

FeCRA CHAIR'S REPORT 2018

Over the last year RA's have worked hard to ensure that Cambridge grows in a way that is sustainable, to achieve balanced communities and to make Cambridge a good place to live and work. They have spoken out on planning, parking, transport schemes, greenways, community and open spaces, heritage and public realm, and they have had some success.

Kim Wilkie, one of the UK's leading landscape architects, said at our last year's AGM:

"So much of the discussion is about the architects and the design, and how the buildings impact on the city, but that's not the place to start. I believe it's in human relationships, it's about how you get on and communicate with your neighbours".

Residents association initiatives illustrate how grass roots action and communicating with neighbours can make a difference.

Affordable Housing

The city's acute housing problem and lack of affordable housing is an on-going story, as is the ability of developers to 'game' the system to minimise the affordable housing in new developments.

Residents were glad to see Councillors in Romsey taking up the baton on their behalf on the opportunistic developments for student flats at the Romsey Labour Club, though disappointed that Council planners ignored the arguments.

When adopted this year the new Local Plan will open up all student accommodation to all students, including the A'level crammers and language schools. There are concerns this will have a big impact on Cambridge's social composition. Another issue affecting that and the availability of homes for local people is the rampant supply of holiday lets. Residents in the new CB1 development have been particularly affected by this and the issue has led to another unattractive outcome, 'pop-up brothels'.

But residents are becoming more organised and determined to question development that does not benefit local communities and they look to politicians and planners to address the impact of planning decisions on social cohesion in a city rated the most unequal city in the UK for the second year running.

Open Space and Amenity

A city growing fast needs to retain good open space and amenity. The Planning Inspector dismissed Robinson College's appeal against the Council's rejection of its plans to build in the back gardens of houses they owned on Romsey Terrace. Since then local residents who campaigned against the garden grabbing have been involved in the discussion with the college

about plans. Two new houses will now be built but in a city with an acute housing problem it is a matter of concern that the houses on Romsey Terrace are still mothballed and left empty.

Not far away Montreal Square, a long established local community of eighteen homes has been described as “a gem of social housing”. The Cambridge Housing Society is proposing to redevelop the existing homes and add new ones, and may finance this by some commercial development of the site. It states that this would make better use of the land available on the site by increasing the number of affordable homes and helping CHS to house more low-income households. Montreal Square Residents Association knows that Cambridge needs more housing, but say that it seems terrible to destroy people’s homes and their small community, particularly when just down the road the student housing that so many objected to has been approved for the Romsey Labour Club.

Noise, Amenity and Pollution

Alerted that the developer Hill had put in an application to remove the noise controls that would impact on their amenity and the use of their balconies, the Great Northern Road Residents Association sprang into action. With the help of local councillors and advice and support from FeCRA and members of other RAs they publicised their objection to the application. As a result, despite officer support for the developer’s application, the application was turned down. Afterwards Hill the Council’s chosen housing provider pointed out there was no onus on them to address the issue as there were no Council guidelines for amenity.

Demolitions and Loss of Family Homes

Residents associations all over the city are expressing concerns about the demolition of family homes. Researching this and sharing information they have highlighted the number of empty homes and the role of foreign investors. Members of the Hills Road Area and Queen Edith’s Way Residents Associations and activists and councillors and candidates from all parties joined together to make a film about the plans to demolish the Arts and Crafts house on Hills Road, 291, and make a stand about planning issues that reflect citywide concerns. They say it is admirable that councillors and election candidates have set aside party differences to put community first. Residents would welcome more cross party collaboration like this across the city.

Cambridge Deserves Better Event - Consultation and Engagement

In July last year a large group of concerned parish councils and community organisations, including FeCRA, came together across the city and villages and agreed the text of a letter to the City Deal Board signed by 54 community groups aimed at improving the process for investing in Cambridge’s infrastructure. Mayor James Palmer offered to address the consortium of groups who had signed the letter. The subsequent event in September, *Cambridge Deserves Better*, was very successful and it was attended by over 230 people.

Sustainable Growth

Residents are saying that it is time to stand back from the interests of purely financially-driven development and think creatively about other more inventive ways of moving forward that will engage citizens and businesses so that they can work together to ensure Cambridge and the region gets the well-designed, strategically planned, infrastructure and housing that can enable Cambridge to be a good place to live and work.

Across the city and in the villages residents are coming forward with suggestions for how to make Cambridge a greener, more sustainable city.

Local Plan Process

Residents felt that it was important that the Local Plan process and any associated plans for modelling the future of Cambridge are seen to be *genuinely open and democratic*, and with sufficient weight being given to the environment, the character of Greater Cambridge, and citizens' rights to happiness and well-being. RAs in North Newnham, Storey's Way and Madingley Road generously contributed towards the cost of FeCRA filming the Local Plan Hearings. Many people viewed the films on Antony Carpen's You Tube site.

Parking

Parking continues to be a major issue for many city residents and RA members across the city have been working together on a number of schemes to see if they can find a way of making parking controls effective as a means to address air quality and congestion. A Benson Area Parking Survey was conducted in response to concerns about whether there was adequate space in the Benson Parking Zone to compensate for loss of parking on Histon Road.

