

2018 Annual General Meeting

Held on 20th April 2018 in the Main Hall, Perse School, Hills Road Cambridge

Starting at 7 pm

1. Attendance

1.1 Attending

Over 175 attended, including 110 from City Residents' Associations and community groups together with Councillors, University and business representatives.

1.2 Apologies for absence

10 apologies were received.

2. Minutes of previous AGM held on 22nd March 2017

The minutes of the previous AGM were approved nem con.

3. Treasurer's Report

The accounts for 28th February 2018 had been circulated. The Treasurer pointed to two major changes, the Federation's bank account had been moved to Lloyds, and activity during the year had stepped up, resulting in a lower year end bank balance of £88. Generous donations from RAs and individuals together with surpluses from meeting had enabled the Federation to continue its efforts in an active year. The Treasurer pointed out that the Federation was reliant on individual generosity and invited those attending to set up a standing order for which forms were available at the AGM.

The accounts were approved nem con.

4. Election of Officers

Nicky Morrison, Lynn Hieatt and Dara Morefield were stepping down. Jean Glasberg, Barbara Taylor, John Lawton, John Latham, Harriett Gillett and the Chair, Wendy Blythe had signalled their willingness to stay in office. Angela Chadwyk-Healey, Lilian Rundblad and John Caldwell had agreed to stand for election.

The officers were elected nem con.

5. Chair's Report - Synopsis (full report available on website and film)

The Chair pointed to the efforts of Residents' Associations in the endeavour to ensure that Cambridge grows in a sustainable way, to achieve balanced communities and make Cambridge a good place to live and work, and the ways in which these efforts had made a difference.

However, the acute housing problems and lack of affordable housing, together with efforts by developers to avoid their obligations on affordable housing remained challenges. Examples were given where concerted efforts had been or were being over-ridden or ignored and inappropriate use of new developments resulted. The Local plan was likely when adopted to broaden still further the availability of student accommodation.

The Chair cited the example of noise pollution along the Great Northern Road approach to the station and the developer's efforts to remove noise controls as one where local RA intervention had avoided loss of amenity. There was widespread concern at proposals for demolition of family homes and the involvement of foreign investors in holding empty homes.

The Chair reported the success of the Cambridge Deserves Better meeting on which FeCRA had collaborated with other organisations to offer an opportunity for the Combined Authority Mayor James Palmer to present his vision following the delivery of a letter signed by 54 groups to the City Deal Board aimed at improving their engagement with community groups' views.

Another initiative had been the Cambridge Virtual Hustings prior to the General Election. Questions put to MP candidates included the achievement of sustainable growth and ways to involve the full range of local interests in assessing the cumulative impacts of proposed developments.

The Chair stressed the importance laid by residents on making the Local Plan process open and democratic. To that end, with the support of Local RAs, FeCRA had sponsored the filming of the Local Plan Hearings.

The Chair outlined a variety of concerns that residents and RAs had in mind in seeking to engage productively with the programme to expand the areas covered by parking controls.

Other initiatives had focused on cycleway proposals and the Sheep's Green learners pool.

The Chair described some of the interactions of RAs with the GCP's current priorities, including Milton Road, Histon Road and Madingley Road, and some of the concerns that have been raised together with the threats perceived to many attractive and iconic parts of Cambridge and the green belt.

The importance of trees in the urban landscape and the need for a more explicit understanding between the city and the County on street trees was highlighted.

FeCRA had organised a successful seminar for those involved in the GCP Greenways Project.

The Chair urged that residents' voice be heard in the earliest stages of the Spaces and Movement public realm city centre policy with a view to progress towards a prosperous green city where good design and civic engagement are principles.

The Chair reported that the number of affiliated RAs, community associations and neighbourhood groups had risen to 99, enabling a range of organisations to have a civic voice. Transport schemes under discussion had brought together City RAs and nearby villages.

The Chair referred to efforts to enhance FeCRA's website and encouraged those attending to become involved. The Chair thanked Nicky Morrison, Lynn Hieatt and Dara Morefield who were stepping down from the Committee.

6. Keynote Speaker – George Ferguson CBE, first elected Mayor of Bristol – synopsis (Whole of presentation and questions available on website)

In a well-illustrated, lively and fascinating talk George Ferguson described his time as first elected mayor of Bristol. He said that he had a near lifetime love of Bristol since his time there as a student, having travelled widely in his youth, his father being in the military. When the opportunity to elect a mayor had arisen he was an enthusiast, but had not expected to win.

He emphasised the benefits that flowed from his having been an independent. He had no expectation of re-election, and consequently he had been able to be bold unlike most party affiliated local politicians whose focus was necessarily on doing only those things that were likely to make their party re-electable. Necessarily he approached questions from an architect's viewpoint and was committed to a sustainable agenda, believing however that this was about people and future generations rather than buildings. He was focused on attempting to redress what had happened in the past 70 years, and on making cities healthy places. He thought health was better understood than sustainability.

