

Harlow Civic Society

26th Annual General Meeting Council Chamber, Civic Centre Friday, June 27th, 2025, 7 PM

MINUTES

1. Introduction and opening remarks from the Chair.

Present: Mary Evans, Colin Porcher, Jo Johnson, Jean Wright, David Wright, John Call, Annalise Taylor, Phil Hardcastle, Tony Evans, Derek Humphrey, Sheila Langman, Nick Langman, Jack Hamilton, Pauline Hockley, Chris Hockley, John Curry, Moira Jones, Erleen Anderson, Robin McCarthy, Pat Larkin, Alan Jones, Jake Shepherd

Apologies: Sandra Newens, Shobha, Barbara Burge, Patricia Mountsteven

2. Minutes of the 25th AGM of Harlow Civic Society, September 2024. Agreed as a correct record of the 2024 AGM.
3. Talk. James Gardner, Managing Director Harlow Council, 'Building Harlow's Future.'
4. Q and A
5. The Secretary's Report. See Appendix 1 below. Tony Evans thanked Phil and Annalise for their contributions to the social media accounts.
6. The Treasurer's Report. See Appendix 2.

To approve the accounts for 2024. Moved by David Wright. Seconded by Derek Humphrey.

To consider increasing membership fees for 2026, as follows:

Concessions from £5 to £6

Individual from £8 to £10

Family from £10 to £15

Corporate from £15 to £25

Moved by David Wright. Seconded by Derek Humphrey. Passed unanimously.

David Wright suggested contacting the Harlow Employers' Group or its replacement as a source of possible corporate memberships.

Derek Humphrey proposed that the fees be reviewed every other year.

7. Update on Harlow Architectural Design Awards (HADA)
Phil updated the meeting on progress on restarting these awards post-covid. This set of awards will consider properties completed in Harlow since the last awards (2019). Phil has received a Completed Buildings list from the Planning Department and is working his way through it. He is in touch with two potential judges for the awards. Award ceremony will be combined with the next AGM. This year there will only be an award for Residential Buildings. In the future commercial

buildings can also be considered. Chris Hockley suggested that we combine use Corporate membership as a form of sponsorship for aspects of our work – one of which could be HADA.

8. The Election of officers and committee members.

Chair: Tony Evans nominated by Moira Jones and seconded by Derek Humphrey

Vice-Chair: no nominations – vacant

Secretary: Annalise Taylor nominated by Jake Shepherd. Seconded by David Wright.

Treasurer: Phil Hardcastle nominated by Nick Langman. Seconded by Alan Thomas.

Committee: Barbara Burge, Frank Jackson, Peter Mountsteven, Robin McCartney, Jake Shepherd, Moira Jones nominated en bloc by David Wright. Seconded by Derek Humphrey.

Auditors: Frank Jackson and Derek Humphrey nominated by Phil Hardcastle. Seconded by Moira Jones with authority given to appoint a replacement auditor if Frank Jackson no longer wishes to take this role.

9. AOB

Pauline Hockley brought members' attention to the state of Parndon Hall. Boarded up, the building is in a declining state of repair. She has received permission from the Hospital Trust to open the building for Heritage Open Days. Personnel changes at the Hospital and council have meant that previous positive contacts have been lost. Pauline asked whether HCS could pursue this matter with the council, seeking to save the building by giving it a new use. Tony acknowledged Pauline's long standing defence of the building. Annalise asked whether there were any issues with the council taking over a building on hospital land. Pauline pointed out that there is access from Cherry Tree Lane.

Jean Wright sought clarification on the status of The Wayre building. She has been reassured by Councillor Joel Charles that 'not to worry' about the building' but asked the committee to ask the Council about the status of the building.

10. Concluding remarks. Tony remarked on the huge amount of changes ahead for Harlow's built environment and that the Civic Society could act as a critical friend to the Council through these changes. He encouraged members to send questions they may have for the Council to the committee who will seek to have them answered.

Appendix One: Secretary's Report

Secretary's Report Harlow Civic Society, June 27th 2025.

The Harlow Civic Society's stated aim is:

'To celebrate and protect the built environment of Harlow'

and so, our years' activities reflect that.

Since our last AGM in October 2024, the Harlow Civic Society Committee has met 6 times. This report will be shorter than usual as I am not reporting on a full twelve-month period.

Our memberships of the Town and Country Planning Association and Civic Voice help to keep us informed of wider issues effecting town planning via newsletters and webinars. We have also contributed by completing the TCPA's National Planning Policy Framework questionnaire and surveys for Civic Voice.