Residents in other areas have also voted for parking restrictions, but in Newnham there are concerns that lack of liaison between the City and County Council could mean a blitz of signs and road markings in the historic Conservation Area – we need officers from the different authorities to work together to ensure that highways schemes are designed in ways that are sensitive to the local context.

Historic Environment, Streetscape and Conservation Issues

Local residents know their own area best and understand what is needed. Last year Newnham residents also campaigned successfully for the removal of industrial-sized containers funded by S106 money at the Learner Pool, Sheeps Green, an important community facility in a sensitive riverside environment. Since then local residents have painted and decorated the pool and a Friends of Sheep's Green Learners Pool has been set up.

TRANSPORT

Cambourne to Cambridge A428 Consultation update

Concerns were raised about bias in the Cambourne to Cambridge A428 Consultation at a packed LLF in Coton last year attended by the then Director of Transport, Chris Tunstall, and GCP Chief Exec Rachel Stopard. They agreed mistakes had been made and that in order to fulfil statutory legal criteria the options in the consultation would need to include a credible on-road option in addition to the off-road option through the Coton Corridor and West Fields.

At the recent Madingley Road Focus Group Peter Blake, the now Director of Transport, outlined to local Residents Associations the decision making process and the relationship between the GCP and the Mayor's Combined Authority.

North Cambridge - The Future of Milton and Histon Roads

Milton Road 'Final Concept' plans were approved by the GCP Board in July 2017 and residents, although disappointed about the inclusion of a bus lane, were pleased that the GCP are addressing their concerns about retaining an avenue of mature trees and that there is now a landscape architect on the GCP team.

Like Milton Road, Histon Road is an important road connecting Cambridge with outlying towns and villages. It too is part of a local community with housing, shops and schools. Residents Associations involved with the GCP Histon Road Local Liaison Forum consultations, conducted in the Autumn of 2017, had written up a set of resolutions and alternative junction plans in response to the GCP 'Do Maximum' proposals for Histon Road which were presented to the GCP Joint Assembly and Executive Board. These were well received and accepted, and although the resolution calling for retention of residents parking on Histon Road was not accepted, the residents associations are hoping that their concerns will be considered in the next set of consultations.

West, North and South Cambridge transport plans are all part of a wider transport strategy that is likely to impact many attractive parts of Cambridge including the Coton Corridor, the West Fields, Madingley Road, Trumpington Road, the green belt of the Gogs, Shelford and Stapleford, along with loved Cambridge streetscape and conservation zones. Concerns were raised last year that even the Backs and Silver Street may feature in transport plans.

As recent planning applications make clear, the County Council as Highways Authority is now saying it no longer accepts additional street trees on the grounds of future maintenance costs and is trying to shift responsibility for this onto others. It is saying this without it even being discussed openly as a major policy change, with no chance for residents to discuss it and without acknowledging the serious implications for place making on sites with any new highways.

There are further concerns that the long term terms of the City Council's contract with the County to manage their street trees have not been agreed since 2012 and that, as in Sheffield, there are fundamental differences about the allocation of resources, the City's Tree Strategy and the value of street trees to the city as an integral part of the urban landscape.

Greenways

The Greenways are a great opportunity to develop cycling infrastructure which will support the modal shift in transport people want to see, so it's important to get it right.

In November, FeCRA organised a well-attended and highly successful seminar for some of those involved in the GCP Greenways Project to explore issues together informally. In a thought-provoking lecture, landscape architect and cyclist Tom Turner said the Greenways project could open the pearly gates to an English cycling heaven, making Cambridge a world leader in cycling infrastructure and urban design. He argued that Cambridge's medieval landscapes such as Coe Fen and Sheep's Green, where people still graze their cattle, are unique urban history, and, like great art, should be preserved. Francis Burkitt, then Chair of the GCP Board commented that his inbox was normally full of hate mail but the Greenways were different, people wanted them and they could be a good way of bringing aspects of the countryside into the city. Much will depend however on the design, and participants made clear that landscaping should be integral to the

development of good cycling infrastructure, and that this would require experts in landscape architecture, engineering, urban design and ecology working together as a team.

City Centre Access Plans and Market Place

There are plans to revitalise the city centre and Market Square and the GCP has set aside funding for a Spaces and Movement public realm city centre policy. FeCRA were delighted to be invited, along with others, to have a say in the procurement process for appointing consultants. RA's and community groups want to be involved from the start in these plans, unlike previous schemes which have been "sprung" on them, fully formed, particularly as many residents and small businesses are very worried about the city centre's future and the potential impact of any road closures.

Design, good place-making and genuine civic engagement is at the heart of what makes for a happy city and good neighbourhoods. Cambridge needs a landscape strategy and people are looking to politicians and to planners to give them a voice to reject ugliness.

As tonight's attendance shows, residents are interested in making Cambridge a healthy green city, the greenest in the UK.

Wendy Blythe
Chair, Fecra
20.4.2018