



2018/2019 Annual General Meeting
held on 5 April 2019 in the Main Hall, Perse School, Hills Road, Cambridge
starting at 7pm

1. Attendance

145 people attended the meeting including 74 from City Residents Associations and community groups.

The Chair introduced the current committee.

Apologies for absence

Five apologies were received.

2. Minutes of the previous AGM held on 20 April 2018

The minutes of the previous AGM were approved nem con.

3. Chair's report – brief synopsis (full report available on website and on film)

The Chair stressed the pressures on Cambridge of an acute housing shortage and rapid growth and the need to assess the cumulative impact of development in the decision-making process. She noted that FeCRA had been able to comment constructively on the recent application for Cambridge High Street funding.

The Chair outlined the involvement and influence of Residents' Associations and Community Groups throughout the city, including:

- Maddingley Road Area Residents' Association (RA) and Maddingley Road Area Focus Group's work with GCP officers on a safe cycling and walking project
- Milton Road RA and Hurst Park RA's work with officers on design ideas for streetscape and landscaping as part of the GCP Milton Road project.
- Histon Road RA's engagement with officers on plans for the GCP Histon Road project and the securing of funding for a local oral history project.
- Mill Road Community Group's successful mobilisation of residents across the city to object to the felling of horse-chestnuts on Hooper Street.
- Newnham RA's successful outcry after the removal of bushes, saplings and a tree on the Grantchester Meadows which led to replacement planting.
- Montreal Square RA's popular campaign against demolition.
- The work of West Cambridge residents, including Newnham Croft RA and South Newnham Neighbourhood Forum in establishing the Friends of Paradise Nature Reserve.
- The establishment of the Friends of Queens' Green to protect and enhance the biodiversity of Queens' Green.

The Chair expressed concern about environmentally sensitive projects, such as the decision to fence off Ditton Meadows from the Chisholm Trail, and the destruction of an ancient city boundary hedge in Arbury Play Park, which had been handled without public scrutiny or consultation.

The Chair noted that many Cambridge schoolchildren had taken the lead on environmental issues by striking for climate change and setting up an Eco Schools Council, and some from local schools had been involved with the Hills Road Area RA in illustrating leaflets, designing children's activities and delivering speeches.

The Chair stressed the importance of design, good place making and genuine civic engagement, and the need for a historic environment strategy, which involved residents and addressed climate change and biodiversity.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's Report was read by Richard Cushing (RC) on behalf of John Latham. RC noted that the latest Accounts and Report had been posted on the FeCRA website and were available at the meeting for inspection. He noted that at the year end of 28 February 2019 there had been a modest surplus of £418, in contrast to the deficit in the year 28 February 2018.

RC noted that FeCRA remained highly reliant on the generosity of individuals and urged attendees to contribute as much as they were able (£5 suggested donation) to cover the costs of the evening. If they had not done so already, members were encouraged to set up a regular standing order or one off donation to support FeCRA's work. He noted that the contributions made at the 2018 AGM had not covered the costs of the evening but two generous individual donations and help from members in providing secretarial support had led to the current net surplus. He noted that FeCRA continued to use a dual control bank account with Lloyds.

The accounts were approved nem con.

5. Election of officers

The Chair thanked the present committee including those who were unable to attend. The Chair noted that all the current Committee members had agreed to stand for another year, but welcomed approaches from others to get more involved in FeCRA.

The officers were elected nem con.

6. Keynote speaker – Robin Hambleton, Emeritus Professor of City Leadership, University of the West of England, Bristol, and Director of Urban Answers – Building a Sustainable City

Robin Hambleton explained his background in local authorities and academia in the UK and the US.

He drew on an image of the Clifton Suspension Bridge as a metaphor for the importance of change and aspiration – at the time when Brunel devised the bridge it would be the largest bridge in the world and the common view was that it could not be built. He urged attendees to take on the challenge of creating an inclusive city, despite those who thought it could not be done, and prove the sceptics wrong.

RH noted that his talk drew on his recent book *Leading the Inclusive City – Place-Based Innovation for a Bounded Planet*, in which he researched inspirational leadership in 17 different cities in 14 countries. He stressed that all those present were engaged in a similar endeavour to shape the place where they lived and worked.

RH drew attention to a number of international examples:

- Portland, Oregon – possibly the greenest city in the US, and an example of both green thinking and social justice
- Melbourne – the ‘empty, useless city centre’ of Melbourne in 1978, caused by poor city planning, had been transformed into a city rated one of the most liveable in the world. This had been done by Place-Based Leadership, an emphasis on urban design with a large dedicated staff and a powerful director, the transformation of the city centre with thousands more homes, improved public transport (Cars Out, People In) and co-operation between residents, the two universities and small businesses.
- The High Line in New York – the elevated freight railway which was decommissioned in 1980 and became an eyesore, set for demolition, which, thanks to inspirational local leadership and a community-based campaign was converted into the most successful public space in the US.
- Freiberg, in western Germany – where advanced public transport was developed before the community moved in, creating a uniquely low-energy, attractive, child-friendly, cycle-friendly city which had been conceived by councillors, city planners and designers.

He outlined his concepts for ‘Framing the power of place’ – the forces shaping every city in the Western world, namely:

- Environmental limits (non negotiable – cities must be built as sustainable)
- Economic (the drivers of capital and investment)
- Socio-cultural (local views on what economic development is desirable and good for quality of life)
- Governmental framing (varied from country to country, with the UK suffering from being a particularly supercentralised state, eroding possibilities for local leadership)

He stressed that while most businesses in the world were rooted in their location, many big global corporations had no interest in place, only in profit and exploiting place, and that rebalancing power to local communities rather than central government to counter these forces was essential.

He explained his flower diagram ‘Realms of Place-Based Leadership and Innovation Zones in the Modern City’ showing the overlap and interaction between:

- Political leadership
- Community leadership
- Business leadership
- Trade union leadership
- Public managerial/professional leadership

He stressed that the most successful sustainable cities were uniting people from all these different realms.

RH also gave examples from Bristol, despite the far weaker local government in the UK and 78% cut in central government financial support during the period 2010-22. Again a combined green and social justice agenda had been promoted by a committed mayor with inclusive innovative leadership involving local communities and businesses, leading to the One City Approach with the statement ‘Bristol shouldn’t be run from the council chamber’. This approach included inclusive city gatherings, a city office innovation zone in City Hall, Task and Finish groups to demonstrate new ways of working, development of the One City Plan and developing place-based leadership talent.

RH noted that progressive cities were sharing insights via the Global Parliament of Mayors.

RH summarised his insights as follows:

- The power of place can underpin bold innovation
- Inclusive public leadership can play a key role releasing problem-solving capacity and valuing improvisation
- Public and community leaders can create innovation zones
- International city-to-city learning is critical
- Power needs to shift from nation states to cities and localities

Questions

Allan Treacy (Coton) asked how the GCP could be encouraged to involve the community and take a one city approach.

Michael Bond (Chesterton RA) asked how the business ratepayers' vote could be reestablished

Kimon Roussopoulos (Cambridge Commons) asked what RH meant by non-negotiable environmental concerns.

RH responded that he knew nothing of the Cambridge scenario and all cities were different and needed their own approach. He agreed the GCP probably needed reform, but that his examples proved that pressure from communities and activists could change the direction of poor civic planning. He agreed that the involvement of a progressive business community was vital and the re-establishment of a business ratepayers' vote was a good idea. He stressed that young people were powerful and intelligent advocates for environmental issues, and united communities could exert considerable influence even when central government was opposed, as in the US.

7. Panel session: 'How can Cambridge grow in a way that will make it inclusive?'

The Secretary introduced the panel:

Meredith Bowles – Director at award winning Cambridge-based Mole Architects, Cambridge Quality Panel and RIBA Awards Panel

Professor Brian Eversham – Entomologist, Chief Executive of the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust

Councillor Katie Thornburrow – Cambridge City Councillor for Trumpington, Executive Councillor for Streets and Open Spaces and Lead Councillor for New Communities and Sustainable Food

Baroness Young of Old Scone (Barbara Young) – Chair of the Woodland Trust and President of the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust

Daniel Zeichner – MP for Cambridge

Each panel member was asked to summarise their main priority in creating an inclusive city.

Daniel Zeichner stressed the need to review the planning system, giving cities stronger powers and leadership to defend their communities and stand up to developers.

Barbara Young agreed that the political system was far too 'top-down' and big national initiatives were riding roughshod over communities, as evidenced in plans for the Oxford-Cambridge arc. She identified her top priority as tree planting and noted that walking in an open space with trees for 13.5 minutes a day was proven to reduce depression by 50%.

Katie Thornburrow praised the Urban Room initiative recently introduced in Nottingham and recommended a similar scheme in Cambridge.

Brian Eversham agreed that local authorities had been starved of funding and influence and were often bribed by central government to approve poor planning applications to avoid expensive public enquiries.

Meredith Bowles stressed the urgent need for affordable housing and good public transport, acknowledging that much of the Cambridge workforce could not afford to live in the city and fast public transport links were essential.

8. Questions and answers

Dr Valerie Neal (Petersfield) asked about the process for selection of those making decisions on the Market Square and protection of the market from powerful outside interests.

Daniel Zeichner said he had met with the CEO about the City Council about the Market Square and was assured that no decisions had been made, consultations would take place and the public would have a chance to respond. Katie Thornburrow agreed that the Market Square proposals were only at the beginning of a long process and many voices would be heard before the brief was finalised and decision made.

Jean Glasberg (Newnham Croft RA) asked how green spaces could be protected for themselves, without succumbing to pressure to fill them with public works of art, play equipment, BMW tracks and climbing rocks due to 106 funding.

Barbara Young noted that local groups could apply pressure for 106 funding to be used allow young people to enjoy open spaces naturally, eg woodland bathing. She stressed the need to promote greenness, biodiversity and wildness. She noted that many developers abandoned some of their plans for 106 funding at the viability stage, meaning the green space delivered was a fraction of what was promised. Local authorities needed the funding and power to fight back against the developers.

Daniel Zeichner noted that interests had to be balanced, especially when local authorities were starved of funds and there were competing demands for space and facilities such as play equipment.

Katie Thornburrow, said that biodiversity and the environment were are at the heart of the decision making process. A motion had been passed in Cambridge declaring a biodiversity emergency to safeguard the ecology of the area and there was a need to work with schools, colleges, businesses and landowners to plant 500 trees a year.

Meredith Bowles stressed that the current process, in which developers announced their plans and Local Authorities passed or rejected them, made positive action and visionary thinking very difficult. He emphasised that the civic life of a community was defined by its open spaces such as the Market Square, the fireworks on Midsummer Common and the 10K run. He proposed that if visionary organisations were established to make public spaces work for people, at the same costs as a developer would charge, the developers would use them.

Brian Eversham expressed his shock at the availability of 106 funding when most local schools could not afford a coach to transport their children to the unique wildlife habitats beyond the city, including its downland, fenland and green meadows. He stressed that everyone should have access to three kinds of public outdoor space: a small space with play equipment, somewhere green

where they could picnic and a place where people could spend the whole day. The current danger was that the countryside around Cambridge would be trashed and its unique habitats lost.

Richard Cushing stressed the power, wealth and land ownership of Cambridge University and asked how local groups could engage with the University, as this was not successful through elected representatives.

Daniel Zeichner agreed that it was difficult to engage with the centres of power within the university and some colleges were far more willing to engage on these issues than others. He acknowledged that the GCP, despite its unpopularity, had attempted to bring both universities on board.

Councillor John Hipkin expressed concern that the agenda for Cambridge's growth was unsustainable and it was overheating. He asked how resources could be redirected to the far poorer towns within a close radius, such as Soham, March and Wisbech.

Daniel Zeichner noted that the Cambridge & Peterborough Economic Review had pointed to many of these concerns. He noted that the city had learned from its mistakes in building Cambourne without an efficient public transport network and the difference between what was promised and what was delivered in the CB1 development. However, he could not currently envisage businesses agreeing to move to the poorer outlying towns.

Barbara Young noted that she sat on the Rural Economy Committee in the House of Lords debating exactly these issues and felt that they could be addressed. The digital business attracted to Cambridge could be located anywhere, if a good public transport system was established to support health, education and further education. She considered that cities should be seen as a whole with their outskirting towns and villages and housing could be more widely spread to avoid central overheating if good public transport was provided. She noted that pressure for housing was sometimes misplaced, as in the Oxford-Cambridge arc, which was, in reality, catering for London overspill and could be located elsewhere.

Brian Eversham pointed out the demographics of the room and noted that community activism was largely done by the older members of society. He stressed that his young staff in Cambourne were quite happy to work outside Cambridge and, given fast broadband, would readily conduct business meetings via Skype rather than meet face to face. Good transport links were needed for freight, but Cambridge should be seen as a county of large villages where people could live and work.

Fernando Perez asked how residents can affect change in their own streets within the current legal framework.

Daniel Zeichner acknowledged that the Great Northern Road development had been a failure and was the result of a fractured approach with neither Abelio nor Grosvenor taking responsibility. He stressed the need for more power in the hands of democratically elected representatives.

Katie Thornburrow noted that officers and elected members needed a better knowledge of the planning process and the city council planned to address this with more training, so that appeals could be challenged successfully. She noted that post-occupancy surveys were an important tool in identifying problem areas and improving future planning, if funds were withheld from developers until problems were resolved. She pointed out that developments often led to secondary congestion, for example in Great Shelford, which had not been identified in advance.

Hilary Cox Condron stressed the need for the involvement of artists in community development.

Meredith Bowles agreed that artists and architects could play a vital part in facilitating and developing local engagement but stressed everyone should be included.

The Chair thanked the Speaker and Panel for an excellent presentation and stimulating discussion, the audience for their questions, and the helpers for their support.

A member of the audience proposed a vote of thanks to the Chair.

The meeting ended at 20:45.