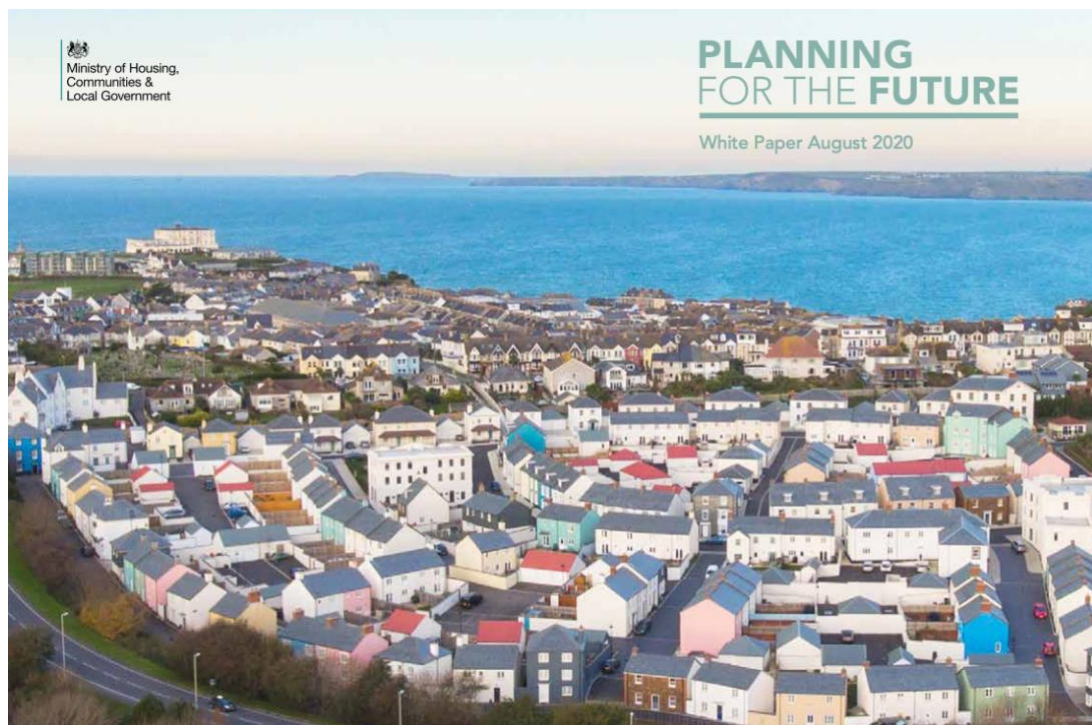
In the meantime, please donate to the plaque fund via our Just Giving page here: <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/harlowcivicsociety>

Mag Barrett writes about the Newhall walk in September, which was enjoyed by all – a very successful event, and John Curry sketches some ideas for future HCS events. There are other pieces about the Harlow Town Investment Plan, the Council's project for developing two areas of the Town Centre, and an update on the progress of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town scheme. We end with a piece on the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), who campaign for the reform of the UK's planning systems to make them more responsive to people's needs and aspirations and to promote sustainable development.

We hope you enjoy this edition. Look at it as a precursor of a pandemicless Spring!

**Barbara Burge**

## **Our response to 'Planning for the Future' the government's White Paper**



Harlow Civic Society (HCS) has submitted a response to the government white paper 'Planning for the Future', claimed to make the planning system for development 'simpler, faster and more predictable'.

Although we agree that the current planning system does need changes, Harlow Civic Society (HCS) believes that the wholesale changes set out in the document would result in an unacceptable reduction in democratic oversight of the planning process and in the opportunity for the public to comment on planning applications. The proposals may reduce the risk for developers and make it easier to get planning approval but without any guarantee of the quality, suitability or affordability of developments.

