

2016 Annual General Meeting

Held on 18th April 2016 in the Main Hall, Perse School, Hills Road, Cambridge
starting at 19:00

1. Admin

1.1 Present:

55 affiliated Residents' Associations, represented by 95 attendees,
9 others including 2 councillors,
Total attendees: 104

1.2 Apologies for absence:

28 apologies were received. List is available on request.

2. Chairman's Report (full report available on request)

The Chairman, Wendy Blythe, explained that FeCRA's role was to provide a network of mutual support to give Residents' Associations a more powerful voice as city stakeholders. Affiliated RA currently numbered 98, including community associations and some individuals. They were united in wanting to preserve or improve the quality of life in Cambridge.

She described FeCRA's activities since the last AGM. These included including keeping membership alerted to public consultations dates and briefings, collaborations on workshops and meetings with the City Council and supporting the formation of fifteen new RA's in the wake of Local Plan and City Deal consultations. Support had been provided particularly to RAs concerned about the impact of City Deal proposals on their areas. There had also been collaboration with other groups, such as Smarter Cambridge Transport – particularly with regard to parking in Cambridge. FeCRA had also welcomed the neighbourhood planning initiatives under consideration by a couple of RAs and Bimby, the initiative of the Prince's Foundation

She pointed out that Cambridge was the fastest growing city in the UK. With all the development plans, the transport schemes, plans for densification, "garden grabbing", expansion of student accommodation versus affordable housing, threats not just to the green belt but to the river and to cultural aspects of Cambridge, there was need for more "joined up" thinking at the highest level and a management strategy to enhance and protect this beautiful heritage city and its vibrant community life, both that of town and gown. Cambridge badly needed heritage and environment champions as well as support for its local communities. FeCRA hoped to engage a wider national audience on those issues and intended to be more pro-active about working with other civic groups to give residents a stronger voice and to support greater scrutiny of local democracy as many concerns had been raised by residents about this with regard to both the City Deal proposals and the planning process.

She urged residents to give FeCRA their help and support. She also encouraged them to be a presence at the Hearings on the Local Plan and said that FeCRA intended to film the Hearings and put them on You Tube as they touched on big issues for Cambridge. She stated that FeCRA planned to hold and support further seminars and would welcome ideas from residents on what subjects they would find helpful.

3. Minutes of previous AGM held on 24th April 2015

The Minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting held on 24th April 2015 at 7A Adams Road, were unanimously approved as issued to the Committee on 5th May 2015.

4. Matters arising

John Lawton, Membership Secretary, had been working on developing the website and the Chair thanked him for his considerable input.

5. Treasurer's Report

The accounts had made a small loss last year due to the expense of running the workshop in October 2015. However, the grants for £500 and takings on the door almost covered the costs. The Hon. Treasurer, Clive Brown, reminded the members that FeCRA does not take subscriptions and is reliant on contributions at events, so they were invited to be generous on this occasion. The Accounts were approved nem con.

6. Election of Officers

The current committee was ready to continue in office being Wendy Blythe (Chair), Tania Elliott (Secretary), Clive Brown (Hon. Treasurer), John Lawton (Membership Secretary), Michael Bond, Nicky Morrison, with the exception of Peter Dawe who wishes to stand down, and Jane Singleton who has already stood down during the course of the year. Peter (in absentia) and Jane were thanked for their work with FeCRA. The motion was carried unanimously for the remaining committee members to continue in office.

New Committee members: Three volunteers had come forward to swell the ranks and bring the committee up to full numbers: Barbara Taylor (Milton Road RA); Jean Glasberg (Newnham Croft RA); Lynn Hieatt (Grantchester Road RA). All three new members were unanimously voted onto the committee.

There was urgent need still for help and advice by others: design, planning, architecture. The membership was invited to come forward if they felt they had these skills.

7. Guest Speaker:

Dame Fiona Reynolds gave a talk on 'The Fight for Beauty', the title of her new book. Wendy Blythe thanked Dame Fiona and hoped that her talk would send out a message to those engaged in the growth of Cambridge that economic values were not the only values at stake.

8. Panel: Questions & Answers from the Floor

The Panel Members were: Richard Buxton (Buxton Associates), Robin Pellew (CambridgePPF), Colin Wiles (Romsey Action), Glen Richardson (Head of Urban Design, City Council). Each panellist presented his or her case for 1 minute.

Richard Buxton, of Richard Buxton Associates specialising in environmental law, sustained that the European Court of Justice as more effective in defending environmental legislation than its British equivalent.

Colin Wiles, representing the RA Romsey Action, argued that the insistence on retaining the Green slowed the growth of social housing. We are not a market town now; if we built on 1% of Green Belt we could build 16,000 homes. A larger compact city would be healthier and more sustainable.

Robin Pellew said either keep Cambridge as a compact city pushing development elsewhere or build on the edges so that Cambridge becomes a metropolis. Cambridge does need to grow to maintain its position, but also maintain quality of life. He exhorted residents to let the authorities know what they want.

Glen Richardson assured the meeting that his office does place beauty in a leading position, giving the example of Mitcham's Corner. Workshops have given synergy with residents over place-making, as Trumpington RA over Trumpington Meadows and infrastructure. Beauty can be subjective but pleased to see so much engagement in the question by residents of Cambridge.

Question & Answer Session:

(Full version can be obtained from secretary@fecra.org.uk)

Questions ranged from querying the prescriptive nature of planning rules rather than placing emphasis on place-making, how to prevent the purchase of housing by outside investors thus reducing the stock of affordable housing, the impact of the Referendum, residents are powerless and ignored, they are not recognised as stakeholders, quality of building poor, natural environment concerns such as the River and other waterways, air quality, S106 policy means money does not go to create green spaces in the area concerned, disgrace that Land Registry might be privatised.

Panel Answers included: the Cambridge Quality Charter should be invoked although lacked teeth, developers should use their landbanks to meet 5 year housing supply plans, government places too much emphasis on home ownership, the debate goes on whether releasing more Green Belt would bring house prices down, the European Court of Justice does enshrine some people power, viability reports by developers can mislead the Planners, developers want 20% profit, the Environment Agency, Historic England and similar bodies don't like to 'put their head above the parapet' for fear of losing funding, the public need to put pressure regarding use of S106, official line says there is a need to find a balance between housing and green spaces, the Panel agreed it would be a disgrace to privatise the Land Registry.

Conclusions - Dame Fiona Reynolds

Dame Fiona Reynolds thanked the Panel, appreciated Glen Richardson in particular who had been very open and had a few things to take back with him. She also thanked audience for the brilliant questions. She said, 'You are the voice on the ground, you are the people who know what is going on, the residents' associations who can make a difference. However powerless we may feel, the process is there to be engaged with; it can be frustrating but it can be [indistinct]. All organisations here today have a great track record of making us of this.'

Chair

The Chair thanked Panel and Dame Fiona's management of the debate.
Meeting adjourned at 20:45hrs

Signed: The Chair, Wendy Blythe

Date approved by Committee: 9th December 2016

Date approved by AGM: