

Harlow

Essex

'Mark One' New Town – Designated 25 March 1947

Identified as the location for a London 'ring town' in Patrick Abercrombie's 1944 Greater London Plan, Harlow's existing connections to road and rail networks and the quality of its landscape influenced its designation. Conceived through Sir Frederick Gibberd's masterplan, Harlow's 'green wedges' give the town a distinctive character and connect residential neighbourhoods with open spaces and the countryside beyond; although today they present their own management challenges. Harlow's population increased significantly in the 1950s and 1960s, but numbers declined in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, supporting the town's regeneration aspirations, there are proposals for around 12,000 new dwellings by 2031. Harlow's recent extension at Newhall has won several architecture and design accolades.



Key facts:

- **Location:** 37 kilometres north east of London. Harlow District is a small predominately urban district with a tight administrative boundary.
- **2011 Census population:** 81,944, in 34,620 households.¹
- **Local authority:** Harlow District Council.
- **Local Plan status:** Saved policies from Harlow Local Plan 2006.

New Town designation:

- **Designated:** 25 March 1947.
- **Designated area:** 2,558 hectares.
- **Intended population:** 60,000, revised to 80,000 (in the second masterplan, approved in 1952) (population at designation: 4,500).
- **Development Corporation:** A key design feature was higher-density housing, with the majority of the town's open space provided within 'green wedges'. Expansion proposals between the 1950s and 1970s put forward a population of up to 150,000, which was turned down in 1977. Development Corporation wound up 30 September 1980.

Housing, deprivation and health:

- In Harlow 31.2% of homes are socially rented – 9.5% and 13% higher than the UK New Towns and UK averages, respectively. 56.1% of homes are owner-occupied – 2.5% and 7.4% lower than the UK New Towns and the UK averages, respectively.
- The number of households not deprived in any dimension is 37.4% – 4.3% and 4.7% below English New Towns and England averages, respectively. 35.5% are deprived in one dimension – 3.5% above the England and English New Towns averages. The number of households deprived in three or four dimensions is 5.2% and 0.6%, respectively.
- The 2011 Census reported that the 'general health' of Harlow's residents is close to UK average levels. 45.1% declared themselves to be in 'very good' health – 1.6% and 2.5% below

the UK New Towns and UK averages, respectively. 4.1% and 1.2%, respectively, declared 'bad' and 'very bad' health – 0.2% below the UK New Towns and UK averages for 'bad' health and in line with the averages for 'very bad' health.

Employment/economic profile:

- Unemployment for those of working age is higher than the Essex and UK averages.
- The hospital is currently the biggest employer in the town.
- Harlow first attracted manufacturing industries and then research industries. Fibre optics was invented in the town in 1964. Harlow became a university town in 2011.
- Within the South East LEP. Achieved Enterprise Zone status in 2012.

Development Corporation legacy:

- The restrictions of the tight administrative boundary are limiting the ability of the town to regenerate and to maintain its regional status.
- Gibberd's positive masterplanning principles allows sustainable neighbourhoods to be achieved in new developments, keeping separate land uses, schools and shops within walking distance. An extensive cycleway system links the separated residential and employment areas. Many residents are proud of the Gibberd legacy.
- When the Development Corporation was wound up, the town centre was sold off to private owners, which makes regeneration a challenge today.

Key issues for the future:

- Regeneration of the town centre and neighbourhoods.
- Managing green space and respecting the Gibberd legacy.
- Accommodating growth within the limited opportunities offered the tight administrative boundary.
- The duty co-operate has made delivering new development in adjoining districts challenging.

¹ Figure for the tightly defined Harlow District area

Did you know?

Harlow contains the first residential tower block in Britain – The Lawn was designed by Sir Frederick Gibberd and built in 1951. The projecting ends of each wing were used to give each flat a south-facing balcony. In 1952 it received a Ministry of Health Housing medal and was one of the first post-war buildings to be Grade II listed by English Heritage.