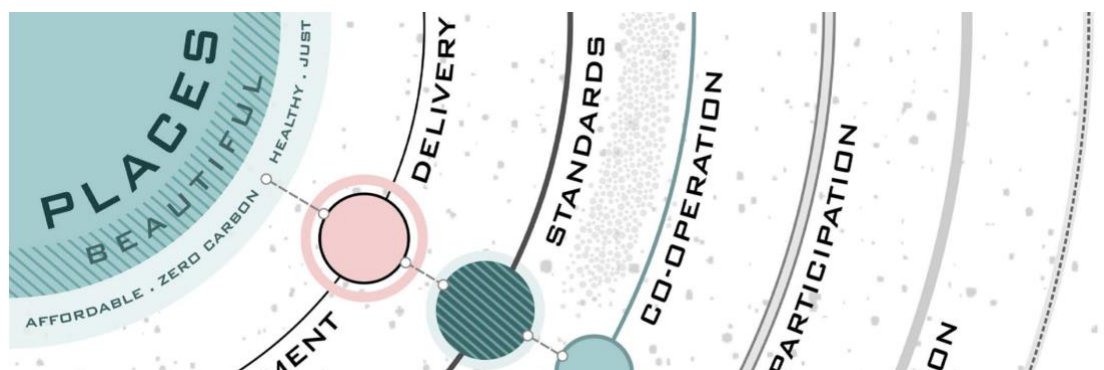
In our view it is essential that democratic oversight and public consultation are maintained and extended. We do not support the proposals for 'a streamlined and faster development management process'. In our view the focus of the planning system should not be on speed, rather on achieving sustainable, high quality developments to meet the nation's health, housing, well-being, employment and infrastructure needs.

The white paper speaks enthusiastically of High-Quality Design and a 'FastTrack to Beauty', to be achieved by swift approval of developments that accord with local design guides and codes. We support the production of strong design codes and standards, but not at the expense of democratic oversight and consultation. Design codes must be comprehensive and include not just aesthetics, but everything needed for healthy homes and places.

Whilst we would support some of the points proposed, we fundamentally disagree with their broad thrust; namely the significant reduction in democratic accountability and the assumption that a more permissive approach with standardised codes will result in private developers providing more high-quality places and homes.

What we need is more planning, not less. We need a system focused on climate change, health, well-being and the powers needed to create high quality developments with sufficient decent and affordable housing.

In our view, the 'Planning for the Future' proposals will not achieve this.



We believe that there is an alternative to the Planning White Paper, namely, the 'Common Ground' proposals by the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA). In our view, this would provide a democratic planning system which would positively promote the long-term sustainable development of the nation and the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals.

You can view our full response on our website here:

<http://www.harlowcivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Planning-for-the-Future-Harlow-Civic-Society-Response.pdf>

Find out more about Common Ground proposals in the TCPA article later in this newsletter

**Tony Evans**

## Letter to the Daily Telegraph, 13<sup>th</sup> November

Sir

*Laura Freeman writes of the benefits of fine art in the great outdoors. (Daily Telegraph 9 November). We residents of Harlow live in a "Sculpture Park". Thanks to the vision of the town's designer, Sir Frederick Gibberd and his team ensured that sculptures be placed in residential areas for the uplifting benefits that art can convey.*

*As a result, we have a collection of 100 pieces (and counting) mostly in the open, so that we can see them at all times. I, for one find this beneficial.*

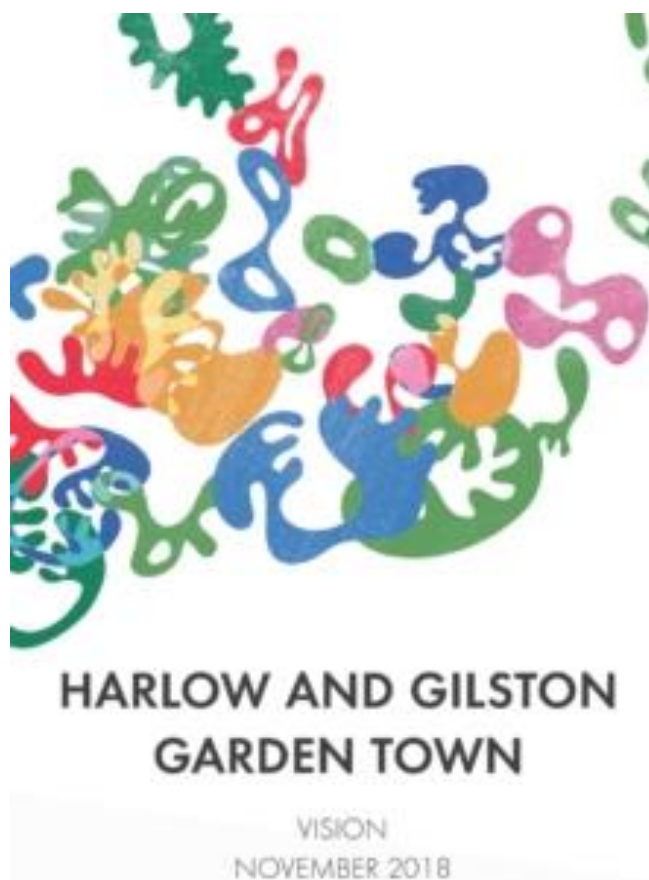
*We have works by Henry Moore (2), Barbara Hepworth, Elizabeth Frink, Auguste Rodin and many more, all free to view 24/7. So why not download the Harlow Art Trust app with its helpful maps and pay us a visit. You'll feel better. The Henry Moore Foundation is close by too.*

