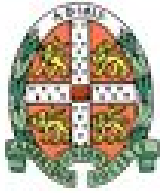


Cambridge Forum for the Construction Industry

Secretary: Robert Ransom FICE, Vine Farm, Church Street, Stapleford, CB22 5DS
Tel: 01223 524821 Email: secretary@cfc.org.uk

AT:



CAMBRIDGE UNION SOCIETY

LENT TERM CFCI DEBATE

6.30 PM Monday 31 March 2014

CHRISTOPHER PRATT
Bursar of Jesus College
Honorary Fellow of Fitzwilliam College
in the Chair

That this House believes that:

CAMBRIDGE IS MORE ABOUT THE FUTURE THAN THE PAST

JEREMY SANDERS FRS
Professor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor
Cambridge University
Future

Will PROPOSE the motion

TIM BICK
Leader
Cambridge City Council

Will speak third

ROBIN PELLEW OBE
Chairman,
Cambridge Past Present and
Future

Will OPPOSE the motion

PETER LANDSHOFF
Professor Emeritus
C U Department of Mathematics
and Theoretical Physics

Will speak fourth

There will then be a Floor Debate

TONY RAVEN
CEO
Cambridge Enterprise
Unit
*Will conclude for the Proposition
Opposition*

CHRIS EVANS
Director
Cambridge Archaeological
Unit

*Will conclude for the
Opposition*

The **Honourable Proposer** may then exercise his right of reply

TELLERS

For the Ayes:
Mr R Ransom
Mr S Walsh

For the Noes:
Mr D Emond
Mr C Jones

Mr President

I am a Fellow of a College that is more than 500 years old, in my retirement I still work in a University that is more than 800 years old, and I am a Trustee of Cambridge Past, Present and Future, which owns the Leper Chapel across the Newmarket Road railway bridge, which is the oldest complete building in Cambridge. So you will ask why I give my affiliation as Cambridge Ahead, which is only 6 months old.

Cambridge Ahead is a new grouping of our largest businesses, working with Addenbrookes and the two universities with the vision to make Cambridge the greatest small city in the world. To achieve this vision, Cambridge Ahead recognises that a high priority is to improve our quality of life, for otherwise it will not be possible to attract and retain the large number of talented people on which our prosperity depends. Organisations all over the world are competing for them, and are willing to pay them more than we can, so we have to give them clear reasons to choose Cambridge.

It is not enough to maintain our present quality of life in Cambridge, we must make it much better. And we will fail to do that unless we look closely at the past and learn from it. As I will explain, our failure to do so is already leading to very serious problems.

Quality of life encompasses many, many things, not just putting right the awful cycle parking at the station. As a trustee of our local civic society, Cambridge Past, Present and Future, one of the things I think of first is the quality of our physical environment. In particular maintaining and enhancing our green spaces. The proposal by our local authorities to intrude into the green belt by building houses in it is nothing short of vandalism. The reasons why the green belt was put in place 22 years ago still apply: to ensure a compact, dynamic city, located within a high-quality landscape setting. Adequate provision of housing is of the utmost importance for achieving good quality of life, but why were our local authorities not able to work together to build the houses further out and to provide good transport to them?

And the appearance of the dwellings is important. Just over the railway bridge there is the Belvedere tower, which until now has been the tallest residential building in Cambridge. People have different views about it, but its design is reasonably traditional and I myself like it. But across the road from it now there has appeared the Marque. I have no problem with its being an even taller and more massive building. Its lower part is traditional in design and looks quite good, but the architect has given it a superstructure which is far from traditional and for me and many others it makes it the ugliest building in Cambridge. Why has this been allowed to happen?

My architect friends assure me that good buildings need not be costly. The problem is that clients too often do not get good advice, and do not realise how much work they themselves need to do to get a good building. I say this from personal experience of a large award-winning building project for the University.

No doubt, Mr President, you will have read the recent book *Hideous Cambridge*. While I strongly disagree with many of the author's judgements, it does highlight the poor quality of much of the new architecture in Cambridge. I am not among those who think we should preserve everything. For example I did not support the campaign to preserve Wilton Terrace on Station Road: if it is replaced with a really good new building that will be an improvement. But so often our new buildings are unimaginative boxes with flat roofs, which, even if they do not leak within a few years, do not look nearly as good as the traditional pitched roofs. And there is a good reason why brick is the traditional facing to a building. My own College has a concrete building dating back to the 1970s which 30 years

later looked really awful. Architects need to think much more about how their buildings will age. They got that right in the past; why can't they do so now?

Social issues are of supreme importance for achieving good quality of life. The young need more good things to do. If they are bored they get up to things that spoil life for the rest of us.

But it is the increasing number of old people that society really needs to worry about. The Office for National Statistics is predicting that a third of girls born today will live to 100. (For boys it is a quarter.) There is a very real danger that old people will lead to the collapse of the NHS. This could be avoided if everybody cared more about each other, as in days gone by. According to the Campaign Against Loneliness, over half of all people aged 75 and over live alone, and half of all older people say television is their main company. Researchers on old people at Addenbrookes tell us that loneliness generates ill health and so lonely people put an increased strain on the NHS – if only because they go to see their GP just to have someone to talk to. It has been estimated that 40% of patients in hospital need not be there, if only there was other provision for them to be cared for. And a couple of months ago we were told that a million old people are under-nourished, so leading to needless ill health. Why can't we all care more about each other, as was the case in the past? For example, where are the churches in this? The NHS is in very serious danger. We need to retrieve our sense of community, and of caring for others.

And then there is education. The country suffers both from unemployment and from quite a serious skills shortage: as the Wolf report to the government highlighted a couple of years ago, the schools are not preparing the children to get jobs. We are complacent about this in Cambridge because we have some really superb schools. But out in the County most schools are merely graded satisfactory – which is quite a low grade – and in Fenland they are not even that. And before Christmas it was revealed that, at primary school level, Cambridgeshire ranks almost the worst education authority in the country. I myself am from a generation when anyone with any talent was pushed into concentrating on classics, so I spent 9 years on learning Latin and 6 years on Greek. I am certainly not advocating that, but there needs to be a return to vocational and technical education, giving children the ability to think and to solve problems, and the attitude to do these things.

I am a great fan of modern technology, but the great danger is that it will lead to people no longer talking to one another. When we were designing the buildings for the University's Centre for Mathematical Sciences, I told the architect that the first thing he had to think about was the coffee facilities. He thought I was mad, but casual face-to-face encounters are essential for the generation of new ideas. And there is a very real danger that young people will not learn to interact with one another. I remember two things from a meeting I organised a couple of years ago on education and skills. The head of Marshalls Aerospace told us that in his recent recruitment exercise the candidates had been superb on paper, but when they came for interview they were unable to talk to him about anything. And the youngest councillor in the country got up and talked with great confidence in front of the businessmen and school and college principals, but explained that he had been extremely shy until he had joined his school drama club. But extra-curricular activities have been under severe strain in many of our schools.

So, Mr President, Cambridge surely has a great future, but unless we think at least as much about what was good in the past we will get the future badly wrong.