

IPSWICH BUILDING PRESERVATION TRUST AGM 2018

‘Planning for Cambridge Growth: Protecting Cambridge Heritage’

Our guest speaker for this year’s AGM at Isaac’s was Lewis Herbert. Lewis has been a Cambridge City Councillor since 2004 and Leader since 2014. He is the combined Authority Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning. In addition, he is Director of Planning Skills at Anglia Ruskin University. Earlier this year we were able to host a lunchtime walkabout at Ipswich waterfront for a group of Lewis’ students who were studying the challenges of conservation and heritage, and the invitation to speak at our AGM arose from this event. In his introductory remarks Lewis also explained that it was a particular pleasure for him to visit Ipswich – his parents lived here and his father was once the collector of customs.



At the centre of the talk was Cambridge – ‘a city of considerable magic’. The Holford Plan of 1950 envisaged a relatively static population for Cambridge and its surrounding area and this was sustained for some years despite the constant perception that the city was bursting at the seams (and even the undergraduates were banned from keeping cars in the city in the 1960s as I remember well). The city centre itself avoided the worst excesses of 1960s urban road construction and has managed to keep much of its historic road pattern and urban space intact. Only a few developments have resulted in the loss of interesting streets and buildings. Now of course the pressures are enormous with the growth of the university and the magnetic effect of its global commercial and industrial appeal. The vast Addenbrooke’s/Papworth Biomedical Campus is an example of the scale of these developments. 40,000 jobs have been created in the last few years – but where are the workers to live?

The Quality Charter provides a framework for development and is being adopted across Cambridgeshire. There are four interconnected themes: Connectivity (the transport and infrastructure links between the city and neighbouring small towns and villages); Climate (the need to plan for low carbon futures); Character (the desire to maintain the individual character of those neighbouring settlements); and Community (the well-being of the people).

Within the city itself cycling is still the top mode of transport to get to work but underground solutions are now being explored to exploit the potential of a versatile rubber-tyred metro system which could enhance strategic links without adding significantly to the surface congestion. The possibility of improved east-west train services could also contribute. Some of the costs associated with projects of this kind could be met by the increased value of development sites made available by such bold schemes. Each of the neighbouring towns could well benefit from improved links across the county.

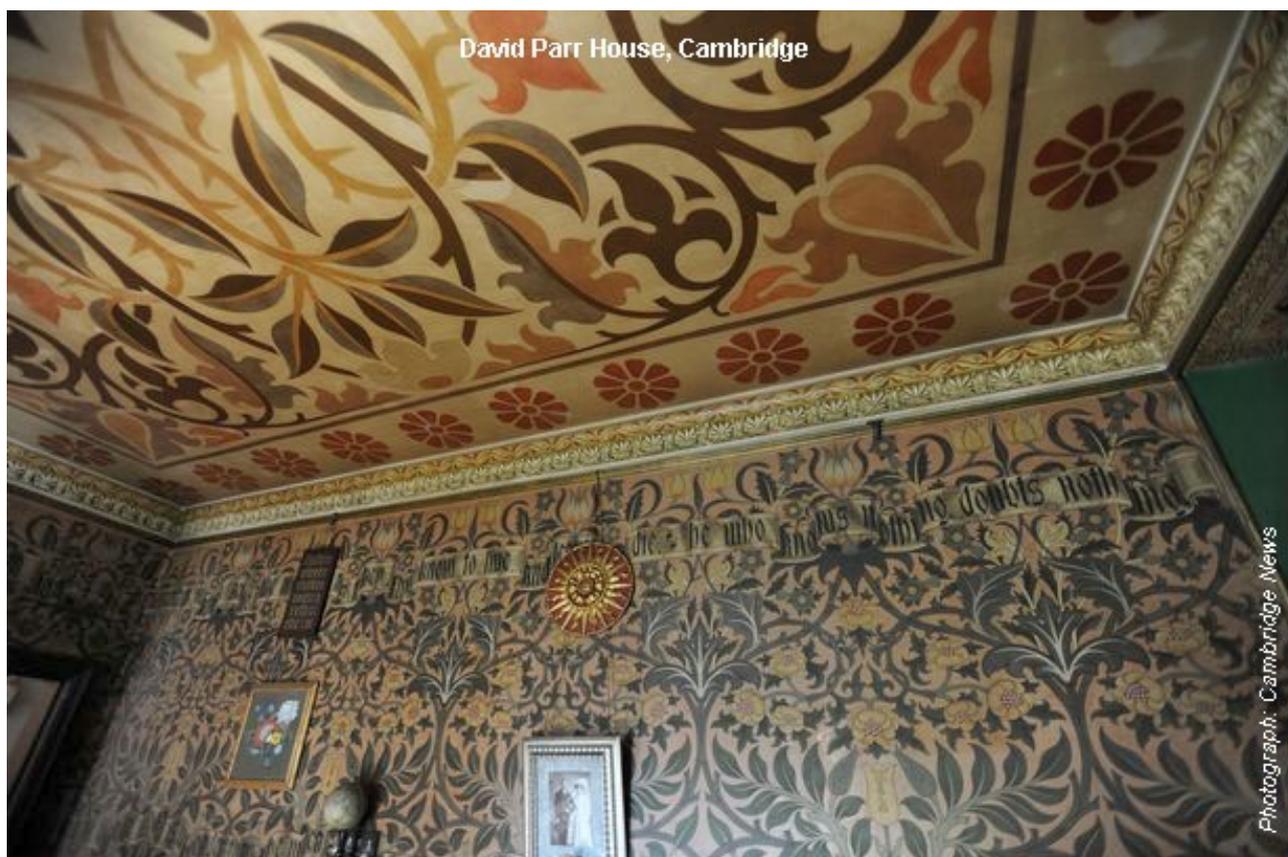
The second part of Lewis’ talk illustrated some of the heritage issues in the city itself. He illustrated the wide variety of stones imported for use in buildings, noting how the wealth of the colleges allowed for new buildings of considerable quality which matched and sustained this heritage. Some new buildings were almost indistinguishable from the old while others were radically new. Cambridge is particularly fortunate in the quality of its buildings (for instance Kings College Chapel; The Fitzwilliam Museum; the original Ruskin buildings of the Anglia Ruskin site; Lloyds Bank; the original Addenbrooke’s refurbished as the Judge Business School) with relatively few exceptions (Lewis described



the Guildhall as reminiscent of a ‘railway station of a forgotten terminus in Russia’). In the field of industrial archaeology too our attention was drawn to an extraordinary survival – a re-cycling plant from the C19 fuelled by waste ‘brought by horses which created steam power to pump sewage away from the Cam which manured the fields which grew the oats which fed the horses which brought the waste’.....and the engineers associated with the scheme had links with a famous factory in Ipswich – Ransomes!

Within the city several conservation areas have been set up to conserve and celebrate their distinctive individual characters. The challenge there is to withstand the pressures for intensification as house prices continue to rocket. In new housing Article 4 Directives have created schemes such as the Brooklands Avenue ‘Accordia Estate’ in which nothing can be added or changed. (A pity that a similar edict was not available to protect the architectural integrity and use of materials in FLS housing a hundred years ago!)

It was an evening which prompted many reflections and a flurry of questions. How does the mix of town and gown work today with the vast increase in student numbers? Would funding ever really be available for the Cambridge Metro? Might the underground tunnels fill with floodwater from the Cam? Will the east-west corridor (Oxford to Ipswich) ever be complete? Can the characters of the surrounding towns and villages actually be preserved or will they merely be dormitories for Cambridge? Are there lessons for our own High Street? Will the quality buildings of the Ipswich Industrial Co-operative Society and the banks have futures like Addenbrooke’s? The artist David Parr lived in Gwydir Street Cambridge and his house with its remarkable collection of murals and artefacts received Lottery funding of £625 thousand. Could we hope for little lottery funding to assist our own FLS project? If only Ipswich had some of the magnetic drawing power of Cambridge!



It was a very enjoyable evening. Lewis spoke with authority and insight. Often his remarks were delivered with a wry sense of humour and it was pleasing to note his affection for Ipswich. As I walked to Isaac’s in the twilight of the waterfront, I passed groups of new graduates from our own University of Suffolk in their gowns. Perhaps in the fullness of time the presence of a university here with The Hold on the campus will generate its own distinctive magnetism.

Bob Allen