*John Curry, Harlow*

## An update on the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)

You may recall hearing about the HGGT vision at our AGM in 2019. HGGT is a partnership between East Herts, Epping Forest and Harlow, along with Essex and Hertfordshire County Councils, to ensure that the area designated as a Garden Town in January 2017 enhances existing communities and provides good quality homes, jobs and infrastructure. HGGT is an annual sponsor of our Architectural Design Awards.

Since April 2019, funding has been awarded for improvements to the A414 river Stort crossing into Harlow and for a new crossing route coming into north east Harlow at Riverway. An Infrastructure Delivery Plan has been completed that identifies all the infrastructure, including transport, education, utilities, health, community, sports, open space, drainage, cultural and arts facilities needed for the Garden Town.



Updated planning applications have just been made for six villages around Gilston and for the development of the crossings over the River Stort.

A new draft **Transport Strategy** has been consulted on, which sets out proposed improvements in travel around the Garden Town area, supporting safe and sustainable transport options. The focus is on reducing the need to travel and to prioritise walking, cycling and public transport with the aim that 60% of all journeys in new communities will be by active and sustainable means and not by private car. We took part in a community consultation event and are broadly supportive of the strategy. Sustainable Transport corridors are proposed for public transport, walking and cycling. One of these corridors is proposed to go through the north-south green wedge from the south to the Town Centre – we will be keeping a close eye on this to ensure the green wedge is maintained.

HHGT have produced a **Healthy Garden Town Framework** and a **Sustainability Guidance and Checklist** which will provide practical guidance to developers and planners on how to achieve and assess high quality environmental, social and economic sustainability and health in the Garden Town. They are consulting on this until 14th December, asking what residents would like to see from new-build homes and communities in the Garden Town.

# HHGT

HARLOW & GILSTON  
GARDEN TOWN

HEALTHY GARDENTOWN  
FRAMEWORK

JUNE 2019  
DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION



You can view all the documents on their website at <http://www.harlowandgilstongardentown.co.uk>

and give your views on the sustainability survey by completing the questionnaire here <http://www.harlowandgilstongardentown.co.uk/shl>.

**Tony Evans**

## **Newhall Walkabout**

When New Hall Limited's Matthew Byatt took his leave of the 26 people who had assembled outside the popular New Ground cafe on September 3 to join a 'walk and talk' of the still-evolving Harlow neighbourhood, I was not alone in

looking forward to the next instalment of the area's development. It is five years since the last Civic Society walk led by Matthew, and progress since then has been enormous with a whole new story to tell, facts and figures to relate and anecdotes to bring the burgeoning neighbourhood to life.

Matthew has worked on the New Hall development since it began 15 years ago. His commitment to the return of the original Gibberd principles of working to a master plan rather than selling off tranches of land to builders of off-the-peg dwellings is clear. He outlined briefly the benefits of such an ethos, and said that William and Jon Moen, owners of the land covered by Newhall, had held firm to the design principles set out at the start.

Social distancing guidelines meant the group was widely spaced — and Matthew ensured his voice projected to the outer edges. After his short introduction to the principles of the Newhall project and a rapid run-through the extent of development since the last Civic Society walk five years ago, Matthew walked us uphill through several newer developments. He explained that fluctuations in the national economy had an inevitable effect on rates of development. The bottom line is that demand for residential property governs the rate of development.



