



**Informing development in  
North Harlow – identifying &  
addressing issues, concerns  
and opinions.**

**Gauging the views of Harlow  
and East Hertfordshire  
residents.**

**Summary of the North Harlow  
Community Engagement process:  
summary of events held between  
September 2009 and January 2010.**

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## 1.0 Introduction and purpose of the report.

The purpose of this summary report is to present a general executive summary of the community engagement events held to date by the Harlow North Joint Venture partnership (HNJV). Common themes are identified across the events that can be used by the HNJV development team, together with other technical reports, economic feasibility analysis and evidence bases, to inform and shape its masterplan and charter for development on land to the north of Harlow.

The document is in three main sections; the first outlines the methods used to publicise the events, the second presents a brief outline of each event; the third provides a composite summary of the event results and highlights common issues, concerns and opinions.

## 2.0 Event publicity.

In terms of publicising the various consultation events, table 1.0 presents a schedule of the events and the means that were employed to advertise them in and around Harlow and East Hertfordshire.

Date	Item	Event Publicised
September 2009	North Harlow Website	Drop-in Sessions, Community Forums and registration for the People's Panel
29 September 2009	Stakeholder Mailing	Drop-in Sessions
30 September 2009	Newsletter Mailing (to 14,000 residents and businesses)	Drop-in Sessions People's Panel
October 2009	Advert - Widford Parish Magazine	Widford Drop-In Session
1, 8, 15 October 2009	Advert and website listing - Mercury, Observer and Harlow Star	Drop-in Sessions
16, 17, 23, 24 October 2009	Drop-in exhibition boards	Community Forums People's Panel
5, 12 November 2009	Advert and website listing - Mercury, Observer and Harlow Star	Community Forums
14, 16 <sup>th</sup> November 2009	Community Forums	People's Panel

A number of mechanisms were used to advertise the various events including direct mailed newsletters, announcements on the HNJV website, announcements made in local newspapers and direct reminders made at both the Drop-in Sessions and at the Community Forums.

The events were facilitated by members of Urban Design and Mediation Ltd (ud+m) brought in by HNJV to independently manage an engagement process with the local communities.

### **3.0 Community engagement format and events.**

The purpose of the community engagement programme was to ensure that local people were given a range of opportunities to make their views known regarding the proposed development of North Harlow. Local residents were invited to record their key concerns, issues and opinions, to make comment regarding their current access to facilities and services and to record their perceptions of Harlow.

The intention of this process was to ensure that the HNJV development team was fully informed regarding local people's views and knowledge of the area. The HNJV development team has undertaken to demonstrate in public how this information has been used to inform, shape and influence its subsequent masterplan proposals.

Four consultation events have been held to date between September 2009 and January 2010. Each event had a different format and offered opportunities for local residents to make their views known on a variety of topics and in a variety of ways.

- A Community Engagement Survey carried out in September 2009 asked residents to make their views known regarding their current access to facilities and services, improvements that they might wish to see and their perceptions of Harlow. The survey was issued by the Harlow North Joint Venture (HNJV) via a newsletter and the HNJV website to 14,000 addresses in Harlow and East Hertfordshire in September 2009. The survey was based on a questionnaire format and was available for completion up to the end of November 2009. The questionnaire was completed by 407 people.
- The Drop-in Sessions held in October provided information that informs the HNJV team in terms of what local people value about their area. The material collected also indicated possible improvements that

would benefit the area and highlighted the concerns that people have regarding the development. The drop-in sessions were held at the Harvey Centre, Harlow, High Wych memorial hall and Widford village hall, East Hertfordshire, in October 2009. Approximately 700 people attended the drop-in sessions. 1200 post it notes, containing approximately 1300 comments were completed. Analysis of the material reveals approximately 260 comments describing what respondents “like” about their area; approximately 340 comments outlining how their area might be “improved” and approximately 700 comments outlining people’s “concerns” regarding the proposed development of North Harlow.