George Ferguson contrasted Bristol's industrial and shipping history with that of Cambridge and said that whilst Cambridge was a town that had grown up around its university, Bristol's university had been implanted into a city. Bristol had about twice the population of Cambridge, with Bath a gem only 12 minutes away by train, but like Cambridge was bursting out of its boundaries. Both Cambridge and Bristol are world cities, and George Ferguson stressed the importance of retaining the elements that made them special and good places to raise a family.

He was a pioneer of the Green Capital concept before it had become a European programme. Partnership with a range of enthusiastic participant groups had been central development of the Green Capital theme.

George Ferguson favoured experimentation. He felt that consultation was valuable, but it was more meaningful if people could see what was being consulted upon, and he had been in a position to try out some ideas.

A particular success was 'one tree per child'. This had resulted in 30,000 trees being planted, not a vast number but a programme that had meaning for each child, with community involvement and other benefits, and one that had been taken up by other cities worldwide.

Other initiatives included the Healthy Schools Award, Refill Bristol (making taps water available to refill single use plastic water bottles), and Make Sunday Special. He felt that it was not always a matter of providing money, but often giving people space and permission to dream, saying 'yes' and letting people get on with it.

He had devoted significant effort to reinforcing links with the city's universities, with monthly meetings with both Vice Chancellors. Volunteers from the universities had provided 100,000 hours in support of Bristol's European Green Capital programme and had been engaged with research projects.

Recognising that cynicism was rife in Bristol he had been keen to find ways to involve citizens and have them share in the approaches he had been developing. It was important to generate and capitalise on pride in the city.

Bristol was strongly multi-cultural with 91 languages and raising the profile of the food cultures had been instrumental in bringing people together. The campaign to avoid food waste had been an initiative whose success had spread.

The Global Parliament of Mayors would be meeting in Bristol in October, at the same time as an Economics of Happiness conference at the Arnolfini Arts Gallery. George Ferguson invited those present to register and attend.

Part of the Happy City approach was emphasis on a circular economy and encouraging independents on the High Street. His vision was one of a city where people knew one another and looked out for each other. The value of variety was stressed, and the creation of a local currency supported that aim. George Ferguson had taken his salary in Bristol pounds.

He was keen to help the city move away from monocultures and offered examples of streets exclusively occupied by independent retailers and where markets had been encouraged through liberalisation of ancient rules. He felt that promoting livelier and more interesting streets required some rules to be broken.

The value of involving children was emphasised. Examples were encouraging children to grow salad. A successful app had been created 'Crocodile' to help parents know where their children were when making their own way to and from school. The local founders of Aardman animations had helped with lending their creations to campaigns.

Other programmes had included investment in renewables, and the creation of Bristol's own energy company. The goal of making Bristol zero carbon by 2050 had been set.

George Ferguson expressed the view that cars had become our mistress and master but were an urban disaster. He felt that the choice was either to impose a congestion charge or to stop people parking. He had accelerated the implementation of residents' parking schemes and believed that the implementation of 12 schemes in 3 years would otherwise have taken 20. He doubted that the political courage now existed to do more.

The removal of the dual carriageway across Queen Square was an example of restoration of the city environment. Another was Make Sundays Special, closing parts of the city to traffic, which had included closing the A4 through the Avon Gorge to allow pedestrians and cyclists to appreciate the setting. His response to the view that removing cars would harm commerce was that it is not cars that buy things but people.

He re-emphasised the importance of narrow streets and cited such a street in Bologna as his favourite. He said that because Bristol has hills, they were able to do things that Cambridge could not even dream of.

Finally, he expressed his gratitude to the EU for supporting various of his initiatives.

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

The panel comprised Tony Eva, an Earth Scientist, James Littlewood, CEO of Cambridge Past Present and Future, John Preston, Heritage campaigner, Prof Wendy Pullan from the University's Department

of Architecture, Stephen Kelly the City Council's Planning Director and George Ferguson. The panel discussion was chaired by Jean Glasberg.

Following on from George Ferguson's talk the panel members made short introductory speeches.

Tony Eva highlighted the increase in Carbon Dioxide levels, and whilst he believed that in response all cities would need to become carbon neutral by 2050, and knowledge and know-how were increasingly available, lack of imagination was an obstacle to embracing new approaches. He encouraged participation in a Cambridge Commons car free day on 22nd September.

James Littlewood pointed to the importance of green spaces and landscapes and saw four challenges, recognition and protection of the best spaces, how to connect them and protect the connections, how to protect the green belt much of which was industrially farmed, and recognising that issues were not just the macro but included the micro. He highlighted four areas as meriting special attention for CPP: the Gog Magogs to Nine Wells, the River Cam valley, Fenlands and the 'quarter to six' quadrant.

Wendy Pullan praised George Ferguson's presentation, and noted that Cambridge is smaller than Bristol, and whilst it had a world class university it was not a world class city. Cambridge was a town struggling to become a city, and the constant focus on housing and transport would not achieve a successful transition, and so far had produced disastrous results. The question of findings ways to increase density without destroying Cambridge's special qualities needed to be addressed, and this would involve concentrating on the centre.

