

Discussion paper for meeting of FCRA on 17th June 2009

1. Purpose of the meeting.

To discuss and agree:

- the proposed role and constitution of the Federation
- the proposed plans on how the Federation should proceed

2. Background

The Federation was started about five years ago by Jon Green and Michael Chisholm. The focus then was on the planning process. Many Residents Associations joined (the contact list now includes 104 RAs and local interest groups) sharing experiences and concerns about the planning process. Probably inevitably, concerns and issues widened to include broader aspects of local government policy and plans, largely triggered by spin-off from the Growth Agenda.

John Green took over the running of the Federation in 2007 but stood down in 2008. During this period two significant events took place.

1. An informal meeting was held between a Federation subgroup and Sian Reid, City Council Cabinet Member for Planning and Environment, at which a number of issues were discussed including
 - the growth agenda
 - transport, traffic and infrastructure
 - urban extensions
 - conserving Cambridge & renewal of existing estates
 - city centre pressures.
2. A successful meeting about the CB1 development that was attended by Sarah Dyer (Senior Planning Officer)

Morcom Lunt took over the role of Chair in 2008 and organised the November 2008 Workshop "What future for Cambridge?" That workshop was well attended and proved very interesting. However the agenda did not allow adequate time for challenge, discussion, and what the Federation might do about the issues.

In April 2009 an ad hoc group met to discuss the possible way forward and this paper represents their proposals (list of attenders below).

3. Proposed role of the Federation of Cambridge Residents Associations (FCRA)

To act as a collective voice for residents of Cambridge who are members of affiliated RAs in respect of their built environment and the public services provided for them. This involves the strategic planning for the City, its Services, and its policies relating to those plans and services.

It is suggested that that the Federation's constituency comprises "Residents of Cambridge City".

Question:

Do you agree the role and constituency?

Areas where FCRA actions would be beneficial include:

- Information exchange
- Mutual support and assistance
- Access to sources of specialist expertise and competence
- Development of strategic views of vital issues for the City of Cambridge
- Collective interaction with the Council to assure key issues are addressed.

Question: Are these appropriate areas? Are there others?

4. Establishing FCRA credibility

It is important that FCRA has credibility; to help achieve this,

1) The FCRA needs a formal properly constituted structure

FCRA should be a formal organisation with a constitution, Officers, Annual General Meeting, etc. (a draft constitution is attached).

Constituent RAs should be genuine with a membership, constitution, officers and AGM. (A 'model' RA constitution is available). Representatives of individual RAs will need to demonstrate the legitimacy of their mandate.

Questions: Do you agree with the broad points of the suggested constitution?
(detailed comments on precise wording can be dealt with outside the meeting)

Do you agree the individual RA 'entry requirements'?

2) The FCRA needs to be competent and authoritative

The FCRA needs to focus on specific delineated topics; general representations will be ineffective; there also needs to be clarity regarding the people for whom the FCRA speaks.

For interactions with Councils and other bodies, the FCRA should derive its position from a detailed understanding of the issues being discussed and demonstrable support from its constituency.

3) Sub Groups.

To help achieve that competence and authority, we propose to create sub groups to tease out the issues and develop options based on a high level of knowledge and understanding of the topics involved, deferring political decisions to the political processes. Potentially, given the amount of talent in Cambridge, the FCRA could be very effective by drawing on residents' capabilities.

5. Possible Subgroup Topics

Our suggestion is that the following issues may be common across our membership and thus they might form the basis of sub group topics:-

- Implications of growth – including impact on infrastructure requirements
- Public Transport
- Highways development (to meet the needs of the City rather than those of commuters)
- Education and Childcare
- Open space management (infrastructure deficit)
- Housing – quantity, design, development quality
- Street cleansing and litter (but note the effective Cleaner Cambridge Campaign)
- Governance – benefits from a Unitary Authority (necessarily a long term goal)
- Refuse collection and treatment.

In addition one subgroup should continue to focus on Planning Policy and Procedures used by the County as well as the City. This group would also look at major planning applications, co-opting local RAs as appropriate

Questions: Do you agree the use of sub groups to flesh out the issues / options?

Which are priority topics?

Do we have volunteers for the priority topics?

6. Development of collective views across the Associations

On some topics, the FCRA could expect to achieve consensus across all RAs; for example regarding the need for infrastructure to be available in parallel with new housing. It will, however, be most unlikely we will establish consensus on some complex issues, particularly on the detail.

We suggest that the approach taken by the subgroups should help to achieve collective views. As an example, the commitment to conservation area reviews only became effective after specific funds were allocated to hire people to carry out the reviews.

The following process could achieve this for each selected issue:-

- Clarify Issue
- Find helpful experts
- “Open ended” analysis of each (e.g. by focussing on the policies behind the actual services provided and questioning whether they are appropriate, and if so, adequately or appropriately resourced)
- Derive questions to be addressed
- Supply analyses to FCRA constituency to get feedback from individual RA views
- Refinement and compilation of FCRA position statement
- Present to, and discuss with Councillors
- Publicise as far as practical.

Key mechanisms will be the collecting, summarising, and disseminating important data.

When the time scale for a response does not allow the development of a Federation position through group discussions, an email route should be developed to speed up our processes.

Question: Is this a sensible process for subgroups to follow?

7. Interaction with Cambridge City Council

The FCRA contact with the Council will normally be through the elected Councillors. A start was made with the November 2007 meeting with Sian Reid. If we can achieve the credibility outlined above, we believe meetings with, for example, Cabinet Members would not be difficult to set up.

The Federation cannot generally expect to have contact with Council Officers though they might attend meetings for briefings and liaison on some topics.

A second route could be via consistent attendance at Area Committee meetings. They present an opportunity for the Federation to raise its profile, and effectiveness. If all were attended by a Federation representative who pushed Federation views to get a common message across the City, we would be more effective.

Question: How realistic is regular attendance at Area Committees?

8. Federation Interaction with the Cambridgeshire County Council

Federation interaction with the County Council is more problematic given the number of County Councillors and the lack of an "Area Committee equivalent". It would be helpful to meet Brian Smith (or his successor) and relevant Cabinet members, once we have clarified what we want to talk about.

We propose leaving further consideration of this topic until the Federation has achieved a wider credibility within the City arena. However this need not prevent the establishment of relevant specialist groups, for example on Education.

Question:

Do you agree this topic should be left to a later date?

Morcom Lunt
Roger Crabtree

28th May 2009

Attendees at the ad hoc Group Meeting on 24th April 2009

Ann Mullinger	Windsor Road RA
Clive Brown	Old Chesterton RA
John Hipkin	Oxford Road RA
Lawrence Greene	19 Acre Field RA
Malcolm Schofield	Cambridge Urban Forum
Morcom Lunt	FCRA Chair
Roger Crabtree	Rustat Road RA
Ron Clifton	Brooklands Avenue RA