

Gilston Great Park



A Proposal for
Actively Managed Countryside
North of Harlow
October 2006

Foreword

"Until the Government takes proper account of the strain which house building places on the environment, we will continue to create serious problems for ourselves and future generations."
Peter Ainsworth, the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee Chairman,

"The scale and pace of growth envisaged (in the draft east of England Plan) is likely to be highly environmentally damaging... and is likely to have serious negative impacts on water resources biodiversity, tranquillity, air quality, recreational access and congestion"
Sustainability Appraisal of the draft East of England Plan, December 2004

"Expansion to the north would mean the loss of some of the most beautiful landscape in Hertfordshire"
The Harlow Development Corporation report Harlow Expansion, 1974

"Losing countryside around us will actually make it harder to attract people. Views of the countryside and access to the countryside are critical to us and one of the key things that Harlow has to offer."
Business representative feedback to Harlow Council Consultation on draft East of England Plan, January 2005

"The proposal for the threatened (housing) development is singularly without merit and should be ruled out an early stage" and
"In my opinion, the Green Belt around Harlow serves a social need to Harlow's residents. The Stort Valley is a particularly attractive part of the Green Belt and one that deserves particular attention"
Bill Rammell, MP, on Ropemaker's earlier proposal to build over 10,000 houses on their land to the north of Harlow, quoted from Harlow Gazette 13th February 1999. (Regrettably we believe Mr Rammell no longer holds this view)

We solidly endorse all these sentiments. We are pleased to bring forward the proposals in this report to promote discussion of "actively managed countryside" as an alternative to unsustainable housing development north of Harlow.

It is our hope that the ideas will meet with approval from the residents of Harlow and the communities affected in East Hertfordshire and will form the basis of a sustainable long term solution to protect and to enhance the environment of the land north of Harlow

STOP Harlow North Team.

STOP Harlow North (SHN) incorporates the East Hertfordshire parishes of Eastwick & Gilston, High Wych & Allen's Green, Hunsdon, Much Hadham and Widford and town of Sawbridgeworth

We are dedicated to positively and actively opposing proposals by Ropemaker Properties Limited and its associated landowners to create a major development north of Harlow around the Hertfordshire villages of Eastwick, Gilston, High Wych and Allen's Green, Hunsdon and Widford, and the town of Sawbridgeworth, on the basis that the locality needs:

- *A better Harlow, not a bigger Harlow. Any development north of Harlow will compete with the existing town and hamper its regeneration*
- *To protect our environment. Greenbelt is there for a reason and should not be built on until all other alternatives have been exhausted.*
- *To protect the unique identity and historic character of rural villages*
- *To bring back fairness and democracy in the strategic planning process.*

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1. Aims for Gilston Great Park

Research commissioned by Cabe Space from Mori (2006) showed that 91% of the population believe that good parks and public spaces improve people's quality of life.

The aims of this proposal are to give practical effect to the long established role for the northern slopes of the Stort Valley and the countryside beyond by:

- (a) emphasising the green back-drop to the built-up area of Harlow
- (b) providing a permanent land use solution to reinforce the Green Belt status of the area and
- (c) implementing the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan.

Although East Hertfordshire is only 30 miles from London city centre, the District has a strong rural character. That does not mean to say that it fails to provide reasonable levels of housing. Despite Hertfordshire being one of the most densely populated counties in the UK, the District has, over the years and through careful planning, striven to maintain a rural predominance by directing new housing to existing towns. That character is widely respected and highly regarded by the East Hertfordshire communities as evidenced by the fact that it is judged to be the sixth best place to live in the whole of England (Channel 4 survey 2005 – East Herts good points - Rolling countryside, perfect villages, numerous market towns and easy access to London.)

East Hertfordshire is not however an idyll. It has the same problems of overloaded infrastructure that many areas of the south east have; the road network suffers extreme levels of congestion and under-funding, and the rail network is full to capacity. The rail companies that operate through the District have declared that the lines to London cannot carry an increased frequency of service and that the stations on the lines cannot be expanded to cope with longer trains. Even more worrying are the widely expressed concerns over the shortage of water and the inability to deal with sewage and drainage.

The south eastern part of the District is typical of this pattern. It comprises villages such as Stanstead Abbots, Eastwick, Gilston, High Wych, Allen's Green, Hunsdon, Widford and Much Hadham and the small town of Sawbridgeworth – all of which are discrete settlements with a priceless history and individual character. The countryside that provides the backdrop to these communities is traditional mixed use farmland, dotted with ancient woodlands and rich in wildlife and ancient and modern archaeology. Although farming no longer represents a significant source of employment, the area has a strong economy with very low levels of unemployment. This patchwork of towns and villages, surrounded by traditional English countryside, constitutes a highly stable society where crime is low, regard for the environment is high and levels of community involvement and self-help are exemplary.

The majority of the farmland in this corner of East Hertfordshire has been acquired progressively over the past 30 years by corporate landowners as a property investment. The most significant of these is Ropemaker Properties Ltd, the property investment arm of the BP Pension Fund, which owns 1500 hectares of land between Hunsdon and High Wych, with Eastwick and Gilston at its centre. Ropemaker bought the land as an agricultural investment, but over the past 15 years has sought permission for housing development on an ever-increasing scale. On each occasion the proposals have been rejected.

Most recently Ropemaker Properties Ltd proposed 'Harlow North' – a development of 25,000 houses for 60,000 people, together with a range of commercial uses – brought forward in the context of the East of England Plan.

The East of England Plan was subject to review by an independent inspector at an Examination in Public. The inspector's conclusions, published in June 2006, specifically rejected these plans

for development (Volume 1, Paragraph 5.95). The reasons for rejection were comprehensive, citing many of the issues raised above including the high quality environment that would be destroyed, the lack of infrastructure and a rejection of the notion that such development would aid the regeneration of Harlow. The Panel argues that such a satellite development would be a distraction to the regeneration of Harlow.

The various stakeholders in the area perceive the value of this land in different terms. Ropemaker obviously have a financial interest whereas local communities value the land in its current state as an environmental resource. These two views appear to be diametrically opposed and in the meantime the area is stagnating as there is little investment in the land by the short-term tenants, who have little incentive to take a long term view. Is there a way out of this impasse?

