

**Local Government  
Boundary Commission  
For England  
Report No. 559**

**Principal Area Boundary Review**

DISTRICT EPPING FOREST  
AND  
DISTRICT OF HARLOW

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BOUNDARY COMMISSION

FOR ENGLAND

REPORT NO. 559

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT  
PRINCIPAL AREA BOUNDARY REVIEW: DISTRICT OF EPPING FOREST AND DISTRICT OF  
HARLOW

BACKGROUND

1. On 28 May 1981 Harlow District Council originally asked us to carry out a review of the boundary of its district with the district of Epping Forest. The District Council sought the transfer to its area of certain parts of the District of Epping Forest which it considered had ties with Harlow; it said there was the possibility of Harlow -related housing development on some of the land in question, and that service provision would be easier if it were to be transferred. The proposed transfer was opposed by Epping Forest District Council, the Parish Councils concerned and some residents of the area. In December 1981 we decided to defer consideration of the request until relevant decisions relating to the Essex Structure Plan had been taken.

2. The outstanding points in the County Structure Plan were settled by September 1982, but Essex County Council then indicated that it considered that all district boundaries within the county should be reviewed together. We were not satisfied that such a major review was either desirable or practical but we once again deferred a decision on whether to undertake a review pending further consultation with Essex County Council and discussions with your department regarding the priorities for our programme of reviews. By mid 1984 it was clear that there would be no major review of boundaries within Essex. We therefore decided to consider the boundary between the districts of Epping Forest and Harlow separately. In view of the lapse of time, however, we invited Harlow District Council to make a revised submission.

## HARLOW DISTRICT COUNCIL'S REVISED SUBMISSION

3. Harlow District Council forwarded its revised submission on 19 March 1985. The District Council sought the incorporation of areas of Epping Forest located to the east, south and west of Harlow. On the east side, the scheme involved parts of the parishes of Sheering, Matching and North Weald Bassett with the new boundary being tied to the line of the M11 motorway. On the south side, parts of the parishes of North Weald Bassett and Epping Upland were to be transferred, with the new boundary following minor roads and farm tracks. To the west of Harlow the scheme provided for the transfer of part of the parish of Roydon with the new boundary being defined by field boundaries and a stream.

4. The District Council argued that all these areas were dependent on Harlow for employment, shopping and leisure facilities. It was claimed that the provision of public transport in the area and surveys of car usage showed the general pattern of community life to be centred on the town. Some of the properties and several of the public roads concerned could only be reached from within Harlow and therefore such services as road maintenance, street lighting and refuse collection could be more easily organised and operated from that district. In addition, other public services such as postal, gas, electricity, police, fire, courts and health were provided from the town. Most secondary school children from the areas concerned were educated in Harlow. Moreover, there were anomalies in the existing boundary which would be removed if the proposals were adopted.

5. The District Council also argued that there was a need for the town area to be increased to enable development to take place. It took the view that the expansion of Stansted Airport would inevitably result in an increased demand for housing in Harlow. Furthermore Harlow had a 'second generation' of residents who would need to be housed independently of the 'first generation'. This was a problem peculiar to new towns and could not be solved within the existing

housing stock or on available building land. The Council feared that unless more land for new houses could be provided, younger people would leave, especially those with skills who were critical to viability of the town's economy, which would lead to a decline in Harlow's economic and social life. In short, the District Council claimed that the original boundaries of the new town had been drawn too tightly and that expansion was now essential.

6. Harlow District Council publicised its proposals and we received comments from a number of sources. Essex County Council expressed qualified support for the transfer of the area to the east of Harlow but opposed that to the west. Epping Forest District Council contended that any consideration of boundary changes would be premature. It argued that the existing boundaries did reflect the pattern of community life, that there were no difficulties in the provision of local government services and that local residents were opposed to change. On the question of development, the District Council's view was that Harlow District Council's case was nullified by a number of factors which it had not taken into account; in particular, that the population of Harlow was declining, that the area concerned was Green Belt, that Stansted-related development was still speculative, and that there was sufficient land available within Harlow's existing boundaries to provide for any reasonable development.

