

CHAIR'S REPORT 2017

Fecra is a grassroots civic voice dedicated to maintaining and enhancing Cambridge as a wonderful city in which to live, work, study and relax. Cambridge Mayor, Jeremy Benstead said recently, "It's not just the surroundings that makes Cambridge special, it's our wonderful residents that make our city what it is, too". Over the last year RA members have been working hard in many different ways to achieve balanced communities and make Cambridge a good place to live and work. They have organised and led on planning, parking, local election hustings, City Deal transport schemes, community and open spaces and heritage and public realm issues, and they have achieved notable success in many areas.

I want to highlight just a few of these initiatives, which illustrate the issues that are important for us, and also the ways in which grassroots action can make a difference.

Affordable housing

The lack of affordable housing is an on-going story. Residents are concerned about the ability of developers to "game" the system. They are also concerned that the report on student accommodation commissioned by the City Council sanctions the expansion of highly profitable student flats and point to a bigger issue which may impact on Cambridge's social composition. Developers say they are building for Anglia Ruskin University, then build expensive flats that ARU students cannot afford, say there is no demand, and then sell to Sixth Form 'crammers'. But residents are becoming more organised and determined to question schemes which do not benefit local communities. They are looking to representatives to give them a voice, and want to see developments which will provide balanced communities and include the family homes so desperately needed in Cambridge.

Neighbourhood plans

Neighbourhood planning is about giving communities power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape its development and growth. South Newnham was the first city area to submit an application to be designated a Neighbourhood Forum, with the purpose of writing a Neighbourhood Plan. Welcoming the application Kevin Blencowe, Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Transport, commented, "I respect and commend the enthusiasm and interest behind this". The workshops revealed how much residents valued the small, open spaces where people like to post notices about local events. These are the kind of spaces so easily overlooked and lost in new development.

Open space and amenity

A city growing fast needs to retain its open space and amenity. Romsey is one of the most densely built up areas in the city. For nearly three years residents of Romsey Terrace fought plans by Robinson College to build in the back gardens of houses the College own there. A packed hearing was attended by residents from all over the city, supporting the Council's case that this dense back-to-back scheme would provide poor living conditions for both present and future residents. The Inspector agreed, and Robinson College's appeal was dismissed. However these houses have now been 'mothballed' by the College, with steel shutters on the doors and windows. This seems to show little concern for the community when people are desperate for family homes in the city.

S106 funded projects

Local residents are the ones who know their own areas best, and understand what is needed. When developers pay S106 money to the Council it is intended as compensation to the community for loss of open space, and when residents are involved in the decision-making it can support useful

neighbourhood initiatives. Industrial sized containers at the Learner Pool, Sheeps Green were funded by \$106 money given to the Cambridge Canoe Club for ‘community sport and recreation’, yet placing them in a popular recreational facility has resulted in a serious loss of amenity for children learning to swim. Residents have also expressed concerns about the negative impact on the sensitive riverside environment of this Greenbelt Conservation Area, and the fact that there seems to have been no consideration at all of the effect of this major Canoe Club expansion on the upper reaches of the River, its kingfishers and wildlife. There are concerns that this money is going to those who are best able to lobby for it. We would urge that local residents are involved from the start to make sure that this money is well spent.

City Deal

Cambridge Residents engaging with unpopular City Deal plans for bus lanes for their neighbourhoods have challenged City Deal’s plans for dedicated bus-lane corridors leading to the loss of over 100 trees, verges and front gardens on Milton Road, achieving an undertaking from City Deal that the scheme will include mature trees. North Cambridge residents’ associations led by Milton Rd RA and Hurst Park Estate RA teamed up with the interest group CamCycle to form a Milton Rd Alliance (MRA) to produce the community’s ‘Do-Optimum’ alternative. Will the Milton Road scheme set a new standard for the city? The MRA hope so, as the scheme pioneers a welcoming, tree-lined gateway into the city that aims to transform people’s choice of transport.

Histon Road is another important road connecting Cambridge with outlying towns and villages. Like Milton Road, it is part of a local community, with housing, shops and schools. The Histon Road Local Liaison Forum workshops shared a strong belief that rather than bus-lanes the focus should be on addressing junction safety. Histon Road’s ‘Do Everything’ proposal and the alternative junction designs created by the Histon Road Area RA, Benson Area RA and Camcycle prioritise walking, cycling, public transport and good landscape design. It has attracted wide support and doesn’t involve the compulsory purchase of gardens, the removal of trees and the impact of a bus lane on a narrow road.