- The Community Forums held in November 2009 provided the opportunity for the HNJV team to hear first hand the concerns that residents have regarding the development and provided an opportunity for local people to ask direct and detailed questions of the HNJV design and development team. Specific and detailed issues were identified. Five community forums were held at The Latton Bush Centre, Harlow and the Manor of Groves Hotel, East Hertfordshire, in November 2009. Around a hundred people attended the community forums, some people did not stay for the full session. Supporters of Stop Harlow North attended the forums as observers. Throughout the sessions they voiced views and opinions and asked questions framed within their view that any development in the area would be undemocratic, unsustainable and unnecessary.
- The first North Harlow People’s Panel survey was issued on January 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 2010. The results of the survey provide an indication of where the respondents’ priorities lie in relation to the issues, concerns, opinions and ideas generated through the community engagement Drop-in Sessions and Community Forums held in October and November 2009. Where the earlier events simply listed the issues of concern etc, the results from the People’s Panel illustrate the relative importance that local people give to each issue – this could be used to

guide the development team's responses to the various issues identified to date. Out of a total of 304 people who voluntarily registered for the People's Panel via the earlier Drop-in Sessions, Community Forums and HNJV website, 172 entries were made with 156 full or partial completions (51% response rate). The survey was open until February 2nd 2010. Respondents to the survey were resident in postcode areas CM17, CM18, CM19, CM20, CM21, CM23, EN8, EN10, SE1 and SG12 and represent a range of age groups and mix of economic activity categories broadly representative of the existing populations of Harlow and East Hertfordshire. The survey was based on the position "What IF development was to occur north of Harlow?" rather than it 'should' or 'will' happen and asked respondents to indicate the priority that they gave to the features, issue and items identified at the earlier events. Analysis of the survey results reveals little significant difference in responses when examined for variation in response by postcode, age or economic activity.

#### **4.0 Summary of key concerns, issues and ideas.**

Two sets of summary information can be extracted from an analysis of the results of these events i) common general items and ii) issue specific items.

##### **4.1 General comments:**

In terms of general comments four views are common across the four events:

- *Objections to the principle of development - comments are recorded that it is undemocratic, unsustainable and unnecessary, it will damage the existing landscape and character of the area - and linked to this there is an indication that no access, service or facility improvements are needed in the respondents' area;*
- *Support for the regeneration of Harlow but a worry that the new development will damage the town and a desire to know how the development will actually help Harlow. There is a further view that regeneration should take place within the town's existing boundaries;*

- *A high degree of concern about the impact that new development will have on the existing social, educational, community and healthcare infrastructure and transport systems;*
- *Some opinion directly supporting development with comments that it would be “good for the area” and specifically that “people need to live somewhere” and that it would address the need for “more houses, schools and employment” in the locality.*

#### 4.2 Issue specific items.

In terms of issue specific items a comparative analysis of the results from the consultation events reveals four issues that are common across each event:

1. Issues of traffic capacity and management;
2. Issues concerned with facilities and services;
3. Issues with local character and
4. Issues of natural resources.

In order to summarise the points of concern common across the events, the key points are listed below and from these a series of composite summary statements have been constructed by the facilitators for each of the 4 key issues.

##### 4.2.1 Composite Statement for Traffic capacity & management issues (Issue 1).

This was a recurring issue. A number of people asked how traffic would be managed in and around the existing villages and town, as well as any new development to reduce future congestion and improve the current situation. Other key points include concerns over present and future congestion on the A414, whether a new by-pass could be incorporated in the plans, increasing public transport provision, park and ride services, and improving facilities at Harlow train station. A composite statement that reflects these common views is that:

*“People would like to see current and future traffic congestion relieved. They are particularly concerned with increased traffic on the A414, traffic capacity around Harlow Station and increased traffic running through existing villages. They would like to see a new M11 junction and a Harlow bypass. They want to know exactly where access into the new development will be and would like to know how adequate parking will be provided within the new development and how additional parking can be provided at Harlow Station. They would also like to see improvements to the public transport systems in and around Harlow.*

#### 4.2.2 Composite Statement for facilities and services issues (Issue 2).

People were concerned that existing health services struggled to cope with existing demand, and asked about primary healthcare facilities. They also asked about the level of employment and training opportunities; and levels of investment into the area. Other issues raised included the scale of affordable housing, the mix of tenure, the regeneration of Harlow, schools, and community facilities. A composite statement that reflects these common views and that also incorporates some of the priorities indicated through the People’s Panel results is that:

*“The provision of adequate healthcare, education, social and community facilities was consistently high on people’s agendas. Specific requests were made for the provision of services for young people and the over 60s. The provision of affordable housing with a variety of type and tenure was also seen as a top priority. There were requests that the provision of these facilities and services should be made in tandem with the provision of housing in the new development so as not to swamp existing services and these facilities should be provided within easy walking distances of homes in the new development. There was also a request for new employment opportunities within walking distance of homes in any new neighbourhoods”.*