7. The five Parish Councils which would be affected by the plan expressed strong opposition, as did some 50 residents of the areas proposed for transfer, and the Parish Council of Nazeing whose parish would adjoin Harlow if the proposals were implemented. In addition we received two petitions against change with 128 and 144 signatures; it was argued that the areas concerned were rural in character and quite different from Harlow and that the proposed changes would have an unacceptable effect on the life of the residents.

8. Support for Harlow District Council's proposals came from the Harlow Chamber of Trade, the Harlow District Employers Association and representatives of landowners and potential developers.

## OUR DRAFT PROPOSALS

9. We considered that a prima facie case, which needed to be further tested, existed for the expansion of Harlow's administrative area eastwards, even without taking account of Stansted-related or other development, and that in this respect the M11 would make a clear boundary. We were not persuaded, however, that it was necessary for the whole of the claimed eastern area to be transferred and we decided to exclude the section in the parish of Sheering and the northern part of the parish of Matching. Nor did we consider that a case had been made, in terms of effective and convenient local government, for extending Harlow's western boundary.

10. We decided to announce the formal start of a review of the boundary between the districts of Epping Forest and Harlow and, simultaneously, to issue draft proposals for changes based on the scheme submitted by Harlow District Council, modified to exclude any change to the western boundary, and to transfer to Harlow only that part of the eastern and southern area between Rye Hill Road in the south up to Moor Hall Road in the north. These decisions were announced in a letter to the two district councils dated 3 December 1985. The letter was copied to Essex County Council, to the Parish Councils affected and to other organisations and individuals who had made representations to us or who might have had an interest in the boundary issues. Harlow and Epping Forest District Councils were asked to arrange publication of a notice giving details of our draft proposals and to place copies of it at places where public notices are customarily displayed. They were also asked to place copies of our draft proposals letter on deposit for inspection at their main offices for a period of eight weeks. Comments were invited by 25 February 1986.

## RESPONSE TO OUR DRAFT PROPOSALS

11. The draft proposals attracted representations from over 100 sources. Harlow District Council supported the proposals subject to a small suggested amendment. Further support came from the same sources as had expressed support for Harlow District Council's submission (see paragraph 8 above). The arguments for change were, in summary:- the need for additional housing; the insufficiency of land within Harlow; the fact that some of the land proposed for transfer was of poor agricultural quality; the proximity of the area to existing communities within Harlow; and that services could more easily be provided from Harlow should any development take place.

12. Opposition came from the same sources as, and was on similar lines to, that expressed to Harlow District Council's submission (see paragraphs 6 and 7 above). Epping Forest District Council reiterated its total opposition and alleged that the draft proposals would pre-judge a planning application for a large development on part of the area. It maintained that the review was premature; that there should be a public hearing since the land in question was Green Belt; that it included high quality agricultural land and that the residents concerned, particularly of the village of Hastingwood, should be given the chance to make oral representations. In the view of the District Council, the draft proposals would not promote effective and convenient local government.

13. The Councils of North Weald Parish and Matching Parish which would be directly affected, and those of a number of other parishes in the district of Epping Forest, objected strongly to the proposed encroachment as they saw it into the Green Belt and argued that the residents were opposed to change. These views were supported by a number of conservation and preservation societies and other political and social bodies in the area. In addition, Matching Conservation Group forwarded a petition with over 250 signatures (including 32 residents of that part of the parish we had proposed for transfer) opposing our draft proposals.

14. Over 50 members of the public wrote to protest about the draft proposals. The general theme of the objections was that Harlow should be contained within its existing boundaries and that any variation in them would encourage development and unacceptable changes to the pattern of rural life in the area. Further points made were an allegation that the public had not been consulted before the issue of the draft proposals; a denial that residents of the proposed transfer area used Harlow's facilities; criticism of the standard of services provided by Harlow District Council as compared with those of Epping Forest District Council; and calls for a public meeting.