This year members of the committee have had two meetings with the Council – one with the Planning Department and the other with Dan Swords to be updated on the upcoming plans for the town and put our questions to them. We also hosted Naisha Polaine from Harlow and Gilston Garden Towns to better understand the issues facing that ongoing large-scale development project.

Planning

In the last 7 months we have submitted on proposals including:

- Shopfront Design Supplementary Planning Document
- Churchgate Street Conservation Area
- Gilston Village 7

- Harlow Muslim Centre

We also keep a watching brief on various sites around the town such as Parndon Hall and field suggestions from members for the Local List.

Blue Plaques

We have secured locations for the Stan Newens and John Graham' plaques which will be installed in the coming months. Chris Vince MP has written to Dan Swords and James Gardner to support the location of Ron Bill's plaque on the Leah Manning Centre, or a suggestion for an alternative. As some of you are aware, Ron's plaque has been ready for some time, and we hope we are getting closer to installing it.

At last year's AGM we mentioned redressing the imbalance of blue plaques in the town and are almost ready to announce the first plaque that we will publicly fundraise £1,000 for. We are just confirming support from the families of the people involved and, as with all plaques, need to secure a location before we launch our campaign.

Promotion

We have begun updating our website – the first steps being to include information about each of our blue plaques and then updating some of the images.

Our Instagram account has 228 followers and Facebook has 364. Facebook has remained stable from last year and the Instagram account has grown by approximately 40%. Though the posts have been well received this has not converted into increased membership and so this is a challenge to overcome. We need to recruit a new generation of members interested in the built environment of Harlow, especially at this time of regeneration. We would urge current members to encourage friends, and maybe offspring, to join us.

We have taken the first steps to relaunch HADA which has been paused since Covid.

Walks. HCS member John Curry led two walks this year: In April walkers enjoyed a route that started and finished at Harlow Museum and took in listed buildings, blue plaques and sculpture. Earlier this month on the Summer Solstice, John led a group through the expansive green spaces of Netteswell. Once again even long-term residents discovered places they'd never seen before and enjoyed John's knowledgeable commentary. Thank you to John.

Events

Our planned events are all yet to come this year including a collaboration with New Arts Harlow on a film and discussion evening on November 20th. We are also involved in promoting Heritage Open Days this September which involves coordinating the opening of various properties around the town. We felt this was a positive way for us to show our interest in the built environment in a tangible way.

A new member has also suggested that we stage social get togethers for members so if this is something you'd be interested in, please add your name to the sheet at the back of the room.

That concludes the Secretary's Report for the year 2024 - 2025

Appendix 2: Treasurer's Report

Treasurer's Report – 2024 Finances

I'm happy to report that after returning the society's finances to a positive figure in 2023 we have been able to continue that trend and ran 2024 with an operating surplus of £116 and ending the year with a positive balance of £256.86.

This has been achieved with members subscriptions of £466 and additional donations which totalled a further £285 from 51 memberships totalling 90 members. Included amongst the donations was £72 taken at last year's AGM and £69 from the film night held at the Playhouse last April. We hope to be hosting more events in future that celebrate the town while giving us a valuable opportunity to raise much needed revenue for the society and the donation baskets are out again tonight for you to show your continued generosity. It really does make a significant difference when running a society with modest resources.

The year also saw us receive £3000 to cover the costs of 3 new blue plaques. These are being unveiled gradually but all have now been manufactured and paid for in full.

This all means that we have returned to a much more stable position with our finances and are keeping our head above water consistently via a close rein on spending and the generosity of our members. However, it must be said that our largest risk going forward remains a stagnant and potentially dropping membership number. As I stated earlier our total membership of 90 people is actually based around just 51 memberships. The difference is due to family memberships and this low number which has been slowly declining year on year does mean that we are at risk of becoming even more dependent of donations rather annual subscriptions.

In that light, I am going to repeat three calls to action for you all from last year:

1. If you are not a member please sign up today
2. If you have allowed your membership to lapse, please renew for the coming year
3. Spread the word amongst friends and family and anyone you think might be interested in the work we do and encourage them to join.

There is a final element to this which has been discussed by the committee and that is the possibility of raising our subscription fees. This would be the first time we have done this for many, many years and is not an idea we raise lightly. But for the reasons I have already mentioned it is a conversation we need to have in the face of dwindling membership.

Our annual accounts have been kindly checked and passed by our usual auditor, Derek Humphry and these are available for members to see.

Thank You