#### 4.2.3 Composite Statement for local character issues (Issue 3).

Across all the events, people were keen to understand how the existing distinctive features of the area would be protected and enhanced. They also

wanted to know how the project would make sure Harlow North became a distinctive place, and not just an anonymous area. Questions were also raised about the density of the scheme. How many homes would there be? What proportion of the area would be given over to employment uses? How will the project protect the identity of existing villages? What green spaces would be provided? What changes are proposed to the greenbelt? The composite statement for this issue that reflects these common views and that also incorporates some of the priorities indicated through the People's Panel results is that:

*“The existing landscape of East Hertfordshire and the existing, Gibberd inspired, green spaces and structure of Harlow are both seen as extremely important to local people and should be the starting point in terms of defining the green and landscape character of any development. The existing landscape and its wildlife should be respected and positively responded to, while new development needs to incorporate green space and wildlife provision. At a neighbourhood scale in any new development local parks, playing fields, play areas and woodlands should be provided – all within walking distance of homes. Existing village character needs to be protected and the densities, form, scale and mass of the new development needs to be defined in relation to the existing places and landscape. Local people want to know how much development there will be, exactly where it will go and what it will look like. If development was to occur then people prefer low density two storey development but also indicate that a variety of housing type – mainly family housing – would be preferable to an “everywhere looks the same” solution”.*

#### 4.2.4 Composite Statement for natural resources issues (Issue 4).

People were consistently concerned about energy, sewage and water supply – will it be adequate? What energy efficiency measures would be taken? What is the Joint Venture's energy strategy? How would the partnership work to secure the upgrade of facilities like Rye Meads? What are the associated flood risks? The composite statement for this issue that reflects these common

views, incorporating the priorities indicated through the People's Panel results is that:

*“The key feature of discussions around the topic of natural resources was the extremely high support indicated for the use of current best practice in terms of energy efficiency, waste management and water conservation in any development. Residents’ priorities seem to be higher for conservation measures rather than for energy generation measures – but the differences in support are marginal. Overall, any new development must have high levels of energy efficiency. Participants have yet to be convinced that the Rye Meads sewage plant and the local water and electricity supplies will be adequate to support the new development and are sceptical of the provision of funding to affect upgrades to these services”.*

These composite statements only provide the emerging key headlines and given the volume and richness of the material collected throughout the consultation process it is considered vital that the development team review the material from each of the four consultation events.

## **5.0. Concluding comments.**

The analysis of material from all the events shows a high degree of commonality between each set of results. The material produced provides a clear indication of both the concerns and development priorities of local people.

Although the material generated at event locations in both Harlow and East Hertfordshire and from the differing post code areas were very similar there are a small number of noteworthy differences in emphasis:

- More positive features about Harlow were identified at the Harlow locations;
- There was a stronger feeling that more affordable housing was needed, particularly for younger people, recorded at the Harlow locations;
- There was also a clearer indication given at the Harlow sessions that more facilities for the young people of Harlow need to be provided;

- Both sets of respondents recorded their concern over the loss of green belt, green spaces and countryside, however this was more strongly expressed at the East Hertfordshire locations;
- There are noticeably more negative comments in principle to the development in the material recorded in the East Hertfordshire locations;
- A negative perception of Harlow and Essex was expressed more strongly in the material recorded in the East Hertfordshire locations;

The material provides not just an indication of people's objections to and concerns regarding development but also gives some clear indications in terms of the features that any new development should have – such as the strong indication that any new neighbourhoods should have facilities within comfortable walking distances of homes and that current best practice in relation to energy, water and waste conservation are seen as top priorities. Knowledge of these issues, concerns and opinions should now be used by the HNJV development team to inform its ideas for the area.

In light of these comments we make four recommendations:

- The material gathered through the community engagement process provides a valuable resource for both the local communities – by having their opinions recorded – and the HNJV development team – by being better informed in regard to local opinion. In light of this we consider it vital to the legitimacy of the process that the HNJV development team demonstrate in public how the views of local people expressed through the events have been used to influence, inform and shape its thinking and the production of a subsequent masterplan.
- Although extremely valuable, the material gathered to date is relatively general in nature, applying to a large geographical area, and it would perhaps be beneficial for more location specific engagement to be undertaken as the masterplan is developed in relation to different parts of the site to ensure that very local level opinion is engaged;

- **We strongly recommend that the community engagement process continues as the proposals develop and that every effort is made to ensure that the process is participatory and engages with the local communities in a meaningful way, ensuring that their influence on the emerging masterplan can clearly be seen. Specifically the HNJV team should consider how it can further involve and further expand the membership of the People's Panel in this process.**
- **Copies of this report should be made available to local libraries and made available to the general public via download from HNJV's website.**

**ud+m**

**May 2010**