15. Harlow District Council, supported by the representatives of a potential developer, urged us to reconsider our interim decision to make no proposals for

the area to the west of the town. It argued that the residents there also used Harlow facilities; that the area was run down and that development would improve it and that some landowners wished their properties to be included in Harlow. Roydon Parish Council expressed renewed opposition to this transfer and denied that residents were in favour of change.

#### OUR CONSIDERATION OF THE RESPONSE TO OUR DRAFT PROPOSALS

16. We were impressed by the strength of the opposition to our draft proposals and, in particular, by the renewed argument from Epping Forest District Council that a boundary change would be premature given that future land use in some of the disputed areas had yet to be determined. Leaving possible development in the area aside, the case for changing the boundaries, viewed against the criteria in our guidelines, appeared to us in the light of the response to our draft proposals, less than conclusive. It still seemed to us that, technically, the M11 would be a suitable feature to which to tie part of the Harlow/Epping Forest boundary; however, the representations we had received showed that it was regarded by many in the area concerned as no barrier to their links with the Epping Forest villages on the other side of the motorway. Furthermore, many residents living just outside Harlow's boundaries were adamant that they did not wish to be regarded as part of the town and made little or no use of its facilities. In the absence of planning consent for development in the affected areas, we concluded, after careful re-examination of the matter, that the transfer to Harlow of such a large and rather thinly populated area would bring insufficient gain in effective and convenient local government to justify our proposing it to you at that time.

17. We recognised however that if there were to be extensive building close to the existing boundary, it would be advantageous for the detailed planning to be controlled from the outset by Harlow District Council, since any new development would, in our view, inevitably form part of the town. We noted that an application for consent to build 3,500 new homes at Brenthall Park (part of the

eastern area covered by our draft proposals) was the subject of an appeal to you and would not be resolved for some time. It appeared to us, therefore, that any final report from us in advance of your decision on the planning application, might seem to anticipate and prejudge the issue of whether or not development to the east of Harlow was desirable, something clearly beyond our competence.

18. We considered the possibility of submitting a report making no proposals but indicating that we would be willing to review the boundary again once the development issue had been resolved. We decided, however, that the most sensible course was to defer our final decision until the planning application had been decided: this would allow us to report to you on the boundary as soon as the land use question had been settled and enable Harlow District Council to participate in the detailed planning of the area with the minimum of delay if the application were granted.

19. We re-assessed our earlier decision to make no proposals for the boundary to the west of Harlow. We took note of the further representations which had been made by Harlow District Council and another, but we did not consider that they provided sufficient grounds for us to change our minds. We accepted, however, that, in the event of major development being authorised in this area, it would be right for us to consider any further proposals which Harlow District Council might submit.

20. We announced these decisions in a letter dated 15 August 1986 sent to both District Councils and copied to all who had made representations to us and to other interested parties. We also asked the District Councils to publicise our decision as widely as possible.

#### OUR FINAL CONSIDERATION

21. On 15 February 1988, following a public local enquiry, you granted outline planning permission for the development of a new neighbourhood at Brenthall

Park, comprising 3,500 dwellings; neighbourhood centre with shopping facilities; light industrial buildings; primary school; health centre; church; public house; community buildings; public open space; parkland; woodland and balancing lakes; associated landscaping; traffic noise barrier mounds and associated and ancillary development.

22. In the light of this decision we have reconsidered our draft proposals area by area. We have decided to propose the transfer from Epping Forest to Harlow of the area bounded by Harlow Common to the south, the present boundary between the parishes of North Weald Bassett and Matching to the north, the M11 to the east and the existing eastern boundary of the district of Harlow. This is the area in which the approved development is to take place and which in our view will become an integral part of Harlow. We consider it important that the planning and provision of local authority services within it should come under the administrative control of Harlow District Council as soon as possible.