This report sets out an exciting prospect for the area as 'actively managed countryside' which could meet both Ropemakers financial needs and the communities' aspirations. We have suggested the name "Gilston Great Park". We would welcome comment and constructive debate on our ideas.

2. The Proposal in Brief

The area of Gilston Great Park includes the northern slopes of the Stort Valley and part of the East Herts plateau extending from Hunsdon in the west to Sawbridgeworth in the east. This totals some 25 sq.Km.

The proposals for the area will complement those for the Stort Valley flood plain which in turn is being considered as an extension to the Lea Valley Regional Park. As such this will provide a continuous area of open countryside dedicated to conservation of the environment, open uses and leisure extending out of London.

The proposals are also complementary to the measures being undertaken for the regeneration of Harlow. A high quality environment and countryside leisure facilities close to Harlow will be seen as an asset for all those who live and work in the Town and therefore a positive attraction to employers.

Greening of the Green Belt and its protection from coalescence and urban fringe pressures is a policy that reinforces the proposals contained in the Report of the Panel following the Examination in Public into the draft East of England Plan. Moreover it helps to address the central concerns of the Regional Plan by providing a sustainable approach in relation to global warming.

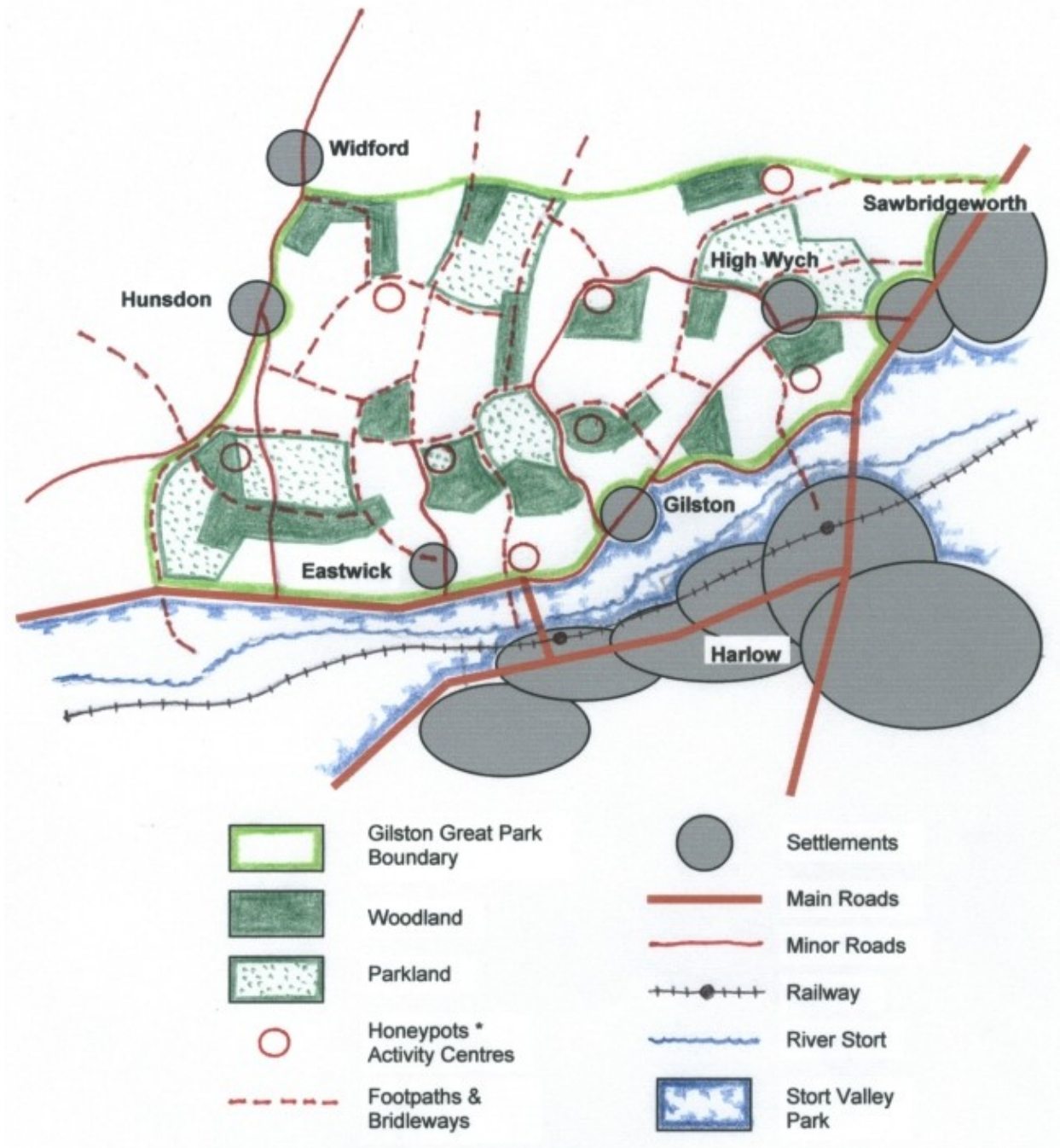
The Gilston Great Park proposals will meet these aims by assuring a long-term and stable future for the rural land uses, restoring the landscape, improving wildlife habitats and providing an attractive setting for rural leisure activities. This will be achieved through measures such as a material increase in woodland and parkland and brought about by the establishment of an 'inclusive' and positive management process.

A detailed description of these proposals and processes is set out in sections 3, 4 & 5.

Diagram 1 shows the area of the proposed Park in relation to surrounding settlements and the Stort Valley. It also illustrates how woodland can enhance the landscape features and how a network of routes can give access to facilities and the countryside generally.

