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Memories of Harlow by the Bard of Barking

IT is not often an icon arrives in Harlow, particularly one who brings his mum, drinks a gallon of tea and is possibly the most genial celebrity you could ever hope to meet.

So welcome Billy Bragg. Taking a few minutes to speak to the Star before appearing on stage at The Playhouse to promote his latest book, the Bard of Barking spoke of his local connections, life in Dorset and Harlow Council.

"I've got great memories of Harlow as I used to come and play with the New Town Neurotics at The Square," he said. "Those were the days."

His new book *The Progressive Patriot: A Search For Belonging* approaches the question of what it means to be British from an historical and socio-political perspective, brought about by his disgust at the British National Party's success in his hometown's local elections.

"I am still incredibly proud to be British - oh yes, most definitely still proud - but there's no definition of British values and that's a problem.

"We are asking people to integrate but what are we offering them? Not a lot. And then we act surprised when they don't want to know and return to their own cultural values.

"The conclusion I came to in the book is we need a new British Bill of Rights, not a new Magna Carta but a rewriting of a set of values which would help sort out these problems with both fairness and tolerance."

The loyal West Ham supporter moved from Barking to Dorset several years ago. "I don't feel I'm missing out on the real issues living down in Dorset as my mum still lives in the house I grew up in and I am well aware of the situation with those toe-rags the BNP."

And he is supportive of Harlow Council's efforts at tackling problems of anti-social behaviour in the town.

"Sounds good to me," he said. "If they don't try and do something about it then who will?"



BRAGGING RIGHTS:The bard of barking in Harlow

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