23. We are not aware of any plans for similar development in the rural area in the parish of Matching, immediately to the north of the planned development. We understand in fact that Harlow District Council intend that this area would form an extension to the existing 'green wedge' in Harlow and that, to this end, part of it would become public open space associated with the new housing. It appears to us highly desirable for this area, like the existing footpaths connecting Brenthall Park with Old Harlow (already within the district), to be under the same local authority as the development so that one authority can take a unified view of its management in the interests of the town as a whole. We

note also, that some public roads in the area, although at present within the district of Epping Forest, are already maintained by Harlow District Council; and we have no doubt that other public services such as refuse collection and maintenance of street lighting, could more easily be provided from the town, from which the major access to the existing properties lies. The magnitude of the development will clearly bring the area to the north within the influence of Harlow and, in our view, it would not in any case be sensible to leave an unsatisfactory wedge shape between the M11 and the existing Harlow boundary, especially when a good boundary is available in Moor Hall Road. Notwithstanding the opposition of the residents, therefore, as expressed in the response to our draft proposals, we consider that it is desirable, in the interests of effective and convenient local government, for the transfer from Epping Forest to Harlow to include this area, and we propose accordingly.

24. We turn now to the area of Epping Forest immediately to the south of the approved development. Under our draft proposals this area too was to be transferred to Harlow. However, we have been impressed, as stated earlier, by the strength of feeling against change expressed by the residents of the area close to Harlow Common. We note their affirmation that, despite the construction of the M11, they retain their close links with the village of Hastingwood to the east of the motorway. From our understanding, we do not believe that this area will be tied so closely to the newly permitted development area to the north and we have decided therefore to exclude it from our final proposals.

25. There are fewer residents in the areas further west, directly to the south of Harlow itself, which we had suggested for transfer in our draft proposals, but it appears that they are equally opposed to transfer. We are not aware of any difficulties in service delivery nor of any planned development. In the light of their views, we do not now believe that we would be right to pursue changes here, and consequently we have decided to make no proposals.

## ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES

26. We recognise that, in the long term, the construction and occupation of 3,500 new homes will create a serious electoral imbalance. It is difficult, at this stage, to predict the exact effects or the precise timing. We propose, therefore, to examine the electoral situation of the district of Harlow as soon as appears appropriate with a view to the possibility of a full electoral review. In the meantime we recommend that the transferred areas be included in the district wards and county electoral divisions shown in the annex to this report.

## OUR FINAL PROPOSALS

27. Our final proposal is that the area of the district of Epping Forest bounded in the north by the north side of Moor Hall Road, in the east by the M11, in the south by Harlow Common, and in the west by the existing district boundary, should be transferred to the district of Harlow. The proposed new boundary is shown on the map attached as an annex to this report. We are satisfied that this change would be in the interests of effective and convenient local government and we commend it to you.

## PUBLICATION

28. Separate letters, enclosing copies of this report, are being sent to Epping Forest and Harlow District Councils asking them to place copies of the report on deposit at their main offices and to put notices to this effect on public notice boards and in the local press. The text of the notices will explain that the Commission has fulfilled its statutory role in the matter and it now falls to you, if you think fit, to make an Order implementing the proposals, though not earlier than six weeks from the date they are submitted to you. Copies of the report and annex are also being sent to all other interested parties including

those members of the public and bodies who have written to us about this matter.

LS

Signed:           G J ELLERTON   (Chairman)

                  J G POWELL     (Deputy Chairman)

