

Meeting of ECONET
16th March 2009
Parks Department Offices, Prospect Park 7:30pm

Present:

Alan Stevens
John Lerpiniere (Chair)
Anne Latto
Dave Booth (RBC)
Oonagh Kelleher (BTCV)
Judith Oliver (Minutes)

Apologies:

Tricia Marcouse

Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

RVA contact: Alan to contact RVA re confusion of contact telephone numbers - he has not done so yet.

Banner: no further info from Peter or Steve as yet item still outstanding.

Bug hotels on allotments: To be included in CROW summer programme, liaising with Dave.

Woodland survey: Dave reported that Giles Sutton part time council ecologist, will be surveying woodlands within RBC 2 -3 a year over a period of several years.

Future management of Kings Meadow: CROW have completed 2 work parties at the willow beds this year, another is planned. The harvested material was sent to Christine Brewster at Englefield, and to the National Trust at Osterley Park where children made willow sculptures.

News & Updates

Conserve Reading on Wednesdays (CROW) Reported a full weekly winter programme with increased turnout.

Clayfield Copse Reported steady numbers 6 - 9 each month including several youngsters. Coppid Hall Estate were defining their boundary in Blackhouse Wood, a member of Parks Dept had met with management. Anne was concerned that the work was being carried out in the woodland in March. Dave said that RBC had no control over what the Estate did on their land. Friends of could take the matter up themselves.

Two walks are planned, for April a Bluebell Walk and in May a Dawn Chorus Walk (as part of International Dawn Chorus day).

Mapledurham Playing Fields Reported steady numbers, further tree planting had been carried out and a Bat Evening was being planned in June.

McIlroy Park Reported holly clearance and tree and hedge planting. Attendance, around 6, good for site with some new faces.

BTCV Reported that the area they were responsible for was now extended to include West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and would be called the South Central area. Base to continue in Reading (possibly moving to Earley in the future). Weekly Biodiversity Action Team events are being planned such that there will be one event each month in a particular area.

Health & Safety

No issues were raised.

Accounts

Current bank balance £2510.

Invoiced task charges for which payment is pending £380, estimated outstanding expenses £250. Assuming these items are settled by the end of the financial year (31st March), the bank balance will be £2640, giving a surplus on the year of £62.

Income

- Reading Borough Council Grant - £500
- Christmas Sale (after expenses) - £128
- Task charges (estimate) - £850 (includes £245 relating to previous year's tasks)
- Bank interest - £65

Expenses

- Insurance and related charges - £500
- Tools - £350 (including bow saw blades, telescopic loppers, shears (x2), pruning saws(x3), stimmer harness and hot water flask)
- Website - £37
- Stationery and Printing - £36
- Administration (estimate) - £56
- Volunteer expenses (estimate) - £502 (£344 relates to payments for providing transport, £158 for refreshments and other expenses)

The volunteer expenses which relate to CROW tasks, are up by over £100 on the previous year. This is in part due to the increased transport payments agreed last year, but also reflects the increase in volunteers on CROW tasks. CROW expects to complete approximately 370 volunteer days by the end of the year, 40% up on the previous year, with a typical turnout over the winter months of between 8 and 13.

CROW task charges for the year will be £645 which after volunteer expenses (£502) leaves a surplus of £143.

Dave expressed concern as to whether the current level of insurance (1000 volunteer days) was adequate. The need to record all task active (CROW, Clayfield

Copse, Mapledurham Playing Fields, McIlroy Park and Waterloo Meadows) was emphasised.

Bank interest of £65 is down from £142 last year. Given the current interest rate of 0.1%, bank interest next year is likely to be about £2. No action has so far been taken regarding moving the accounts. While better rates of interest are available, the most likely to be gained is in the order of £20. The treasurer will continue to monitor the situation.

Letter confirming RBC grant of £500 for 2009/2010 has been received.

£40 BTCV tool vouchers received as a result of 2 young people participating in the group's activities, a further 7 young people received music vouchers. [This was part of a BTCV scheme to encourage young volunteers, ages 16 - 25. Econet opted to offer music vouchers as an alternative to receiving tool vouchers, as a 'thank you' to those involved].

Treasurer's incidental expenses of £45 were agreed. This includes maintenance of the website.

Publicity

On behalf of Econet Alan had assembled a wonderful display of posters, a news letter, business cards etc. for the 'On Our Watch' exhibition [based around St Mary's churchyard] in Reading in late November/early December. Various local environment groups had taken part. Items left were put in Reading Library. Thank you said to Alan

Tools

Alan and John expressed concern re tools missing at the store, some returned later some not in good condition. Dave reported that there were plans to move RBC tools to another container and that 'Tools for Self Reliance' would be sharing our container in future. He also said that 'Rescue' had been using the container for their recent clearance day.

Events

Christmas Tree Sales *[actually this was discussed briefly later but should have been here!]* generally felt it was successful; thank you to all who turned out for cutting and selling on some of the wettest days of last year and to Judith for organising. A search party was needed to find trees for this year's sale possibly at Snelmore Common.

Green Festival at Reading Library 18th April: Alan volunteered to take similar material that he used for 'On Our Watch' and would spend some time there. Judith also volunteered to spend some time there.

Forbury Fever 6th June had suggested a practical group could be present. Some discussion followed as to how we could show our practicality but a display of material, as above, would be ok. Alan is to contact for more info.

Heavenly Planet Festival 10/11 July Anne Latto reported that this was a spin off from activities that took place at Womad in previous years which at the time of the

meeting was not entirely confirmed owing to poor ticket sales. A Green Corner could be a feature in which Econet could be involved. More discussion on showing our practical skills - Anne to confirm whether it would take place and a rep would be needed to attend committee meetings. *[RBC subsequently announced that the event had been cancelled]*

Walks Trish as part of RUWG is hoping to promote discussions/walks etc. to look at future enhancement of the river Kennet and it's relationship to Reading.

Control of Ragwort

Judith was concerned about the ragwort control carried out at Clayfield Copse site which seems to be motivated entirely by the adjoining grazing land owner, [an area to the north of the site]. She felt there was room for some discussion with those concerned. She will prepare a draft case to present to the local councilors proposing that the area controlled could be reduced for the benefit of bio diversity on the site.

Lower Southcote Allotments

Dave reported that an area approx. 1 acre bounded by the railway and the Holy Brook is available for a possible nature reserve which Econet could take on. The meeting agreed that members could look further into this.

AOB

It was agreed that Tricia Marcouse would be Econet's representative on re3's Stakeholder Group. *[re3 is a partnership between Bracknell Forest, Wokingham and Reading councils and the Waste Recycling Group, and oversees the Bracknell and Reading recycling centres. It is developing waste minimisation and education projects to help the councils achieve their recycling targets. Earlier this year local groups were invited to participate in the development of re3 through a Stakeholder Group.]*

Friends of Cowsey would like to participate in Econet as a non working group.

Date of Next Meeting

7th September 2009, Parks Department Offices, Prospect Park at 7.30pm.