*A walk around Newhall, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020*

A major non-housing development is the large wooden-clad Newhall Academy primary school. Nearby is a purpose-built Montessori nursery. Close to the school is an ancient barn in a sad state of disrepair, more of a wooden skeleton. The wooden barn is to have a strong steel structure 'hung' within its beams and a community centre will come alive within the new and weatherproof building while the agricultural history of the site will remain, visible outside still as a wood-framed barn. The cost is huge and demonstrates the Newhall Project's commitment to the development of a complete community, rather than a series of housing estates.

The clue to another piece of Newhall's history that is being preserved comes in the name Rose Crescent, a small area of attractive houses with a bed of roses set within a grassy patch. Opposite Rose Crescent, off Round House Way, is the late 18th C thatched Round House. The house was lived in for many years by a Soper employee who looked after the farm's roses, developing plants for sale. Another housing area is to be named after a rose variety developed at Soper's. Matthew revealed there had been interesting 'finds' during a lengthy archaeological survey of an area long known to have thrown up Roman and other artefacts from time to time. Some will be displayed in the future.

The Moen brothers, grandsons of J W Soper, the farmer who owned all the land, knew the original farm well as they grew up, and Matthew stressed that they retain a hands-on interest in every phase of development. Part of their long-term plan is to ensure the history of the place will be remembered and respected. About 40 per cent of Newhall is being given over to green open space for recreation and wildlife reserve.

Before the walk ended, we saw a good selection of newer properties, from a small development of detached houses that won a Civic Society architectural award, to a well-integrated and stylish street of housing association properties for rent. An interesting feature of Newhall is that all residents contribute to landscape maintenance, and that will ensure pleasant and well-tended areas of shrubs and flowers for all time.

John Curry organised the event and took over once Matthew left so that those with energy to spare could walk across to the Enterprise Zone to look at the tall Corten steel sculpture by Nick Hornby that graces the front of the main building. That was when the heavens opened, and walkers dispersed.

My hope is that another walk and talk with Matthew Byatt can be organised once the world re-opens, post Covid-19. It won't be long before there is lots to explore in 'new' Newhall, which is taking shape rapidly, and already has a spacious new Co-op and the excellent New Ground café (<https://www.newgroundcafe.co.uk>)

**Mag Barrett**

## **Walks and Talks**

Here is a preliminary programme of events for 2021 on the assumption that the constraints of 2020 will be behind us.

Our secretary, Isobel Urquhart, has prepared a talk she would like to deliver in the New Year, this can be pencilled in for Spring. During their tenure both Jackie Storey and Mag Barrett were able to summon speakers from here and there to talk on their specialist subjects - subjects with local relevance. I have not done this, sticking to my 'last' of local walks. So, if anyone reading this is willing to give us a short address, ideally with some Harlow or Essex connection, we would be pleased to hear from you.

However, during the spring/summer of 2021 I will be leading walks in the town - some rural, others more architectural or cultural. Given our Newhall experience I think we could try that again with an afternoon walk. What do members think?

Finally, 2021 marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of our town. A significant event. We have no idea what Harlow Council are planning, but all bright ideas should be considered. Any contributions?

**John Curry**

## **Town Investment Plan**



The Harlow Growth Board, a partnership of local public, private and voluntary organisations, has created a Town Investment Plan which sets out priorities for Harlow. A bid has now been submitted to the government's Towns Fund for financial support for the plans. The Towns Fund is a £3.6 billion fund created to help develop towns and cities and to recover from the impact of COVID-19. The Growth Board bid is for up to £25 million.

The Town Investment Plan covers four areas:

### **Improving the transport links and connectivity in the town centre**

The plan will improve our town centre by transforming the Bus Station into a new transport and commercial hub with better connectivity with Broadwalk, Market Square, East Gate and the College.

### **Improving the Staple Tye Neighbourhood**

The plan will develop new workspace for businesses and better and safer connectivity between the neighbourhood centre and the new Lister Medical Centre.

### **Developing the Templefields Enterprise Zone**

The plan will develop a new Cambridge Road and Riverway junction to improve access to the Enterprise Zone and so attract new businesses and jobs.

### **Increasing local skills opportunities**

The plan will improve local skills together with Harlow College's plans for an Institute of Technology.

You can read the Town Investment Plan proposals document on our website here:

[http://www.harlowcivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Towns-Fund-Town-Investment-Plan-proposals\\_0-2.pdf](http://www.harlowcivicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Towns-Fund-Town-Investment-Plan-proposals_0-2.pdf)

The outcome of the bid should be known early next year.