                  G E CHERRY

                  K F J ENNALS

                  G R PRENTICE

                  HELEN SARKANY

                  BRIAN SCHOLES

S T GARRISH  
Secretary

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

PRINCIPAL AREA BOUNDARY REVIEW

HARLOW DISTRICT/EPPING FOREST DISTRICT

FINAL PROPOSALS

EXISTING DISTRICT BOUNDARY



PROPOSED DISTRICT BOUNDARY



PROPOSED WARD & ED BOUNDARY

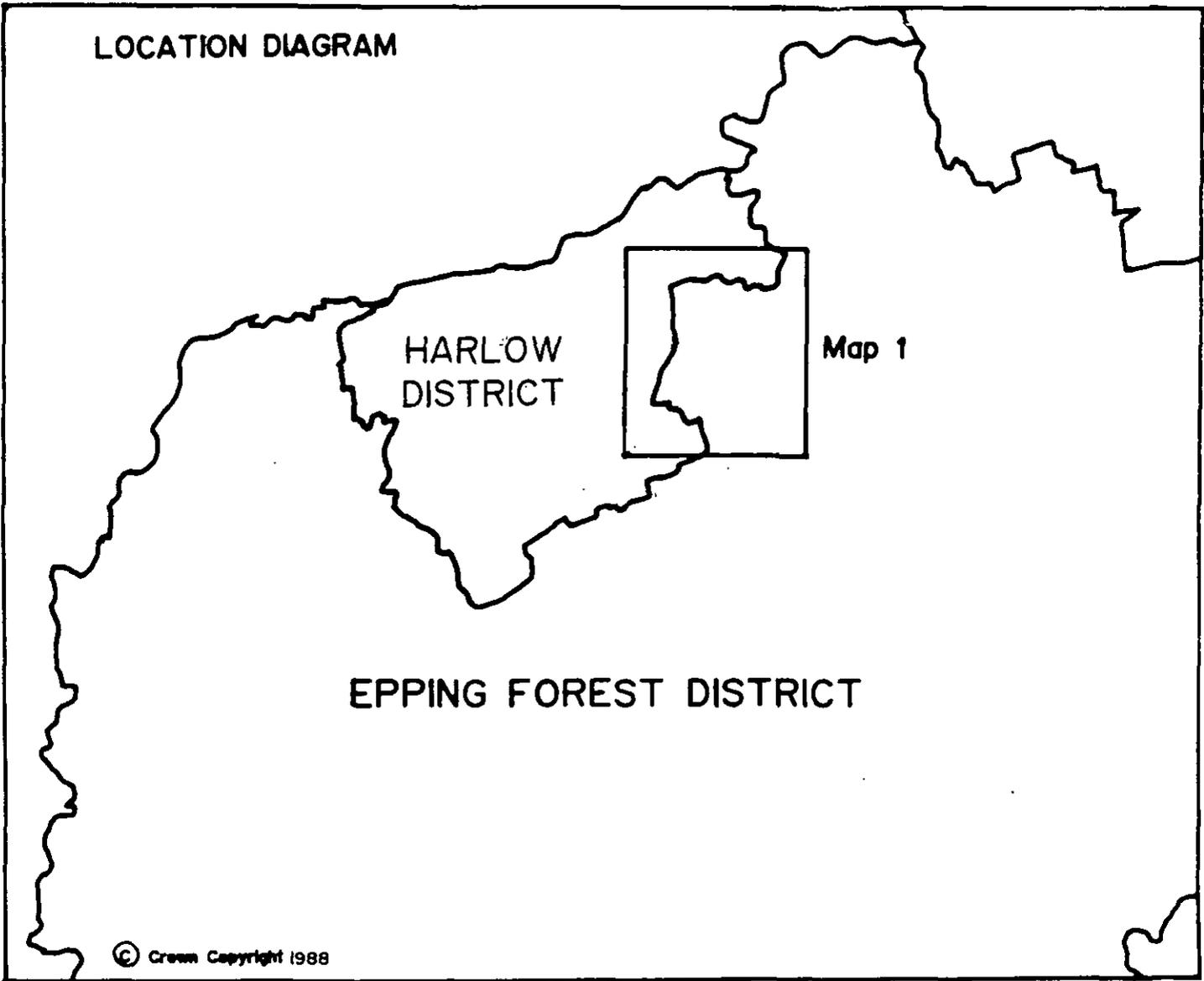


LOCATION DIAGRAM

HARLOW  
DISTRICT

Map 1

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT



## CONSEQUENTIAL CHANGES

Map No	Area	From	To
1	A	Epping Forest District Matching CP Moreton and Matching Ward Ongar ED	Harlow District Non-parished Area Old Harlow Ward Harlow and Mark Hall ED
	B	Epping Forest District North Weald Bassett CP North Weald Bassett Ward North Weald and Nazeing ED	Harlow District Non-parished Area Potter Street Ward Harlow Common ED

Map 1

HARLOW DISTRICT

Area A

Area B

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT