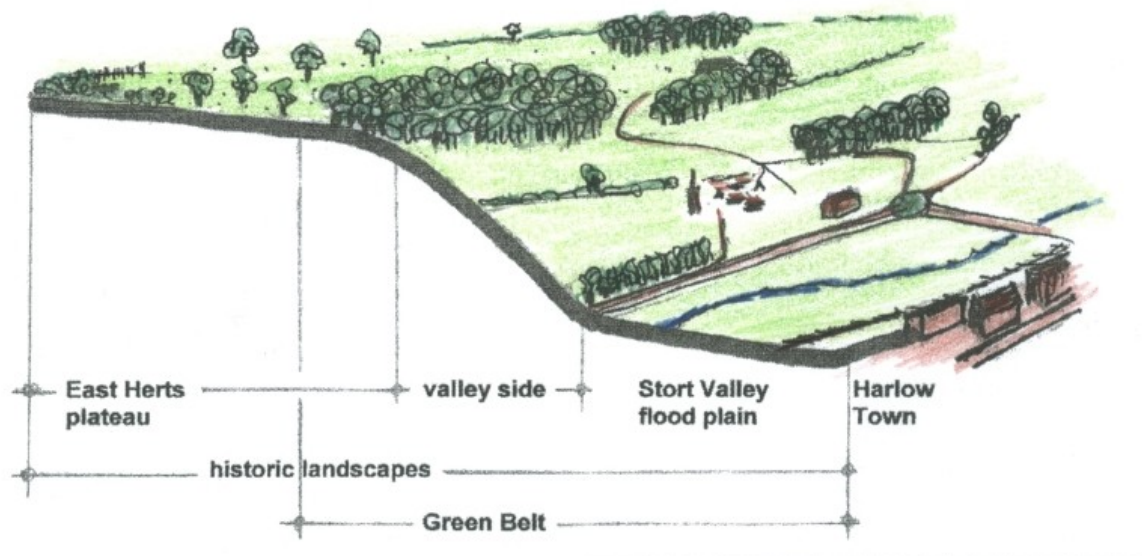
Diagram 2 illustrates how the valley form can be reinforced and the essential role of the Green Belt maintained.

Diagram 1



* Locations for Sport, Recreation, Cultural or Leisure facilities. See section 3 b

Diagram 2



3. Land Use & Activities

a. Agriculture, Forestry & Minerals.

Agriculture and forestry form the basic framework for the area. Agricultural uses are subject to considerable change with different EU funding regimes and a greater emphasis on conservation and recreation. Climate change will also be a major factor in the evolution of this use. It is foreseen that agriculture will however remain the predominant use and the best productive land should be protected especially given its closeness to the market for agricultural products. These changes will however provide increased opportunities for diversification within the agricultural economy. It is vital that a settled long-term policy for the area is established to provide certainty and to encourage investment and positive involvement in conservation. This is not possible at the moment because of the 'short-termism' arising from the "hope value" of residential development.

A positive move to support the re-use of historic agricultural buildings worthy of retention, in accordance with the aims of this proposal and Green Belt policy, will be supported both as a diversifier and a way of recording the historic evolution of the countryside. Modern functional agricultural buildings no longer needed for their original purpose should be removed and the land restored to its former use.

It is the aim of this proposal to increase woodland coverage from about 6% currently to in excess of 25%. This is a very significant change that may take many years to achieve. The choice of planting and its location can be subject to detailed consideration and negotiation but one key principle must be to emphasise the form of the Stort valley. At all times planting will be expected to be native species which enhance rather than damage ecological and historical features. In essence, woodlands are absorbers of carbon, provide biodiversity, provide visual amenity and can be helpful in absorbing sound.

Another important aim will be to ensure that woodlands are seen as commercial as well as environmental assets. New wood-based enterprises and rural crafts may be encouraged. Restoration of areas of historic parkland is another example of what could be achieved.

Both agriculture and forestry are expected to have an increasing relevance to the bio-science industry; such as the production of bio fuels. Further education services in Harlow could take advantage of this area as a location for practical research. This is an issue that should be supported by BP and its Pension fund represented by Ropemaker Properties Ltd, the principal land owning interest in the area.

Former mineral working sites need restoration and return to uses consistent with the Park plans. Hollings Mead is a potential major source of minerals and any working which may be granted by the planning authority will need to ensure a long-term plan for restoration and after-use which will benefit the aims of this proposal.

b. Leisure

The cornerstone of the leisure strategy is to harness the intrinsic resource within the landscape whilst promoting diversity in land use and the natural habitat. The aim relative to the suggested activities below is to provide something for the body and soul of everyone; a local 'treasure', connecting with other regional resources.

Some of the suggested uses will compete for resources and could be in conflict unless carefully planned. This is a further reason for suggesting the preparation of a detailed Gilston Great Park plan.

Culture and Education:

Culture is acknowledged to play an important part in regeneration projects and this aspect of the proposals could be used to enhance Harlow's image. There is a significant opportunity to provide a range of dispersed, high quality venues of unequivocal value to the region:

- Sculpture: Walks / exhibits (potential links to Henry Moore Foundation)
- Theatre: Venues similar to London's Southwark globe and Regent's Park open air amphitheatre located near existing settlements of Eastwick and Gilston
- Medium scale music venue
- A field centre incorporating for example 'The Ropemaker Great Hall' where visitors can learn about the history of the landscape as well as providing a venue for conferences, training and marriages. This centre could incorporate:
 - An East Herts 'Life-ology' (cf. Jorvik Centre in York) related to an archaeological feature. Henry VIII theme could be developed further
 - 'RAF Hunsdon' Museum
 - Class rooms and Adventure Playground
 - YHA hostel
- Field kitchen: where visitors can consume locally produced food and drink

Sport and Recreation:

The location of the proposed Park makes an ideal setting to provide training facilities and an inspiration looking toward the 2012 Olympics. Facilities might include:

- Running: Orienteering, Cross-country for schools, Running track
- Field sport venues
- Equestrian: Resource Centre – farrier, eventing space, vet, expanding the number of bridle ways
- Ornithology: the area is already valued as a location for bird watching including a recent sighting of a Pine Grosbeak: establishment of a network of hides and vantage points
- Cycling:
 - Mountain biking trails
 - Leisure cycle paths (similar to those offered in the New Forest)
 - Community connection (e.g. Hunsdon to Sawbridgeworth cycle trail)
 - Hire facilities
 - Links to existing facilities in Harlow
- Footpaths: Expansion of existing network /links to Harlow
- Camping: Camping clubs, Scouts & Guides
- Picnic sites: Related to footpaths, car parking facilities
- Kite flying meadow
- Resources and drop-off points related to the River Stort navigation

c. Landscape, Archaeology & Wildlife

Harlow was designated as a New Town in March 1947 and was one of the first post-war New Towns. A Master Plan for the town's future development was prepared by Sir Frederick Gibberd who adopted a distinctive 'landscape-led' approach to the Town's design. It is this which has strongly shaped the development of the town's urban form and was key to its relationship to the surrounding countryside. From the outset the northern slopes of the Stort Valley were an essential part of the landscape setting of the Town.