You can read more about the Harlow Growth Board here <https://moderngov.harlow.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=300> .

## **Council Proposals for Harlow Town Centre**



The Council submitted an application for £10m from the government's Future High Streets Fund to support the regeneration of the Town Centre.

The proposals are for developments in two areas of the Town Centre:

**Playhouse Quarter** - The proposals include a series of new buildings opposite Harlow Playhouse on the current Occasio House site, providing new spaces for arts, cultural and leisure uses (as well as public sector services). The upper floors of these buildings will provide new homes for 'key workers' (such as nurses, doctors and teachers) at affordable rents.

**Stone Cross Square** - Market Square will be renamed Stone Cross Square and will provide a new northern gateway to Harlow Town Centre, with open, green spaces and public sculpture designed to accommodate public events. Community and commercial spaces will be created to support a range of activities and events including pop-up markets and street trading.

You can view the proposals on the Council website:

<https://www.harlow.gov.uk/news/proposals-released-support-harlow-town-centre-regeneration>

The Council expects to hear the outcome of the application this autumn.

## Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)

The Civic Society is a member of the TCPA, and we find them an invaluable source of information and guidance on all development and planning matters. Over recent months we have participated in TCPA webinars on Designing Quality into large-scale new communities, Planning for Climate Change and the Healthy Homes Act campaign.



### Online Study Tour of Harlow, the expanding New Town

A number of our members attended this TCPA webinar on the 18<sup>th</sup> November. We heard an overview of Harlow's history, growth and renewal and the opportunities and challenges posed by expansion and regeneration.

After a very upbeat introduction by TCPA Chair Mary Parsons (a speaker at our Architectural Design Awards last year), Katy Lock presented the history, design and development of the town. She gave a video tour with contributions from Chris Snow, Chair of Harlow Art Trust and local resident Jake Shepherd (he gave a talk to us in 2019 and is now on the TCPA Policy Council). We also heard from Councillor Danny Purton as he and Katy walked around Newhall. Key themes included the landscape-led design, Neighbourhoods with facilities within walking distance and the importance of Art to the New Town.

Robert Halfon MP then talked about Harlow as a place of aspiration and community. He highlighted the government Towns Fund, developments in the Enterprise Zone, the M11 junction 7a, and the new hospital Health Campus

which looks likely to be sited nearby. He, said that, with the arrival of Public Health England, Harlow would become the Public Health Capital of the world. Our vice-chair, John Curry, got a mention, with Robert praising his recent letter in the Telegraph about Harlow and its sculptures (included earlier in this newsletter). I was, however, surprised that he tried to defend the changes to Permitted Development Rights that have resulted in so many poor-quality office conversion homes in Harlow, on the grounds that it has been done well at the Pearson building on Edinburgh Way.



We then had two contributions from Harlow Council: Andrew Bramidge, Head of Environment and Planning (who spoke at our AGM in January) and Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing. Andrew spoke about the opportunities and challenges facing Harlow. He described Harlow's advantages in its location in the M11 London-Cambridge corridor, its growth and regeneration potential through the Garden Town (with cross party-political support) and the strong and growing employment base from the Science Park and the arrival of PHE. He said that the new Local Plan will soon be adopted and recommended reading the vision in the plan – you can see this on our website: <http://www.harlowcivicsociety.org.uk/harlow-local-plan/> . He highlighted the £122m Housing Investment grant, initially for the new and improved river Stort crossings, then to be used as a rolling fund for infrastructure for the rest of Harlow, in particular for sustainable transport. He also showed a map of the Harlow Expansion proposals from 1973, of which only Katherines and Sumners were completed: this showed expansion to the West, South and East, almost exactly as set out in the new Garden Town vision for these directions.

Jane Greer outlined the Council's regeneration investments and the three large bids made to gain funding for the town: £3.5m for the Enterprise zone, £10m from the Future High Streets Fund for the Town Centre and £25m from the Towns Fund for four projects across the town, as described earlier in this newsletter.

Andrew gave four challenges for Harlow. Firstly, that most of the Garden Town

growth will be outside the Harlow District boundaries, yet residents here will look to Harlow for services and facilities – how should receipts be shared amongst Local Authorities? Secondly, we have to ensure that the Garden Town growth also secures the renewal of the existing town. A third challenge is that land and rental values are low so there is little incentive for investment – this is one factor in why Harlow has had many Permitted Development office conversions. One measure of success will be when investment here is in higher value developments. The final challenge mentioned was the Town Centre, an important part of our heritage, some parts good but some not. Multiple funding applications have been made and it will evolve from retail to mixed use. A complication is that little of the area is in public ownership.

