

## FeCRA – The Federation of Cambridge Residents' Associations



### FeCRA Chair's Report - AGM 2020

Cambridge's acute housing problems and lack of affordable housing together with the unabated growth agendas pursued by government, big business, the universities, colleges and property developers working together continue to pose challenges to the quality of life but the Climate Crisis and Corvid19 has given the impact of this a new focus and urgency.

Almost 100 residents associations and community groups are part of the FeCRA network. They point out that it is this network of community groups that the Councils turned to for support throughout the pandemic.

This is a very engaged city. People care. They want to be involved.

At Local Plan briefings to R A and community reps and Q and A sessions RA reps have raised a number of questions, some of which speakers tonight will be touching on. **Allan Brigham of Mill Road** asking about the provision of affordable housing summed up concerns about a growth agenda supported by inward migration and building one million homes when he said:

"All of England can't move to Cambridge. What Cambridge needs is affordable homes and jobs for our children".

Public realm, social inclusion and environmental issues have been a key issue for RA's and community groups across Cambridge. Plans for urban densification and green belt transport corridors and the scenarios for sustaining the high growth that is proposed threaten green spaces and city garden wildlife corridors. All over the city residents who are concerned that their local nature and green spaces are under threat are forming Friends groups and working on management plans to try and protect them.

#### SLIDE 1 QUEEN'S GREEN – BIODIVERSITY

Cambridge's informal open spaces with ducks, swan and cows are admired all over the world and have been a life saver during this pandemic. Biodiversity and cowslip planting featured in the town and gown plans of the Friends of Queens Green who have been working with the City Council Open Space officer on management proposals that include not cutting grass, no herbicide spraying and not using commercial flower seed mixes. The plans mirror what is being done by other groups.

## SLIDE 2 – SKATER’S MEADOW FOOTPATH

Interest in Grantchester Meadows and preserving the unique rural qualities of this much loved Cambridge landscape and its connected green spaces has led RA members from across the city to set up a Friends of Skaters Meadow Footpath to protect the verges and hedges of Skater’s Meadow. Another Friends group is working on management plans for Lammas Land.

Friends of St Albans Rec, a group set up by Arbury mums is campaigning to protect the natural open spaces of the rec, one of the few places where local children can experience nature in this densely populated ward, from development and urbanisation by the City Council and its chosen housing partner Hill.

Friends of St Matthew’s Piece with similar concerns about a proposal for densification of their local park by an investors consortium<sup>1</sup> for student accommodation say it will “monster the trees and open spaces of this park in their densely populated ward”.

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 a success is vulnerable.

Schemes proposed as a solution to transport problems cut bus journey times by minutes, yet involve the loss of trees, hedgerows, and green space. This ignores what makes Cambridge special, and the council’s commitments to tackling the biodiversity crisis. Impaired quality of life threatens the most vulnerable.

Residents are asking: “Why is there no assessment of impacts and issues arising from current and already approved growth at this stage? Why is there no engagement with strategic environmental capacity issues as a vital part of the evidence base for the new Plan?”

The plan for sustaining high growth and building one million houses is underpinned by Natural Cambridgeshire’s vision for “doubling local nature”, with urban fringe parks in the green belt.

The River Cam is the only river in the country that is not back to normal flows, yet exponential growth fuels 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 current work on evidence for the Local Plan considers only housing growth! Why? What about environmental capacity, the impact of transport proposals, current growth ambitions, the need to address climate change, and Cambridge’s historic environment, **before** credible issues and options can be identified.

Residents in North Cambridge ask how is the proposal for the North East Cambridge development being coordinated with other developments in the area? They point out that this equates to a town the size of Ely.

The shortcomings of Cambridge's expansion so far have been highlighted nationally. Inequality has not been addressed and new housing developments and design do not meet high standards. People say they have lost confidence in the planning process.

Resident groups all over the city have recognised that Cambridge's success factors are uniquely difficult to scale up. Hundreds of people have attended meetings and marches, pointing out that the cumulative impact of current growth ambitions must be evidence assessed before credible decisions can be made. But we are running out of time.

As a former assistant chief planner of Cambridge city council highlighted at the City Council leader's briefing, there is no option in this plan to limit growth. Why not? Where is the evidence that this is necessary? Why are our civic leaders failing to question this, or represent the views of their constituents?

Residents want Cambridge to be a sustainable, green city, which is inclusive for all. People care. They want to be involved. Many good ideas have been put forward which are based on grassroots community participation. As the landscape architect Kim Wilkie has said previously, 'Genuine consultation has the best outcomes. When plans are sprung fully formed on a community it destroys the sense of belonging and being part of a continuing evolution of place'.

### SLIDE 3 FECRA MEMBERSHIP – HOW TO JOIN UP

Wendy Blythe

Chair, FeCRA, 16.7.20

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<sup>i</sup> Attendees at the AGM event were informed this is global investment manager Schroders.