



FeCRA Chair's Report - AGM 2021 – 7 October

The growth agendas being pursued by the government, big business, the universities, colleges and property developers working together continue to pose challenges to the quality of life in and around Cambridge. There are stories about this on a daily basis along with the growth agenda connections with global business, sovereign wealth funds and foreign states with human rights issues.

The Times, Guardian, and Financial Times and others have reported on the concerns about China's growing involvement in Cambridge. Residents are asking is Cambridge and the OxCam Arc part of China's Belt and Road.

Politicians and human rights lawyers who have spoken out about human rights issues have been banned by China. Senior MP's have called for a listing of the University's China links.

Earlier this year a senior researcherⁱ for Cambridge City Council's external partner, Centre for Cities, a think tank funded by the Cambridge University Chancellor, and whose trustees include the Councils's development partner Anglian Water, tweeted:

'When millions of jobs have been destroyed in the middle of a pandemic and housing shortage, I make no apologies for demanding growth and a spicy hot labour market. The Cambridge Milton Keynes Oxford Arc are below the national average for CO2 emissions, which is why we should build 1.5m plus homes in them'

Compare that with the concerns of so many Cambridge communities worried that they and their children will be living next to building sites for the next 50 years. People are asking who are the interests promoting the 'spicy hot labour market' whose economic environment requires so much development and so many houses?

They are asking where is the evidence for agglomeration and that companies will otherwise move abroad? Who has funded the research supporting such a high level of employment growth?

The Climate Crisis and Covid 19 have given concerns about unsustainable growth agendas a new focus and even greater urgency. Despite this, off

highway bus routes and large car parks in the Cambridge green belt are being approved. The city has a tree canopy policy yet is unable to protect trees on building sites. Anglian Water are re-locating a functioning sewage works, not for operational reasons but to enable employment growth and housing. This re-location is facilitated by over two hundred million pounds of taxpayers money and takes green belt from three medieval River Cam villages. Yet nothing is being done about upgrading the small treatment plants in and around Cambridge villages which are dumping sewage in the Cam.

SLIDE 2 SCRUBS

Almost 100 residents' associations and community groups are part of the FeCRA network. These networks of neighbours and friends and community groups have worked with the Councils to provide support throughout the pandemic.

SLIDE 3 CAVENDISH ROAD ADVENT CALENDAR

If you walked down Cavendish Road, a quiet street just east of Mill Road Bridge, last December you would have noticed windows aglow with festive numbers. Cavendish Road Residents Association has for three years turned their street into a sparkling advent calendar.

SLIDE 4 HURST PARK ESTATE PLAYING OUT SCHEME

Hurst Park Estate Residents Association in North Cambridge applied to run a Playing Out Scheme in their neighbourhood to allow children to play safely in the street and for adults to chat and get to know each other. Their campaign to stop the sale of the Milton Road Library has featured in Private Eye.

SLIDE 5 HISTON ROAD AREA RA – A COMMUNITY REMEMBERS

Histon Road Area Residents Association celebrated the publication of their book 'A community remembers', which brought the community together to reminisce, research and get to know one another with an exhibition of work by the documentary photographer Faruk Kara.

SLIDE 6 QUEEN EDITHS' COMMUNITY GARDEN

On the South side of the city Queen's Edith's Community Forum created Joy's Garden, a 'meanwhile' community space in a garden that will be developed eventually but in the meantime is a wonderful, informal green community space enjoyed by all ages.

Public realm, public space, social inclusion, and environmental issues are key issues for Residents' Associations and community groups. Last year we reported that residents were worried their local nature and green spaces were

being “scoped for investment “ as visitor destinations and event locations and were working on stewardship plans to protect them.

SLIDE 7 PARADISE NATURE RESERVE – BIODIVERSITY & STEWARDSHIPVOLES

Cambridge’s market square and the city’s green spaces with their famous rural vibes, are the city’s environmental commons.

SLIDE 7 PARADISE NATURE RESERVE – BIODIVERSITY & STEWARDSHIP-

The river is the heart of Cambridge. Its informal green spaces with kingfishers, voles, ducks, swans and cows are admired all over the world and have been a life saver to many during this pandemic.

Voles, a listed species and eight species of rare bats feature in the Friends of the Paradise Nature Reserve management plans. Friends of Lammas Land and Sheep’s Green and Friends of Logan’s Meadow are working with the City Council Biodiversity officer on proposals that include protecting the Driftway Hedge, not cutting grass, no herbicide spraying and not using commercial flower seed mixes.

Last year we reported that the Friends of St Matthew’s Piece were concerned about a proposal for densification of their local park by an investors consortium for student accommodation that would “monster the trees and

open spaces of this park in their densely populated ward”. Following a fantastic campaign supported by residents across the city this application was not approved.

Residents say that the very qualities of life and environment that have made Cambridge unique don't scale. That same human scale that makes Cambridge such a success is vulnerable. They say “Why is there no assessment of impacts and issues arising from current and already approved growth in the Local Plan? Why has there been no engagement with strategic environmental capacity issues as a vital part of the evidence base”?

The economic environment that requires so many houses and taking so much water from the Cam chalk aquifers is supported by Natural Cambridgeshire's vision for “doubling local nature” and by new country parks and environmental land management schemes which will be funded by net gain offsetting and a central Cambridge Nature Network fund.

Many residents ask how can you double nature when developers on building sites don't follow the rules and there is no enforcement? How can the Wider Cambridge consortium talk about nature tourism funding a system of water management to save the Cam when the river is full of sewage?

The River Cam is the only river in the country that is not back to normal flows, the massive growth planned will fuel huge pressure upon our natural water supplies. Concerns about the impact of over-abstraction on the River Cam have been expressed but large development keeps getting approved.

There is gridlock at every level. Yet the draft Local Plan is focused on employment growth! What about environmental capacity, the impact of transport proposals, current growth ambitions, the need to address climate change, and Cambridge's historic environment? The cumulative impact of current growth ambitions must be evidence assessed before credible decisions can be made because we are running out of time.

ⁱ Ant Breach (tweet 11.07 28 January, 2021)