

ECONET AGM
4th August 2023, 10.45am
RISC, Reading

Attendees: Dave Barks, Sandra Jackson, John Lerpeniere, Tricia Marcouse, Judith Oliver, Steve Lloyd, Vicky Clayden, Keith Alexander, Phil Allen, Marcus Wheeler

Apologies for absence: Theresa Verney Brookes

Minutes from previous meeting (11th July 2022) approved

Matters arising:

- The Econet Consultation Group, with representatives from all parts of the group, has been set up and has been used successfully on several occasions.
- The move of tool storage from Prospect to Palmer Park was successful. 5 keys have been distributed to ease access. Keith is currently conducting an inventory.
- Caversham Court was undergoing a change of management. Tricia has been in touch with RBC, but hasn't heard back. Recent events there have met with no problems. It was felt that no action was required.

Election of officers:

- The roles of chair, co-chair, treasurer and secretary are currently performed by Dave, Sandra, Alan and Marcus. All have agreed to continue in these roles. This was unanimously approved.

News and Updates:

- CROW:** Keith reported that the scheduling of tasks continues successfully, with an average attendance of 8. [This discussion raised an important aside, as follows]
- Aside:** Keith added that it would be nice to see new faces, and how could we achieve this.
 - The RVA (Reading Volunteering Association) was suggested, but Tricia said that this had been tried, with no success. She suggested she investigate a number of further options:
 - Having a stand at Reading University freshers' fair.
 - Getting involved with the RNN (Reading Neighbourhood Network) and GREN (Greater Reading Environmental Network). Trish to action.
 - Marcus mentioned that TCV often posted laminated site/task-specific information sheets at their sites, informing the public of the reasons for the work, and how to get involved.
- Friends of Clayfield Copse:** Judith reported that numbers were good. Recent bat surveys had been successful, with positive results as regards diversity and good interest from locals. [This discussion raised an important aside, as follows]
- Aside:** Concerns were raised about our relationship with RBC. This affects not just Clayfield, but other areas of Econet's work as well.
 - The last contact, who has since left, was Caroline Jenkins, whose attitude was 'You know what you're doing, get on with it.'
 - It was felt that this was not good enough as it occasionally led to RBC using contractors to do certain tasks which didn't necessarily fit with what Econet were doing, and that working in closer contact would better serve everyone's interests.
 - Tricia identified the problem, namely that RBC has no staff, but that councillors were in favour of finding a replacement for Caroline. They were currently conducting a

management review and would take no further action until this was completed. No timetable for this was set.

- It was agreed to 'park' it for now, and that Tricia would continue to liaise with RBC.

- Friends of Mapledurham playing fields: [No report]
- Friends of McIlroy Park: Phil reported that they'd had a few new members, including a couple who'd got in touch via Jotform, (i.e, the method provided by our website to contact Econet). Average numbers were 5. Work was continuing successfully.
- Friends on Reading Old Cemetery: [No report]
- Friends of Ruscombe wood: Steve reported that work continues, with lots to do and new opportunities for work arising. There had been good local interest with the 10 or so regular volunteers turning up being optimal. He also reported that as part of their hazel coppicing activities they had started to provide stakes and binders etc to local users.
- Friends of Waterloo Meadows: No report submitted, but Phil reported that tasks were continuing successfully.
- Reading Urban Wildlife: Tricia reported that this needs reviewing with RBC. She had plans with local groups at various sites and that there were a lot of possibilities, but they needed co-ordination. [See earlier comment wrt RBC]

Health and Safety:

- It was pointed out that some of the 1st aid kits were out of date.
- Questions arose as to who's got one, who wants one and shouldn't someone oversee their provision and maintenance?
- Phil agreed to take this role, and he'd get in touch with the necessary people.

Insurance:

- Vicky reported that this had been renewed. Use of ladders to 3 meters was now covered, to allow bird and bat boxes to be installed and maintained. Working near/in water was covered allowing use of waders.

Accounts: These were in a more-than healthy state, which led to the following points:

- We perhaps should consider using some of our funds to support appropriate good causes. Members of the Econet Consultation Group should be asked to put in requests. Dave to action.
- Tricia and Judith suggested producing permanent, quality information notices for some of the site notice boards, advertising and informing people of Econet's work.
- Steve raised the possibility of 'kick-starting' new friends-of groups. A local group could start up, be 'tool-ed up' and could then join Econet.

Events: Christmas tree sale:

- Tricia reported that Caversham Court had given permission for this event. Permission from the site to cut the trees was being sought, but this was not regarded as a problem.

Tools:

- Tricia suggested the purchase of a rechargeable grass trimmer. It was pointed out that we have petrol trimmers that are being serviced. David and Adrian were currently organising this.
- It was also suggested that scythes might be a useful addition to our tool list.
- Tricia suggested that for a number of tasks a table/s would be useful, but that the existing ones in the tool store were unmanageable. It was agreed that she should investigate and purchase more convenient options.
- Keith pointed out that tool maintenance needed improving. It was suggested that an

occasional maintenance task at Palmer Park be scheduled. Attendees should include those to whom tools had been dispersed. Date TBA.

AOB:

- Gazebo: The current available option is cumbersome and not easily available. Reading nature/nurture might have one or two available. Dave would investigate.
- Reimbursement: CROW have a system of reimbursement for the person who gets the tools and refreshments to a task. It was suggested that the system be expanded to include the Friends, to unanimous approval. Dave agreed to investigate suitable amounts.
- WBC (West Berkshire Council) Countryside Team has been very pleased with work carried out by ECONET, therefore we've agreed to take on conservation activities for them across the following sites: Cornwell Copse, Barefoots Copse, Withy Copse (potentially Omers Gully Wood and Auclum Copse). WBC to draw up a SLA to formalise the relationship going forward.

Date of next meeting: [No date yet set]

Close of meeting: 12.30pm