John Preston questioned how it might be possible to draw a divided city together around a unified vision. Cambridge is an economic hothouse. Against this situation was arrayed a huge range of entities, and Antony Carpen's Venn diagram of these was used to illustrate the complexities. John Preston felt that concepts such as the quality charter in supporting growth failed to address the city's capacity and he noted the risk of damage to open spaces. There had been too many visions. Nevertheless, he echoed the need to involve schools, on which he had himself been engaged.

Stephen Kelly focused on the city's green spaces, surrounding the city and within the city both public/semi-public and private, much with public access. He believed that there was good news in the 257 hectares of public parks and gardens and pointed out that 188 hectares had been added in the past 15 years, and was publicly accessible. Major challenges were how to connect the spaces, and how to enable people to get access and enjoy them.

8. Questions and Answers

Terry McAlister of Cambridge Commons and a Newnham resident thanked George Ferguson for a fascinating talk, and said how much he had enjoyed a recent first visit to Bristol and the atmosphere that he found there. He asked each of the panel to identify one initiative that they believed would make Cambridge a better place. These were:

- Open streets, easily done, cheap and affordable, with a high likelihood of buy-in.
- Much improved facilities for cyclists and pedestrians
- More multiple housing in the City centre based on mixed use at street level
- A spaces and movement strategy for the City
- Get schools involved

- George Ferguson agreed with all of these and regarded involving schools as the most important

Jane Singleton of Old Newnham Residents Association questioned where power lies between planners and developers – too often the developers seemed to have the upper hand.

Stephen Kelly said that developers would probably say that the planners were not helpful enough. He pointed out that the planners were trying to achieve a whole suite of objectives, and address a variety of policies. He said that the planning team were determined to do their best to balance a range of interests.

Wendy Pullan said that Cambridge was no different from any major city around the world facing the global power of developers. In her view the planning initiatives that the city was pursuing were positive and picking up speed and momentum. Wendy suggested that support from residents for these initiatives would assist and perhaps that could be an outcome from a meeting such as the AGM.

Sam Davies of Queen Edith's Community Forum contrasted well-funded groups such as Cambridge Ahead, (£10,000 p.a. per member) with the £5 per head being sought by FeCRA and questioned how residents' voices could be heard against such well-funded and resourced lobbies. This was a popular question with those present.

George Ferguson said that it was too easy to blame the planners, and the planning system was relatively weak and reactive. The developers have the advantage. He believed that there was a need to invest more time in defining the sort of place we want to create. He encouraged creating and sharing a vision. He did not believe in telling developers what to do but said that authorities should be brave enough to say 'no' to crap development, of which there is a lot about (much applause). He said that there should be a rewarding system for beautiful placemaking and that would encourage beauty in a place like Cambridge.

A resident from Grantchester asked where affordable homes would go?

Stephen Kelly said that there was a good track record of affordable homes being developed alongside private development. James Littlewood thought that Cambridge was making the best of a bad job, but that the system perpetuates an unaffordability crisis.

George Ferguson who had re-started council home building in Bristol after three decades lamented that social housing would end up being sold. He thought that it should remain as social housing.

Tony Eva wanted the best energy efficiency to be incorporated.

Dan Greef, Labour candidate in St Edith's pointed out the problems arising from the monopoly structure of public transport, in particular buses in Cambridge.

George Ferguson said that this was one issue where a combined authority made sense if the issue was tackled correctly. He did not think that this was a matter to be tackled by cities acting alone.

Nicki Marrian, Hills Road Area RA asked George Ferguson why he thought that he had not been re-elected.

George Ferguson felt that he had taken the political parties by surprise, but they had soon mobilised to oust him, and across 34 wards to elect 64 members of the council, each had some 8-10 candidates. He stood alone as an independent, and his enthusiasm to make changes was not matched by representatives of political parties whose main objective was to be re-elected. He felt therefore that he had in some ways signed his own death warrant.

Tony Booth, Newtown RA asked for ideas on how to reduce the city's reliance on car parking revenue.

George Ferguson took the contrary view. He had sought to emulate Copenhagen 5% annual reduction in available car parking space by reducing Bristol's by some 20% over three years, with revenues raised from residents' parking schemes and parking charges.

Allan Brigham, Romsey Resident asked in the context of concerns to increase affordable housing why there was so much emphasis on creating student housing. People needed small houses and gardens.

Stephen Kelly said that the need to provide student housing was in part to reduce competition for general needs housing. The housing strategy sought to deal with all forms of housing with a view to generating the right homes in the right places. Wendy Pullan emphasised the value of gardens as perhaps the most important room in the house and suggested that this need could be fulfilled in various ways including roof gardens. She said that multiple housing does not need to be nasty.

George Ferguson favoured mixed communities. In order to achieve a more thriving city student housing should be integrated not separated.

Clare King, Milton Road asked George Ferguson to identify one thing that he would have done differently.

George Ferguson said that the one thing that he would have changed would have been the length of his term in office. Although at under 4 years his term had been particularly short through being out of sequence, he thought that 6 years, or 8 years as in some German cities was what was required given the time scales needed, for example, to get a tramway installed. He said that he felt no bitterness, his life was better for not being the mayor, and he tried to support the current mayor where he could.

The meeting closed at 9 pm

Drafted by J A Latham