

FeCRA – The Federation of Cambridge Residents' Associations



FeCRA 2021/2022 Annual General Meeting Held on 15 November 2022 6.00 -7.30 pm

by Zoom starting at 6pm

In the light of Covid 19 restrictions it remained necessary to hold the meeting by Zoom.

Attendance

There were 136 participants, including representatives from many City Residents' Associations and community groups. The Chair, Wendy Blythe, introduced the current committee, who were all present. **Apologies for absence** - 7 apologies were received.

1. Minutes of the previous AGM

The minutes of the previous AGM held on 7 Oct 2021 were approved nem con

2. Election of Officers

The Chair, thanked the present Committee, who had agreed to stand for another year and the Chair encouraged the participation of others who wished to be more involved in FeCRA.

The officers were elected nem con:-

Wendy Blythe as Chair, Jean Glasberg as Vice Chair and John Latham as Treasurer.

3. Accounts

The Treasurer presented the accounts to 28th February 2022, noting that the AGM, the source of most donations and costs, was being held on line. He reported that the Federation remained fully independent, and welcomed donations towards its costs. The Chair and members of the FeCRA Committee give their time and efforts without reward.

The Accounts were approved nem con.

Chair's Report

The Chair delivered her report, a copy of which is available on the website and also available as a You tube recording which includes the slides. See link below .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5IWJdCEe7k&t=2s>

The Chair said that growth agendas pursued by government, big business, the universities, colleges and property developers working together with global business, sovereign wealth funds and foreign states with human rights issues continued to pose challenges to the quality of life in and around Cambridge. She highlighted that the same names, representing vested interests, came up again and again in membership of the many review bodies considering these plans, involving potential conflicts of interest. As an example of this she asked "should we be comfortable that Cambridge University is contributing to the funding of the Planning service?"

She pointed out many residents had been shocked at the high level of growth proposed in the draft Local Plan and what they saw as the plan's failure to consider the overall environmental capacity and climate change impact. Water supply and sewage were particular concerns. She mentioned that the government had recently announced that a land use framework for England would be published in 2023. The Food Farming and Countryside Commission, whose members include the former Master of Emmanuel College, had hosted meetings to discuss two pilot land use projects in Cambridgeshire with developers, Cambridge University, Cambridge Ahead, councillors, water companies, landowners and NGOs; but no community or river groups were invited.

Turning to the proposed congestion charge she said that many residents of Cambridge and wider Cambridgeshire had expressed concerns to the FeCRA Committee about the impact of the proposed charge on the low paid and elderly and were sceptical that claimed improvements in bus services would be adequate. Residents had also asked why the Greater Cambridge Partnership planned to spend £200 million on off-highway bus routes such as Cambourne to Cambridge through the Green Belt rather than improving existing bus services.

She highlighted that another concern expressed by residents was the decline in Cambridge's traditional market. She asked if Cambridge Market was being allowed to deteriorate to facilitate the redevelopment of the city centre as an event location, generating income for the City Council and the Council's business partners in the Visit Cambridge Consortium: Cambridge Bid, Cambridge University (via Fitzwilliam Enterprises) and King's College.

She pointed out that FeCRA's strength lies in the network of members in many city neighbourhoods, plus the Federations's strong contacts in nearby villages and the city wide connections with community, cultural heritage and environmental groups. Supportive networks of neighbours and friends were a valuable community asset and an essential part of a city's wealth and assets and Cambridge residents had a tradition both of problem solving and reaching out to strangers and those in need.

For the recording of the Chair's report see link below.

Chair's 2022 report "should we feel comfortable that Cambridge University funds the planning service?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5IWJdCEe7k&t=2s>

Following the Chair's report attendees heard a fascinating key note talk presentation from the award- winning investigative journalist and China expert, Ian Williams about Cambridge's relationship with overseas investors, especially China, in which he talked about university research, funding, investors, transparency, scrutiny, democracy and the nature of the Chinese Communist State. The talk seemed very pertinent given all the concerns in the press about Cambridge's connections with China and Chinese state institutions

Ian Williams' talk was followed by another very interesting and disturbing presentation from Independent councillor, Sam Davies, on the democratic deficit affecting Cambridge, in which Cllr Davies referred to the employment-led growth that she had highlighted in a previous talk at FeCRA's 'Supersize Cambridge' 2021 Event. Links below:

Investigative journalist and author Ian Williams: Cambridge's relationship with overseas investors, especially China

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oClvjH6r3M&t=6s>

Councillor Sam Davies: The Democratic Deficit affecting Cambridge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGZSqomguao&t=5s>

Questions from attendees at the AGM event reflected the varied network of Cambridge community groups and wider Cambridge networks who were at the meeting. They included the following questions although there was more discussion:

Q & A discussion of issues raised by Ian Williams and Cllr Davies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSi6eIRnTaU&t=16s>

“Cambridge for Sale” Q&A Chat

<https://www.fecra.org.uk/docs/FecRA%20AGM%202022%20Zoom%20copy%20of%20chat%2015.11.22.pdf>

John Walsh - So why, what with Chinese influence (and money) on a city like Cambridge, is there seemingly little serious chatter going on amongst our politicians when it comes to the what's happening in Xinjiang, or the undoing of work by Hu Jintao that General Secretary Xi has undertaken? Is it simply because they are bringing so much more money to the table?

Professor David Rogers - Chinese influence in UK Freeports?

Peter Blythe to Ian Williams - Were you able to discuss these issues with Cambridge academics taking these decisions and if so do you feel that there is an acceptance of the risks involved and any willingness to be more open and more cautious about Chinese involvement ?

Martin Lucas Smith Everyone (I think) agrees, the current structure of local government and all the bodies are a total mess, as that diagram showed. How is this going to change? Personally I believe we should have a Cambridge Unitary + South Cambs Unitary. This would basically match the town/rural cultural difference, as shown so clearly in the county election result. Is that view shared widely? What can be done to get consensus between the three main councils as to what should change, so that can be taken to government as a collective view?

Kati and John Preston How do you suggest we challenge all this?

Professor Tony Booth Referring to information posted in the chat by Cllr Davies 'University announces funding of planning officers: <https://www.varsity.co.uk/news/9516> Article by Professor Gavin Parker on how the pre-app process could be remodelled to be more transparent: https://www.jlgc.org.uk/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019_Feb_article.pdf

Asked : “It would be good if Sam can say more about pre-application money. How much? How - brown envelopes?

David Plank – Referring to ‘the growth of the BioMedical Campus and its exceptional status as the only site on the edge of Cambridge being allowed to carve another 18 hectares out of the Green Belt having already taken 77 asked : Will our local objections to this count for anything against the Government's imperative that it should be allowed to grow?

David Yandell- A key reason why the moving of the Cambridge Sewage Works is proposed is because that move is seen as being in the national interest and hence attracts central funding . How real is this need for expansion, which the relocation is said to facilitate , when as has been laid bare this evening the process which is going on here is to do either with property investment or with our international enemies' infiltration of our higher education and research organisations

Charles Jones Govt pays Anglian Water £0.2 Billion to move, Anglian Water then gains a similar amount from redeveloping the existing site. National priorities are irrelevant. Do you think Biomed expansion and housing at NE Cambridge are in the same category?

The Chair thanked all the speakers and attendees for making it a most interesting evening , and said the FeCRA Committee looked forward to wider engagement around all the issues that had been discussed.

WB 10. 12.23