

Diamond Jubilee: Chelmsford to become city

Published 14 March 2012 by the BBC

Chelmsford has been awarded city status as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

Chelmsford's MP Simon Burns said he was delighted the town would become the first city in Essex.

The leader of the Conservative-run council, Roy Whitehead, said it was a tremendous honour for the town.

"The 'city of Chelmsford' sounds a lot better than the 'town of Chelmsford', so if we're going to get investment we'll be better off as a city," he said.

"It is a tremendous honour for the town and will bring considerable joy to the local community.

"I would like to congratulate everyone at Chelmsford Borough Council and elsewhere who worked so hard and put such a compelling bid together, which has led to this honour for our community."

Chelmsford's Mayor Robert Shepherd said: "This is very welcome news for Chelmsford and everybody who lives and works within the city.

"We are delighted that Chelmsford has been honoured in this most important of years and also that Essex has at last been recognised as the vibrant and successful county that it has become.

"On behalf of everyone in Chelmsford we would like to thank Her Majesty for this great honour in her Diamond Jubilee year."

Chelmsford Borough Council leader Roy Whitehead said: "I particularly wish to pay tribute to the council officers who put together our bid.

"The whole process was produced by highly-talented young people at minimal cost - in these times of austerity it would have been wrong to spend large sums of public money."

'In public eye'

David Burch, policy manager at Essex Chambers of Commerce, said they were "absolutely delighted".

"It puts Chelmsford and Essex on the map," he said.

"It reinforces the message that Chelmsford and Essex are good for business.

"It will bring Chelmsford more into the public eye and help attract inward investment."

He said he thought the town had won because it was "already very vibrant place attracting a lot of businesses".

Chelmsford City Football Club chairman, Mansell Wallace, also welcomed the city news.

He added: "I don't know what all the fuss is about... we've been a city since 1938, haven't we?"

"It was always a bone of contention in opposition board rooms why we were called Chelmsford City and we had no real right of reply, now we have. We're proud to represent Chelmsford and congratulate Chelmsford Borough Council on their successful bid."

The club was given its name during its formation in The Fleece public house in Duke Street 74 years ago, when the founders stepped outside the front door to be greeted by the cathedral.

They named the club Chelmsford City under a misapprehension that the county town was a city.

Chelmsford College principal David Law said: "It is tremendous news for Chelmsford. It will turn peoples' attention and focus on the place and change peoples' perceptions of Chelmsford. It's very positive. I'm tremendously excited."

The Cabinet Office would not say how it reached its decision about how to award City Status.

But in 2010, when it launched the competition, it said that among the things it would consider would be the history of a town, its vibrancy, identity and community.

A spokesman said a team of officials assessed the various bids but the final recommendation to the Queen was made by the deputy prime minister.

Chelmsford: Essex town with all attributes of city

Published 14 March 2012 by the BBC



Photo: The church celebrates its centenary of becoming a Cathedral in 2014

Chelmsford has had all the attributes of a city for decades but lacked that official status until Wednesday when the honour was announced.

It has a cathedral, a crown court, a university, a prison and was also the county town of Essex.

Now, as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations it is to become a city in its own right.

The market town was established by Royal Charter in 1199 on an original Anglo Saxon settlement and became the county town of Essex in 1218.

Links to royalty are mixed as the town was in the forefront of the Peasant Revolt during the reign of Richard II who moved on to conquer the town after dealing harshly with the people of London in 1381.

But all was reconciled by 1516 when Henry VIII built a palace at Chelmsford for his mistress Ann Boleyn. This Beaulieu Palace was later taken over by his daughter Mary I and in recent years was the site of a school.

Now the royal link has been made permanent with the award of city status.

The town became prominent in the legal system as the place where many of the victims of the Witchfinder General Matthew Hopkins were tried, imprisoned and hanged.

In recent times Chelmsford Prison was the setting for the feature film spin-off from the television programme *Porridge* starring the late Ronnie Barker and Richard Beckinsale.

Chelmsford College offered a wide range of courses and in recent times degrees have been offered by Anglia Ruskin University which has a campus in the town.

The town was also a pioneer of industries that were to become the foundation of science and technology in the 20th Century.

As a market town surrounded by rich agricultural land it became a centre for the manufacture of traction engines to work on the farms which were becoming increasingly mechanised.

"It's about time the town's status was recognised as it has a rich heritage," local amateur historian Peter Turrall said.

"It was the biggest industrial centre near London and its three pioneering companies employed huge numbers of local people.

"Hoffman, who made ball bearings, had a workforce of 12,000, Marconi had 10,000 and Comptons had 5,000.

"Over the years it had applied several times for city status and now it has been awarded it is well deserved."

Nick Wickenden, museums manager with Chelmsford Museums, said: "If you look historically at the development of Chelmsford, getting city status is the next logical step.

"We have been the communications centre of the county since the 13th Century.

"And now it will forever be associated with the Jubilee year when people look back on the events of the Queen's Jubilee."

Home of radio

Clarksons developed the first steam-driven buses as growing populations needed to depend on more public transport and engineering expertise grew rapidly.

Guglielmo Marconi set up a wireless factory in the town in 1899 and it soon became the home of radio.

Light engineering became an important employer and people began to flock to the town and local villages, such as Broomfield, which soon became engulfed.

Comptons, the first electrical engineering company in Britain, was founded in the town and developed street lighting and traction motors for industry, shipping, construction and power generation.

A chemist's shop producing flavoured waters built up into the Britvic company which still has its headquarters in the town.

The town's industry was heavily bombed during the World War II because many defence companies were based there.

But over the past decade some of these names have been in decline and Chelmsford has suffered as a result with rising unemployment and structural change in the profile of industry, business and commerce.

More service industries are based in the town and it is hoped the new city status will give that a new burst of growth.

The cathedral is the second smallest in England behind Derby but serves a huge population in the county of Essex and a major part of East London.

Its bishop, dean and clergy said they were looking forward to a new role as the city's status develops.

Chelmsfordians react to city status

Published 14 March 2012 by the BBC



Photo: Market trader Mandy Beckwith hoped becoming a city would increase tourism

People in Chelmsford said they hoped being given city status would have a positive impact on its economy.

The Essex town was one of three locations to be awarded the status as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

It will become the first city in the county. Colchester and Southend had also put in bids.

Market trader Mandy Beckwith, 52, said: "It's nice to be recognised as a city. Hopefully it will do more for tourism and for trade, which we could do with."

She added: "It's gone very quiet recently. We've had trouble this year with the [High Chelmer] car park having to close, so a lot of the traders are still suffering from that."

"So if we can get in more tourism and bring in some more trade, that would be really good."

Other people said they also hoped Chelmsford would see benefits beyond it just having a new title.



Photo: Chris Henton believed city status was "icing on the cake" for Chelmsford

"It's already a good place to be.

"City status will just be the icing on the cake.

"It's good news, I know it's something they've been trying for for a number of years.

"Chelmsford has progressed massively over the past 10 years or so and I think it is recognition of that.

"Certainly, I think it's going to be helpful for businesses and for the housing around here as well.

"It will increase the demand with people looking to move into a city."



Photo: Market trader hoped more would be done to help local businesses

"It's absolutely brilliant if it brings people in.

"If the council do something constructive as a city, then that's brilliant, but they've got a lot of work to do.

"We need a boost because the rates are too high for everybody and that's why a few people are closing down and packing up."



Photo: Karen Potts said she welcomed some positive news for the area

"It's cool.

"I think Chelmsford deserves it for how they're building and improving everything, so good on them.

"It's something positive.

"There's too much negative at the moment,

so it's a positive thing."



Photo: John Rogers believed the town would become more attractive to visitors

"I think it's wonderful, it's about time.

"But I sincerely hope the town gets tidied up, the rubbish cleared off the streets and generally make the place look like it's worth it.

"A lot of people probably thought it was a city because we have a football team

called Chelmsford City.

"I think it should help it be more attractive to visitors, it's like waving a flag really."