The vision for green infrastructure north of Harlow, as supported by the Panel Report into the draft East of England Plan (Appendix II), is of *an attractive, distinctive, accessible, diverse and multi-functional network of green spaces and links, landscapes, biodiversity and heritage assets in and around Harlow that seeks to meet the social and environmental needs of all communities*. It will do this by promoting:

- The protection and enhancement of key ecological habitats and species
- New high quality urban edge landscapes of distinction creating an improved image and sense of place for urban fringe landscapes,
- Health and fitness through provision of opportunities for community involvement in active recreation;
- The protection, re-creation and rehabilitation of landscapes and habitats damaged or lost by development or land management practices;
- The potential of archaeological, historical and cultural heritage features to contribute to local identity and sense of place;
- High quality places to visit, and providing an attractive environment
- Opportunities for farmers, foresters and other land managers to diversify into the management of woodlands, water meadows and grasslands as publicly accessible green spaces

The biodiversity, heritage and recreational value of these key green spaces will be protected and enhanced, and they will be well-connected to each other and the wider countryside via a network of attractive green corridors providing links for people and wildlife.

In particular, a series of multi-functional and connected green spaces managed for wildlife, heritage conservation and recreation will be created along the Stort Valley on Harlow's doorstep, providing a new and substantial green space resource accessible to local communities and visitors alike.

This proposal provides an exciting opportunity to deliver a new and bold vision for multi-functional landscapes that meets the needs of urban and rural communities in the Harlow Area. The key features and opportunities are set out in the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan, extracts of which are reproduced in Appendix III.

d. Housing & Employment

The draft East of England Plan has few effective policies relating to rural communities. Small scale developments of affordable housing to meet local needs are clearly required in the communities within and adjoining Gilston Great Park.

For Eastwick, Gilston, High Wych and Sawbridgeworth, within the Green Belt, all new housing developments will be strictly controlled. Beyond that, in Hunsdon and Widford the Rural Area policy applies where limited housing will be allowed to meet local needs. The local planning process will determine the location and scale of that growth.

Harlow has been identified in the Regional Strategy as a Key Centre for Development and will have development at twice the level of local needs. The local planning process being conducted jointly by Harlow Council and Epping Forest District Council will determine the location and scale of that growth.

Additional employment opportunities will arise within the Great Gilston Park area. Forestry, countryside management in various forms, leisure activities and cultural and recreational facilities will all generate new jobs. These will, for the most part, relate well to the labour force available.

It is part of the justification for Gilston Great Park projects that investment in the creation of a high quality environment will improve the economic well-being of nearby towns and villages which will be seen as more attractive places in which to live and work. Harlow in particular, where there is concern about its image and ability to attract employers, will benefit from these proposals and this will assist with its regeneration.

e. Water & Drainage

Extract from Thames Water's submission to the Examination in Public:

"With respect to growth proposed at Harlow, recent indications are that as a result of the proposed levels of growth forecast in the area there will be a significant tightening of the consent for Rye Meads by the Environment Agency. The current treatment at Rye Meads would have to be changed and new technology installed. The new technology is more energy intensive, roughly double that of the existing process and we have real concerns that enough standby generation could be provided. The additional complicating factor at Rye Meads is that parts of the site are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (S.S.S.I.) and Special Protection Area (SPA) any changes to the process that could affect the ecology of these areas needs to be assessed. Meeting a low Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) could be compromised due to algal growth and by waste products from resident bird populations"

Unlike proposals for massive housing and commercial development in the area, Gilston Great Park will not make insatiable demands for water and drainage services that cannot be supplied in a sustainable way. Indeed the Park proposals for planting and consequential soil stabilisation and retention of rainfall to recharge the aquifer are all very positive in relation to the issue of global warming. It is hoped that the nitrate run-off from agriculture can be reduced and this will have a beneficial effect on the quality of water in the Stort and the long-term future of the Hunsdon Meads S.S.S.I.

f. Access & Traffic Generation

The strategy for Gilston Great Park will be to provide safe access for all appropriate modes of transport to encourage access by all ages and walks of life.

The existing internal network of bridleways and footpaths will be developed and expanded and adapted to include specific cycleway provision to encourage recreational use. Significant lengths of the network will have suitable surfaces to cater for wheelchair, pushchairs and battery powered scooters. This network will be linked to the town centre network via a safe signal controlled crossing of the A414 at the Fifth Avenue roundabout.

Peripheral discrete parking areas will accommodate vehicular access for cars and buses from the A414 and surrounding country lanes.

Traffic will be generated through agricultural business, and leisure activities. By their nature these will not exacerbate the peak hour congestion problems on the A414 and town centre road network.

Marketing of produce will be through outlets in Harlow Town Centre and the surrounding villages in addition to a small number of 'on site' locations thus reducing traffic generation and supporting the regeneration of retail within the town and other settlements.

Major infrastructure provision, beyond that described above, is therefore not required. The proposed northern by-pass, necessary in the case of major housing development, will not be needed. The by-pass had no funding commitment and the consequential new junction with the M11 was in conflict with Government policy.

4. Sustainability

The sustainability statement of the Harlow North proposal, for at least 10,000 houses, prepared for the Examination in Public was judged by many to be inadequate.

However it did state that “the location was unlikely to be able to accommodate the particular type of change without extensive degradation of character and value. Mitigation measures are unlikely to be able to address potential landscape environmental issues.....that the location was in the highest category of sensitivity to anything more than development of 50-100 dwellings”

The one potentially positive statement “Potential positive contribution to regeneration objectives” in the sustainability statement was significantly outweighed by the significant negative effects:

- Potential that site may not be adequately linked to Harlow, which would not promote regeneration objectives
- Environmental effects of loss of Green Belt area
- Effects on sub-regionally important landscapes, wildlife, and historic features
- Loss of tranquillity and potential disturbance by aircraft noise
- Increased demands on water supply
- Possible increased flooding risk

The Environment Agency also indicated as early as November 2005 that it is unable to support the Ropemaker Properties Ltd. current proposals for a “Living Bridge” across the river Stort floodplain on policy grounds. Ropemaker argued the case that there is a significant overriding need for the the “Living Bridge” from the perspective of urban sustainability and that the buildings and urbanism on the bridge are required to achieve the necessary integration of the two settlements. The Agency’s objections were summed up in three categories:

- The Sequential Test - PPG25 states that a development should not be placed in the floodplain if there is a suitable alternative site nearby
- Precedent/Control - this would set a precedent for inappropriate development in floodplains
- Promote Further Development - Any development in the floodplain may be a catalyst for further intrusions into the floodplain over the coming years.

It must be a concern that the supposed sustainability of Harlow North would be dependent on the building this massive structure in the floodplain.

However a new sustainability assessment has been carried out in relation to these proposals for an area of ‘actively managed countryside’.

The essential conclusion is that the Gilston Great Park proposals will result in a long-term sustainable future for the area. From all points of view the plan would underpin ‘sustainable living’ and be positive in relation to climate change.

- The high quality historic environment will be actively preserved and enhanced
- The Green Belt and other green infrastructure will be actively managed to provide a sound economic future with widespread public access and recreation
- Extensive wildlife habitats will be preserved
- The high quality landscape setting of Harlow would be protected and enhanced
- The scheme would substantially enhance the quality of life for residents of Harlow and improve the town’s image

The detailed assessment and comparison with the Sustainability Appraisal of the Draft East of England Plan is given in Appendix I.

5. Implementation & Monitoring

It is our view that these proposals should be realised by the following steps:

1. The concept of Gilston Great Park should be incorporated into the Regional Strategy at the next review and we hope the Parish and Town Councils in the area will campaign for this to happen. A proposal can then be incorporated into the Local Development Document. At the local level Parish Councils should incorporate the principle into the Parish Plans that are currently under consideration.
2. To implement the proposal a Steering Group should be established with representation from all stakeholders. This Steering Group should then oversee the preparation of a plan for the Park and the regular monitoring and updating of the plan.
3. A more detailed study and a plan need to be prepared which will elaborate the outline ideas presented in this document. Much of the basic research relevant to such a study already exists in the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan and other studies by Herts County Council, East Herts Council and Ropemaker Properties Ltd. We hope Ropemaker Properties will publish, or otherwise make available, the large number of environmental and archaeological studies they have recently conducted.
4. The study and plan will provide a firm basis for action and the attraction of relevant investment and grants. A number of Government agencies, particularly Natural England and the East of England Development Agency (EEDA), can be expected to grant aid the type of schemes envisaged here.
5. It is not expected that progress will be made by compulsion. The objective is to mobilise a wide range of individuals and organisations to focus their efforts on achieving results by “pump-priming” finance, negotiation and agreement. A form of Countryside Management Service may well be appropriate.
6. The first step is consultation. The purpose of this proposal is to stimulate discussion on the ideas presented. We will give wide publicity to this proposal in the press, offer to arrange meetings with the land owners in the area, offer to arrange public meetings, and offer to discuss the ideas with other stakeholders including Government agencies. Since Gilston Great Park will provide an invaluable resource for the residents of Harlow consultation will clearly involve that community. Details of this proposal will also be published on a website so that any member of the public or organisation can ask, and have answered, any question in relation to their proposal.

We would welcome comment and constructive debate on our ideas either by letter, email, secretary@stopharlownorth.com, or via our website, www.stopharlownorth.com.

We would be happy to meet to discuss the ideas in more detail if you consider that would be both helpful and appropriate.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Appendices

APPENDIX I – Sustainability Statement

This table is compiled from Table 3.2h in the Sustainability Appraisal Report of the draft East of England Plan (November 2004) and our own assessment of the proposals in this document.

| Extract from SA of RPG14: Problem / Issue & Data Source | Extract from SA of RPG14: Supporting data | Extract from SA of RPG14: Implications for Draft Regional Plan. <i>Italics SHN comments and emphasis</i> | SHN Assessment: Impact of designation of area as Gilston Great Park |
|--|---|--|---|
| High quality historic environment. English Heritage | Combination of high quality historic settlements in rolling countryside makes this one of the most environmentally attractive parts of the region. The comparative lack of change in the middle part of the LSC corridor, as well as the good state of conservation of the historic environment makes the area particularly special. Peripheral development could put pressure on historic centres for additional development. Growth in the area could have an adverse impact on the setting of some settlements' historic cores | A judgment will need to be made whether the environmental quality of an area such as this is best preserved by concentration of growth in one location, perhaps a new settlement, rather than a large number of urban extensions, some of which would be bigger than the existing historic settlement. Sensitive town centre improvements will be required to guard against negative outcomes from additional pressure. <i>Major development north of Harlow will be harmful to the archaeological heritage and historic parkland features.</i> | The high quality historic environment will be actively preserved and enhanced |
| Green infrastructure. MAGIC maps. | Harlow is located within London's Green Belt, which resists urban spread and coalescence of settlements. Urban sprawl may encroach on the Green Belt. Each of the proposed spatial development patterns is subject to different environmental constraints. | Growth on the edge of Harlow could assist regeneration or impede it through deterioration of landscape character <i>and introduction of a counter magnet.</i> Would limit the separation between Harlow and surrounding villages <i>to the north.</i> | The Green Belt and other green infrastructure will be actively managed to provide a sound economic future with widespread public access and recreation. The original intent of the Green belt will be preserved. |
| Extensive wildlife habitats. English Nature. | The area includes numerous designated sites. The key habitat types present are: lowland broad-leaved woodland (regional priority habitat), open water and associated wet grasslands and reed swamp The area also includes woodlands of importance such as Epping Forest SAC, Hatfield Forest NNR and numerous ancient woodland sites. | Existing habitats should be protected and enhanced. <i>Major development to the north of Harlow would have a significant negative impact on the wildlife value of this area.</i> | Extensive wildlife habitats will be preserved. Special note should be made that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the area provides the largest habitat for bats in Hertfordshire • the River Stort has a population of otters • rare orchids are known to grow in the area • in July 06 there was the 11th recorded sighting in UK of Pine Grosbeak |
| Poor air quality. | Is a major issue as it is very poor in the south of the sub-area. Of particular concern is the impact on Epping Forest cSAC that currently | Areas of poor air quality should be prioritised for enhancement. <i>Major development and the introduction of more</i> | Preserving and enhancing the flora and, in particular increasing woodland cover, will provide local improvement of air |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| | has almost three times NOx threshold, mainly due to the traffic. | <i>traffic north of Harlow will not aid improvement of air quality and may worsen it</i> | quality |
| Lack of water resources. Environment Agency | Most watercourses in the sub-area are already over-abstracted. There are also relatively flat, poorly drained areas of land with existing flooding problems. Water stress is a key problem for the whole area with abstractions affecting groundwater in some areas and surface water in most rivers. Unsustainable abstraction regimes exist particularly in the eastern part of the sub-area. | Future development would need to be underpinned by sustainable water management. <i>Long distance import of water, necessary to supply major development north of Harlow, is unsustainable.</i> <i>Investment necessary to cope with sewage treatment unlikely and impact on quality in Lea Valley a potential issue.</i> | No further water demand. Woodland planting will aid water retention and improve condition of aquifer. |
| High quality built environment. English Heritage | There are a number of 'picture postcard' villages in the sub-region. However there are also very poor quality areas such as central Harlow that would benefit from regeneration and environmental enhancement. | Areas in need of regeneration such as Harlow provide opportunities for increased densities and therefore may help relieve the pressure on the aesthetically pleasing villages. <i>Major development north of Harlow be harmful.</i> | The high quality built environment will be actively preserved and enhanced. Villages including Eastwick & Gilston and Hunsdon – all mentioned in Domesday Book – will not be degraded |
| Development and flood risk. Environment Agency | Fluvial flooding is already an issue in parts of the sub-area. | Several potential development locations are located in the floodplain <i>or will have an impact on it (e.g. development north of Harlow)</i> | Woodland reduces rapid run-off and reduces flood risk. |
| Transport capacity. EERA | Number of routes in the sub-region have existing heavy traffic flows. The sub-region has many transport problems, including capacity of rail links, poor quality of east-west rail links and localised areas of congestion. Public transport links are poor in this area and will need substantial improvement to accommodate growth. | Further development should seek to accommodate increased movement sustainably. (i.e. prioritise other modes over car travel). Information, analysis and planning is needed for transport in Harlow. <i>Northern by-pass and new junction to M11 necessary for development north of Harlow. New crossings of Stort Valley also necessary. Jobs / labour mismatch means high commuting levels but no public transport capacity without major investment</i> | Local access, including designated parking areas, would be unintrusive. Most visitors are likely to be outside the rush-hours and at weekends and so would not add to the existing levels of congestion. Improvements to existing public transport are possible. |
| Vulnerable landscape character. Countryside Agency | Setting of Harlow – river valleys, floodplain and natural environment designations constrain growth (particularly to north, south and west). Recent development in the south of the sub-region has often been inconsistent with local character. | The high quality landscape setting of Harlow should be protected. The inner regeneration of the town should be sympathetic to its surrounding landscape. <i>Development north of Harlow conflicts with this criterion.</i> | The high quality landscape setting of Harlow would be protected and enhanced. |
| Poor image/ reputation. EEDA | Harlow's poor image needs to be addressed through regeneration. | Opportunities for regeneration should be maximised to encourage economic stability. | The scheme would substantially enhance the quality of life for residents of Harlow and improve the town's image |

APPENDIX II

Extract from Policy ENV1 from Panel recommendations on the draft East of England Plan

Policy ENV1: Green infrastructure

Areas and networks of green infrastructure will be identified, protected, created, extended, enhanced, managed and maintained throughout the region to ensure that an improved and healthy environment is available for the benefit of present and future communities. This will be particularly important in those areas identified to accommodate the largest amounts of growth in the region, whether or not officially recognised as such in the Sustainable Communities Plan.

Local development documents will:

- define a multiple hierarchy of green infrastructure, in terms of location, function, size and levels of use, at every spatial scale and across all areas of the region based on analysis of existing natural, historic, cultural and landscape assets, including the identification of new assets required to deliver green infrastructure;
- identify and require the retention and provision of substantial connected networks of green space, in urban, urban fringe and adjacent countryside areas to serve the new communities in the sub-region by 2021; and
- ensure that policies have regard to the economic and social as well as environmental benefits of green infrastructure assets.

APPENDIX III – Wildlife, Landscape & Archaeology Assets & Opportunities

The following are edited extracts from the Harlow Green Infrastructure Plan which demonstrate how the ideas for Gilston Great Park are compatible with the principles described in that Plan

Wildlife

Key Habitats within the area north of Harlow include:

- The River Stort which is of key importance for a wide range of wildlife species, including BAP priority habitats and species related to its value as a key wetland habitat;
- A large number of Ancient Woodlands that have had continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD, particularly to the north;
- Areas of value for their grassland and woodland habitats, floristic interest and associated wildlife, including protected species;
- Green lanes and hedgerows providing links between areas of semi-natural habitat set within the mixed agricultural landscape;
- The parkland areas and plantation woodland;
- Habitats associated with the numerous stream tributaries which drain the Harlow Area into the major river systems;

The key ecological assets and key habitats support a wide range of rare and protected species within the Harlow Area.

Examples of rare and protected species recorded in the area north of Harlow include:

- Bat species (including Pipistrelle, Noctule, Brown long-eared, Leisler's, Natterer's, Serotine, Whiskered/Brandt's, Daubenton's)
- Water Vole, Badger and Otter
- Grass Snake, Slow-worm and Common Lizard
- Native Crayfish,
- Great Crested Newts
- Buzzard, Water Rail, Barn Owl, Nightingale, Cetti's Warbler, Wood Warbler, Kingfisher and Pine Grosbeak,

The square kilometre north of Harlow contains the densest population of bats recorded in Hertfordshire.

Key opportunities for enhancing wildlife include:

- Provision of strategically located new educational / visitor centre facilities for environmental interpretation and education for the local community and visitors;
- Enhance and maintain grass verges, hedgerows, footpaths and by-ways, arable field margins and brooks to bring the countryside to the urban fringe;
- New tree planting to address problems of elm dieback within woodland and hedgerows;
- Creation of bat roosting/breeding sites in new buildings using 'bat bricks' built into the brickwork of buildings that comply with Buildings Regulations.
- Incorporation of nest boxes onto buildings and provision of innovative nest sites within built structures for breeding birds such as starlings, house sparrows and swifts.
- The opportunity to conserve orchards, such as the Rivers Nursery Orchard to the north of the County Wildlife Site at the Rivers Hospital site near Sawbridgeworth - the site, which has had a continuous history of horticultural cultivation stretching back to the seventeenth century, is currently being promoted as a community orchard by The Friends of Rivers Nursery Orchard who are working on improving the grasslands and developing the site as an educational resource for local people.

Landscapes

Gilston / Hunsdon Historic Landscapes

The area is comprised of farmland (dominantly arable) and woodland around Hunsdon, north of the A414. This area has small villages, winding narrow lanes and large parkland/estates. Scattered throughout are pockets of biodiversity and a few wildlife sites, contained within woodland and linear features such as hedgerows, lane verges and brooks that stand out within the arable landscape.

The area contributes an open area of farmland with biodiversity held in pockets such as brooks, waterbodies and woodland. It is made accessible by many footpaths that cut across the arable land. The area includes scattered areas rich in biodiversity, with good local populations of hares and great crested newts.

Opportunities for Gilston Park include enhancement of new verges, woodland and scrub. For example:

- There are two areas of woodland and moats, which could be extended with additional tree planting on adjacent land.
- Create species-rich wildflower verges to link woodland to the north of Gilston such as Blackhut Wood and Eastwich Wood.
- Link ponds with scrub habitat within managed estates to offer diverse habitat for amphibians such as at Channoeks Farm.
- Opportunities for the enhancement of existing parkland, including grassland, veteran trees and ponds.

Opportunities for Fiddlers Brook include enhancement of verges, hedgerows and brook. For example:

- Manage road verges for wildflower north of Gilston to provide links between farms and woodland for wildlife such as invertebrates
- Hedgerows and footpaths throughout the Zone could be enhanced and extended to link blocks of woodland such south of Widford. Areas of elm dieback especially could be planted up with native local species;
- Undertake surveys of Fiddler's Brook and apply management to enhance marginal and aquatic vegetation along the brook, such as buffering the riparian corridor with permanent grassland.

Opportunities for New Habitat Linkages exist. For example Fiddlers Brook to River Stort – where new hedgerows, field margins, ponds, grassland and woodland could be created.

E.g.

- Create new habitat linkages by reinforcing the hedgerow network with new planting – the incorporation of wide field margins in association with field boundaries will further strengthen the links.
- Additional pond creation and woodland planting could also be incorporated into the landscape.

Landscape, Townscape and Riverscape Character

The key landscape assets related to the Harlow area's landscape, townscape and riverscape character include:

- The distinctive 'landscape-led' approach by Sir Frederick Gibberd to the development of the Harlow Master Plan, which has strongly shaped the development of the town's urban form and was key to its relationship to the surrounding countryside. Gibberd's approach to landscape to the north can be summarised as:

- Physical and visual links from the centre of the town to the surrounding countryside on its edge formed by the green wedges, which encapsulate natural features such as valleys, woods, brooks;
 - A clear contrast between the town and the surrounding countryside provided by the Stort river corridor separating the town from the undulating/rolling landscapes to the north, and the pronounced north-facing ridge slope to the south which visually and physically contains the urban area from the open countryside to the south.
- The diversity of landscapes within the area to the north of Harlow– in particular:
 - The Lee and Stort River Valley Floodplains characterised by wetland vegetation, a mixture of natural river corridors, canals and extensive waterbodies created by sand and gravel extraction, including in particular the distinctive waterscapes of the Lee Valley Marshes, characterised by open and expansive mosaic of marsh, scrub and wet woodland and large flocks of waterfowl
 - The undulating/rolling Ridges and Slopes and Uplands to the north of the River Stort characterised by pockets of woodland, isolated small settlements and farmsteads, and distinctive areas of historic parkland
 - The extensive gently undulating Plateaux, with medium to large-scale largely arable fields and winding lanes connecting scattered farmsteads
 - The woodland blocks, hedgerows and hedgerow trees providing a green edge to many urban areas;
 - The individual identity of generally dispersed small-scale nucleated rural settlements and their dispersed pattern within the landscape;
 - The range of varied field patterns in the landscape reflecting different patterns of historic land-use and modern development;
 - The range of local landscape elements and features, many of which are of historical and cultural value, which contribute to local distinctiveness and sense of place.

Archaeological, Historical and Cultural Assets

The key archaeological, historical and cultural assets within the area north of Harlow are:

- The 70 Scheduled Monuments – with notable concentrations around Hunsdon
- The concentrations of visible archaeological areas and features in the landscape;
- The numerous remnants of Ancient Woodland
- The nationally and regionally important 20th century military remains – especially the airfield at Hunsdon.
- The concentrations of 18th and 19th century parkland of varying condition not on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest – particularly between Ware and Sawbridgeworth north of the River Stort.
- The River Stort – with its relict enclosed meadow pasture and good survival of prehistoric monuments occupying the river gravel terraces along the river;
- The tracts of agricultural landscapes that retain a high degree of surviving historic features such as relatively intact pre-18th century field boundary patterns found throughout the area.

The key generic opportunities for the protection and enhancement of archaeological, historical and cultural assets within the area north of Harlow are considered to be:

- The contribution that archaeological, historical and cultural assets makes to landscape, townscape and riverscape character by creating a strong sense of place, sense of time, and sense of community - especially with regard to publicly accessible assets in and around urban areas;

- Recognising the mutually beneficial inter-relationships between conservation of the historic environment and biodiversity conservation - particularly with regard to the protection, enhancement repair and restoration of hedgerows, ancient woodlands and historic buildings and structures (e.g. repair of military pillboxes to provide bat roosts);
- The enhanced presentation and interpretation of publicly accessible archaeological, historical and cultural assets linked to opportunities for increased research and education programmes (linked to the 'The Past on Your Doorstep, the Future in Your Hands' Groundwork projects which are introducing young people to industrial heritage);
- The potential to further maximise the contribution of the historic environment to landscape character and distinctiveness, especially in terms of the repair and restoration of historic parks and gardens, river valley water meadows and built historic features, ancient woodland and hedgerows;
- The potential for achieving 'Green Heritage Site' status to promote the value of historic public parks in the Harlow Area
- The linking of similar sites through connective networks to encourage further exploration of the Harlow Area – for example, historic mill sites along the river valleys;
- The potential to re-establish historic field patterns in key areas where future farming practices allow through Environmental Stewardship - particularly in the area surrounding the M11;
- The potential to secure appropriate protection for, and sympathetic ownership of, historic buildings, sites and structures as key green infrastructure assets;
- The potential to take archaeological sites out of arable / woodland cultivation, where future farming practices allow;
- The potential to create physical and intellectual access to currently neglected archaeological, historical and cultural assets;
- The potential for the discovery of undisturbed archaeological landscapes within Ancient Woodlands due to their continuous woodland cover since c.1600 AD.

APPENDIX IV

Landscape Character Assessments Source: Hertfordshire County Council

A: Stanstead to Pishiobury Parklands

Strategy and guidelines for managing change: Improve and Conserve

- encourage landowners to safeguard existing hedges, increase hedged field boundaries, create permanent grass strips around field margins and prevent spray drift, using financial incentives as available
- encourage the authorities responsible for the Eastwick moats to review their management of the site to achieve a more informative balance between nature conservation and historic objectives
- disseminate information about the historic landscape and ecological value of veteran and parkland trees
- discourage ploughing up of parkland grasslands
- encourage a reversion from arable to pasture where practicable, and the management of new and existing grasslands to maximise their biodiversity potential
- encourage management of woodland to ensure age diversity, favour locally indigenous species and maintain species-rich ground flora
- encourage the planting of new woodland around existing woodlands where this will contribute to ecological diversity and will not damage the local landscape character or historic features such as banks and ditches
- encourage the replanting of hedges along historic field boundaries, using locally indigenous species
- ensure that new features and planting within historic parklands, especially in connection with development within them, respects their historic integrity by reflecting the dominant period of the house and parkland and using similar species to those planted originally in order to reinforce its character
- ensure that proposed development is only permitted where it will enhance local landscape character

B. River Stort

Strategy and guidelines for managing change: Improve and Conserve

- resist any development within or adjacent to the floodplain which could damage the ecological interest of the river
- encourage landowners to create buffer strips along the watercourse, to prevent ploughing right up to it and increase its ecological diversity and value as an ecological corridor
- encourage landowners to avoid the use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizer near the river channel, in order to reduce loss of ecological diversity or eutrophication of the water
- encourage good practice in water and vegetation management, especially in the SSSIs
- encourage research into or consultation on grazing or vegetation management systems that do not conflict with flood defence requirements
- encourage the conservation and enhancement of riverside and other wetland habitats and the connection of wetlands along the river valley
- support the establishment of agri-environmental schemes within ESAs and CHAs (Countryside Heritage areas)

- ensure that mineral restoration proposals are adhered to and that they are designed to maximise nature conservation potential by contributing to the BAP objective of creating a 'necklace' of wetland habitats along the river valley
- resist any further proposals for mineral extraction in this area which might affect the local water table or permanently damage the local landscape character or high ecological value

C. Hunsdon Plateau

Strategy and guidelines for managing change: Improve and Conserve

- the north east part of this area retains its historic characteristics of ancient woodland blocks linked by ditched hedgerows. This part should be conserved and protected, while the remainder should be improved to achieve the same landscape and ecological value
- encourage landowners to safeguard existing hedges, increase hedged field boundaries, create permanent grass strips around field margins and prevent spray drift, using financial incentives as available
- encourage the replanting of hedges along historic field boundaries, where this will not damage historic features such as ditches and banks
- encourage the planting of new woodland around existing, to protect them, increase the scale of woodland in this area and improve ecological diversity
- new woodland planting should use only locally indigenous species, of local provenance if possible
- plantations and woodlands should be managed to favour locally indigenous species, to encourage good age diversity and to maintain a species-rich ground flora
- where the loss of ponds and ditches is unavoidable, ensure that replacement features of at least equal potential nature conservation value are created and maintained
- encourage awareness of the importance and value of veteran trees
- if any artefacts relating to WWII use of the airfield are still extant, consider their retention and conservation

The full assessments can be found here:

Stanstead to Pishiobury Parklands:

<http://enquire.hertscc.gov.uk/landscsh/Areas/area81.htm#summary>

River Stort:

<http://enquire.hertscc.gov.uk/landscsh/Areas/area82.htm#summary>

Hunsdon:

<http://enquire.hertscc.gov.uk/landscsh/Areas/area83.htm#summary>

**Extract from a Study of the relationship between Transport and Development in the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough Growth Area.
Colin Buchanan and Partners & GVA Grimley, August 2004 commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister**

“10.10.4 There is no minimal impact land around Harlow, due to landscape sensitivity and significant partial and absolute constraints. Land to the north of Harlow was considered to be the most sensitive and development here would have significant environmental impacts. Absolute constraints that were identified included Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMs), floodplain and the eastern section of the search area is located within the 57 dB(A) Leq Noise contour. These absolute constraints would preclude development completely. In addition, there are also a high concentration of partial constraints that consequently overlap to the north of Harlow. These include the 54 dB(A) Leq noise contour, areas of archaeological significance and an abundance of county wildlife sites distributed across the whole of the search area.

In terms of landscape sensitivity, 90% of the area is within moderate to high landscape sensitivity.”

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