

ECONET AGM
26th July 2024, 1.30pm
RISC Reading

Attendance: Vicky Clayden, David Barks, Sandra Jackson, Phil Allen, Keith Alexander, Mike Cox, Judith Oliver, Steve Lloyd, Marcus Wheeler, Tricia Marcouse, Cathy Holwill.

Apologies: Steve Ayres.

Minutes from previous meeting: Approved

Matters arising from 2023: Covered later as part of other discussions.

Election of officers:

- Sandra and Dave agreed to stay as joint Chair which was approved.
- Marcus agreed to stay as Secretary which was approved.
- Alan has stepped down as Treasurer, and Cathy has agreed to take over the role. Vote: unanimously in favour. Cathy and Alan will work together to hand over duties.

News from Friend of Groups:

CROW: The program is full, and going well. Various members mentioned their continued interest in looking for new sites and work opportunities.

Friends of Clayfield Copse: Good number of tasks, well attended.

- Judith raised the issue of a lack of formal action plans. RBC contact Caroline Jenkins has left and is being replaced. Her (Caroline's) stance on our work was that she had looked at our policies, documentation and work, concluded that we knew what we were doing, and so should just get on with it and keep in touch. Tricia agreed to try and contact Caroline's replacement. David agreed to get in touch with Rosie Street to find out who the RBC contact was on the Berkshire LNRS for any future reference to RBC. It was finally suggested, to considerable agreement, that, given the group's experience and knowledge, we were uniquely placed to do our own surveys and come up with our own action plans.
- Judith asked if we could install an information board about Clayfield copse with information about the site, and promote Econet. Vote: unanimously approved. Judith to get a quote.

Friends of Waterloo Meadows: A few more members had joined, and work was proceeding well.

Friends of McIlroy Park: Work continues well.

Friends of Ruscombe Wood: Steve reported that they had as many volunteers as they could handle and work was going well.

Friends of the Cowsey: Work continues well.

- Keith pointed out that two representatives from Nature Nurture had come along, and promised to attend regularly, and possibly provide some funding, but they had never been heard from since. Others commented that Nature Nurture seemed to have ended involvement with other projects as well, so perhaps were no longer as involved with our work anymore.

New groups: Tricia mentioned a Reading University conservation group, run by Dan Fairbank, possibly joining Econet. She didn't think there would be enough work to do, given the university's efficient estates team, but suggested attending the fresher's fair and gauging student interest in doing work with students on the Whiteknights site.

H&S: The importance of training new volunteers was raised, and agreed on. The importance of training new volunteers was raised and agreed on. It was also stressed by some present that ALL volunteers, regardless of expertise, must ensure that safe working practises are employed e.g. ensuring that tools are used in the correct manner. It was agreed that task leaders must ensure that any potential H&S issues are highlighted at the beginning of each task including site-specific ones.

Insurance: Vicky reported that there were no changes needed, but we should keep any eye on the maximum number of volunteer hour numbers as we agree to include new groups, but that we did currently have headroom on this right now.

Tools:

- A brief discussion was had on the use of scythes. Clearly safe working procedures are important. It was decided to buy one and see how much use we got from it. Teresa from the Old Cemetery group has previously asked for one
- A brief discussion was had on the use of rechargeable brush cutters and if we should get one. It was pointed out that we already have one. Vicky confirmed that its use is covered by our existing insurance policy.

Accounts: They are available on the website. There are no issues arising.

Publicity and Events: Waterfest was a big success.

We have been asked to give consideration to a new Twyford group: Steve Lloyd mentioned a new group to establish on Wokingham borough land. The locals were enthusiastic, WBC were supportive and had been helpful. He asked if they could become part of Econet and be covered by Econet's insurance. Also could CROW do a few early tasks to help set it up. It was agreed that the group be called the Econet friends of Broadhinton Copse group or something similar. Vote: unanimously agreed.

Note it was agreed that the policy for any new group joining Econet in the future should be named "Econet ????????" with Econet first in the name.

Econet's future bank accounts In order to move away from sending cheques to be signed, etc. new bank accounting systems should be looked into, including the Lloyd's treasure's account. David and Cathy to investigate.

Minimum age of volunteers -We have recently been looking into offering Econet's services to the NHS Social Prescribing service. This has highlighted our duties of care for any volunteer under the age of 18 (technically classed as a child in the UK). It was felt that we need to look into this matter further as there are potential safeguarding issues, however, a parent or guardian accompanying the child was thought to be acceptable.

With this in mind, a full review of all Econet procedures and policies including safeguarding and insurance is to be carried out to ensure that we have good governance in place. This task was assigned to Sandra, Dave and Vicky.

AOB:

- Meeting attendees were reminded that all volunteers are Econet volunteers. It is perfectly acceptable to continue organising tasks as Friends of XX for example but please remember that our insurance is in the name of Econet and that all volunteers are Econet volunteers.
- Insurance nominee: The address on our insurance policy should be updated to the new Treasure's.
- Funding request: Tricia asked if she could have £40 for hornbeam for the Peppard road site. Cathy agreed. Vote: Unanimously agreed.

Date of next meeting: to be agreed.

Meeting closed: 3:22