The final speaker was Guy Nicholson, Chair of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT). He gave an overview of HGGT and its vision to build 23,000 homes in four neighbourhoods and to create 20,000 jobs. He talked about taking inspiration from Gibberd and his approach to Town Design and making the process 'people-led'. He outlined the new neighbourhoods: seven new villages around Gilston, Latton Priory, Water Lane and East Harlow. They want to achieve a green and natural town with landscape-led design and protection for the green wedges and existing landscape. They are planning for walkable neighbourhoods and will promote sustainable transport to get significant reductions in car use; with an overall aim of having a 'Healthy and Happy Town' by promoting mental and physical wellbeing through play, the arts, green spaces and active travel networks.

Mary Parsons closed the webinar by saying how much she liked and appreciated Harlow and what an amazing town it is.

I found the seminar encouraging, presenting a very positive view of our town and showing the great potential for building on its principles and strengths as we strive for renewal and growth; a real opportunity for Harlow to become a benchmark for green, sustainable and healthy towns.



We are supporters of the TCPA **Healthy Homes campaign**. This is aiming to get legislation enacted to ensure that all homes and places fulfil minimum standards across a wide range of criteria. These include: access to natural light; radical reductions in carbon emissions; freedom from unacceptable noise and light pollution; safety from risk of fire; inclusive, accessible and adaptable surroundings; resilience to climate change; minimal contribution to air pollution; better space standards; access to sustainable transport and walkable services

For more, see <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/healthy-homes-act> .

It is frankly disgraceful that in 2021 the case has to be made for these minimum requirements and that there has to be a reminder that planning regulations were

first enacted in the last century to address poor standards. It is amazing to see that access to natural light was only introduced as a requirement for permitted development conversions in June; and plans are still being produced for homes without windows (not in Harlow so far I think), with light just coming from light tunnels and wells. We have seen too many poor-quality conversions in Harlow and across the country that have inadequate space and poor access to facilities, services and transport. This is one reason why we strongly disagree with the government 'Planning for the Future' White Paper that proposes a more permissive planning system without any guarantee of the quality, suitability or affordability of developments.

## Common Ground

A Shared Vision for Planning Reform



The TCPA have recently published an alternative vision for the planning system, entitled '**Common Ground**', prioritising democracy, climate change and housing delivery. It reflects concerns about the effect that the radical changes in the Planning White Paper will have on local democracy and the quality of outcomes.

The 'Common Ground' proposals give six priorities for change:

- A statutory purpose for planning – to promote the spatial organisation of land to achieve the long-term sustainable development of the nation and the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals.
- Building public trust – a system that is democratically accountable and genuinely participative.
- Minimum standards for homes and communities – ambitious standards that support people's health and wellbeing.
- The need for strategic co-operation - a national strategic plan with democratically accountable regional plans.
- A focus on practical delivery – a more active public sector leading and partnering with the private with a modernised and effective Development Corporation option for areas undergoing rapid change.
- Sharing development values – harnessing and sharing the profits of development.

The proposals would strengthen housing standards and bind the climate and planning acts together to help deliver radical reductions in carbon emissions.

We have signed up to support 'Common Ground' and you can read the report and also sign up to show your support for it here

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/commonground>

## Tony Evans



Harlow Civic Society

was founded in 1999 to appreciate, encourage and conserve Harlow as a balanced community with a unique architectural design and heritage.

Latest News and Events

- Sustainable and Healthy Living – Garden Town Survey
- Vote For Harlow's Green Flag Award Winners
- Four Green Flag Awards for Harlow!

## Harlow Civic Society is Online

We are at:

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

Please like us on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/HarlowCivicSociety>

### Harlow Civic Society Committee

Stan Newens – Chair  
John Curry – Vice-Chair  
Tony Evans – Treasurer  
Isobel Urquhart – Secretary  
Barbara Burge – Press

All contributions to the Newsletter to Barbara Burge, [b\\_a\\_burge@yahoo.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto:contact@harlowcivicsociety.org.uk) or use the contact form on our web site.**