Parking

Concern about parking continues to be a major issue for many city residents, and RA’s across the city have been working together to see if they can find a way of making parking controls an effective tool to address congestion and air quality in the city.

Heritage and Conservation initiatives

Sir David Attenborough recently described Cambridge as ‘one of the loveliest cities in Europe’, but there are concerns that a mixture of commercial pressures and increasing street clutter is having a negative impact on our historic Conservation Areas. Silver Street Bridge, for example, is a Grade 2 listed structure, rated of ‘high significance’ in the Council’s own Historic Core Appraisal, yet it is covered in bins and signs and features a hot dog stall and souvenir stand. FeCRA has supported Newnham Croft RA as heritage champions in their request for a review of the area, tied in with the improvements to the Silver Street toilets and as part of an over-arching vision for the city, one that is about ensuring our heritage and green spaces are looked after in a way that will make sure future generations can also enjoy them.

Safety and streetscape initiatives

Nine RA’s from Newnham, Trumpington and the Hills Road Area, led by Jean Glasberg, FeCRA’s cycling officer, joined together to comment on the cycleway proposals for Trumpington Road. They were pleased that officers responded to the concerns that they and the Cambridge Wildlife Trust expressed about taking land from historic Two Bit Common, and decided this will not now be necessary. They also welcomed the fact that in response to residents comments ‘*The approach within*

the scheme recognizes the variety of cyclists and differing levels of confidence and needs' and aims at physical segregation of cycle lanes from other traffic, which is also strongly supported by the Cyclists Touring Club (CTC) 3.3.

It is unfortunate that Hills Road had to be designed and implemented to a very tight timescale. Several key features of this scheme were highly experimental. The new cycleways on Hills Road are not in fact separated from other traffic, and the 'Cambridge kerb' is a small slope specifically designed to allow other vehicles to drive onto the cycle lane. Residents across the city concerned about the safety of these experimental features, hope that the Milton Road "Do Optimum Scheme", which addresses the need for safety and context for all users, with separation by trees and verges, will set the standard. FeCRA's comments on the draft City Deal Design Guide reflect this aspiration.

Green street initiatives

Retention of the city's tree lined avenues, hidden paths and green open spaces cannot be taken for granted. With the help of their local councillor and the City's Rangers, Barton Close RA organised a community action weekend. They managed to create a new green space, one that reflected the semi-wild style of Cambridge, where children could play and residents could wander or sit. Local people worked with Carter Jonas on an initiative to clear brambles and debris, and clean up Hodson's Folly by the river, while Hills Road RA lobbied the Cycleway team to incorporate planting areas on the new floating island bus stops.

Support us

These are just some of the initiatives that residents are working on because they want to ensure that Cambridge grows in a way that will achieve both balanced communities and wellbeing. FeCRA's strength is in our network of members in all city neighbourhoods, plus our strong contacts in nearby villages. We now number 97 RA's, community associations and neighbourhood groups, including environmental & cultural/heritage groups. Our membership includes members of the interest groups Cambridge, Past, Present and Future, Smarter Cambridge Transport, Cambridge Connect and CamCycle, so we have good channels of communication with key Cambridge groups. We worked closely with members of Smarter Cambridge Transport to produce their **Rebooting Event** and with members of CPPF's Heritage Watch group to produce the event **Keeping Cambridge Special** and with CamCycle. We have also organised filming of the Local Plan Hearings and the City Deal Assembly and Board Meetings and of some Council meetings, making them available online and organised Residents Fora in conjunction with the City Council and Greater Cambridge City Deal.

FeCRA is a grassroots civic voice for everyone in Cambridge and its environment and we welcome people to join our Membership through an RA, or as individuals, to sign up to our Mailing List for updates on local issues. Over the next year we will be organising friendly, informal FeCRA lunches and suppers at which people can meet and share ideas and get involved with one of our Working Groups, or maybe contribute to an ad hoc project.

Wendy Blythe

Chair, FeCRA 22 March, 2017

