

FeCRA's Response to CPIER Consultation

The Federation of Cambridge Residents' Associations (FeCRA) is a grassroots civic voice for everyone in Cambridge and for its environment. Residents want a say in shaping Cambridge's development to ensure that the city grows in a way that will achieve balanced communities and quality of life.

FeCRA's strength is in its network of members in all city neighbourhoods. Membership currently includes 97 residents associations and community groups, including environmental and cultural/heritage groups such as Friends of Cambridge Library, Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook, members of Cam Valley Forum and Cam Conservators. We also have good channels of communication with key Cambridge interest groups, including the Cambridge Active Bus Users Group, Save our Spaces, Living Streets, Cambridge Cycling Campaign, Cambridge Past Present and Future and Smarter Cambridge Transport. We work closely with communities in the Greater Cambridge villages that surround Cambridge city.

Membership has grown rapidly over the past two years as more community groups throughout the region reach out for mutual support.

FeCRA's immediate aim is to support more residents associations and community groups across the city and to reach out to those groups in the city who otherwise have no civic voice. A sense of neighbourhood and wellbeing and belonging is particularly important in a city with the unenviable title of most unequal city for two years running and in a county where 75% of the people think old age will be lonely and where 45% of homeless people in Cambridge have mental health issues.

What FeCRA does

Over the last year residents associations have organised successful discussions on parking, local election hustings, Greater Cambridge transport schemes, neighbourhood planning, heritage and public realm. We would be very happy to present to the CPIER commissioners on any of these topics.

FeCRA regularly organises residents forums and other community events in conjunction with the City Council and Greater Cambridge Partnership. Last year we organised a well-attended and highly successful seminar to discuss the Greater Cambridge Partnership's current "Greenways" cycling scheme with about 50 participants, including officers from both councils, councillors from City and parish councils, representatives from residents associations and a wide range of community groups, including walking, cycling, equestrian, conservation, heritage and open space and environmental groups. This was a chance to explore issues together informally.

FeCRA's well attended AGM events are organised on the same basis, featuring presentations from leading speakers including the leading landscape architect, Kim Wilkie ('The Happy City'), and George Ferguson, former Mayor of Bristol ('Making Cambridge a Green City – Lessons from Bristol').

Answering selected questions posed in the CPIER interim report:

1. Does the three-area characterisation summarise the area well? Which links between the area have not been well captured? What are the most important links to outside the area?

Over the last year FeCRA has heard concerns from a number of residents associations and community groups that evidence gathering that is being done for the region has focused simply on evidence drawn from business groups and developers but has not engaged local residents who know their areas best or involved them in data collection about the issues that concern everyone in the region such as:

Health

Wellbeing and mental health

Old Age

Environment and landscape strategy and heritage

Nature and biodiversity

Climate Change

Air Quality and Pollution

Flooding

Water shortage issues

For instance we should like to draw the Commissioners attention to the report published by the Cam Valley Forum in 2017 which highlights some of the issues raised about the region's impending water shortage
http://www.fecra.org.uk/docs/2018_06_09_FeCRA_CPIER_response_-_The_Cam_Valley_Forum_WRMP_response.pdf

In 2013 Cambridge Water set up a 'Local Water Forum'. We understand that this has only met once. It should meet again.

The concerns raised by Cam Valley Forum also relate to the information in "Rivers on the Edge" http://www.fecra.org.uk/docs/Rivers_on_the_edge.pdf

The River Cam is at the heart of Cambridge. It features in the city's economic and cultural life and there is reference to more "investment opportunities" yet there is congestion and no Cam landscape strategy or management plan. Why not, given its importance?

We know of a citywide survey being done by the Natural History Society on biodiversity yet encouraging biodiversity hardly features in the growth agenda and

transport plans except as mitigation and disappointingly is handled by outsourcing agencies such as Capita with very little input from local residents, despite there being significant city expertise. We know of residents involved in data collection about air quality and unoccupied homes.

So rather than the narrow three-area existing political and administrative boundaries proposed as a description of how things are in terms of economic activities, we would like to suggest the Commission takes account of the region's geography, landscape and cultural history and think in terms of a landscape strategy that can encompass the whole region so as to addresses the issues outlined above and ensure that development reflects the way that people want to live and the legacy they want to leave the next generation.

2. How can the area achieve its target of doubling GVA in 25 years?

We are not clear why this is the starting point. Given the concerns about the region's impending water shortage, flagged in the recent report by the National Infrastructure Commission and the area's flood plain issues. We note too that it is the local taxpayer who picks up the bill for flooding and that the government effectively subsidises developers to build on flood plains.

<http://personal.lse.ac.uk/michaels/Flooding - FT.pdf>

Residents worry too that the additional infrastructure required for a much higher level of growth could cause irreparable damage to the environment, and to the natural and built heritage of the area, which is one of the region's economic strengths – tourism.

Residents have observed development in the Cambridge and regional housing market. Many have expressed concerns that the target set is more likely to lead to job relocation rather than creation. There is a concern about the citywide demolition happening in Cambridge to provide student accommodation and executive flats for the investor market and London commuters while there is a serious shortage of family homes, especially affordable homes.

We would like to see the growth agenda be much more aspirational and inclusive and address the issues of health, social equality and quality of life and involve residents who know their areas best in the evidence gathering and data collection.

As the inspirational town planner and architect Jan Gehl has said:

I think we haven't thought through the challenge of technology for city mobility. We are stuck with some 120-year-old ideas that the industry is desperately holding on to. I tell students: Whenever you hear the word "smart," beware, because that is somebody who wants to sell as many millions as possible of some new gimmick. And he is not necessarily giving you a better quality of life.

Gehl advocates that to build communities that work well where people, not cars, occupy the pavement, the evidence needs to be shown and capacity issues need to be addressed. Count all the pedestrians, cyclists, strollers, and café loungers going by, just as highway planners have long tallied up road users in vehicles. This is something that residents groups are well placed to do.

10. What are the main infrastructure priorities and why? What needs to come first to maintain economic growth and unlock future growth, from an economic and practical perspective?

The most urgent need is not for infrastructure plans in isolation but for a regional strategy that is landscape led and that can address the long term issues of climate change and flooding, water shortage and capacity and reflects the way people want to live. We would urge the Commission to look at the Thames Landscape Strategy which is still going strong after 25 years and to talk to the landscape architect, Kim Wilkie who was the instigator of this.

Transport interest groups such as Cambridge Connect and The Cambridge Active Bus Users Group, Smarter Cambridge Transport, and CamCycle have put forward suggestions for light rail, the Girton Interchange and proposals for well-connected travel hubs to enable bus services to run frequently and quickly between villages, towns and cities in the region along with improved cycling infrastructure such as greenways. Many of the measures they suggest are supported by FeCRA members, particularly the suggestion from Cambridge Connect for light rail and tunnelling and the suggestion for improving the Girton Interchange.

People need to be able to get around a city easily for all sorts of activities and not just for work. Any transport plans for Cambridge which involve an inner ring road which limits people's freedom of movement and makes the Backs a transport corridor or mean commuter cycleway highways through the unique medieval recreational spaces such as Lamma Land and Coe Fen or involve road closures that affect the livelihood of Cambridge's small businesses and shops and traders are likely to draw strong opposition.

Wendy Blythe
Chair, FeCRA

9th June 2018