

Meeting of ECONET

8th September 2008

Parks Department Offices, Prospect Park 7:30pm

Present:

Tricia Marcouse - Reading Urban Wildlife Group
Jenny Cottee - Tilehurst Globe
Judith Oliver - Mapledurham Playing Fields
John Lerpiniere - CROW (Chair)
Oonagh Kelleher - BTCV (Minutes)
Paul Forrest-Jameson - BTCV
Peter Scudamore - Clayfield Copse
Carolyn Jenkins - Reading Borough Council

Apologies:

Dave Booth, Steve Ayers, Vicky Barker, Alan Stevens, Anne Latto

Minutes of Last Meeting and Matters Arising

Alan was to approach RVA about publicity and contacts, it needs to be confirmed that he has done so.

Steve was to find out prices for a banner. Alan has a contact in Pangbourne. Peter also has a contact and he is going to enquire about prices and sizes. Once prices are confirmed the group will consider the size of the banner.

Kennet Valley Park - There is a proposal to build 7,500 houses in the Kennet Valley Park, but there has been so much opposition that a minister has said that it should be taken out of the South East Regional Plan. Letters need to be written in opposition to this before the end of October. There is a template on the website. Alan to put a reminder of this deadline on the website?

Green Forum - John attended the Green Forum and reported comments of excellent work on Eldon Square by RBC.

News & Updates

Mcllroys Park

Christine Cliburn emailed describing what they have done in the last year.

- Laying wood chip
- Coppicing hazel
- Scrub clearance
- Cutting back holly
- Clearance scrub along the path - to encourage butterflies
- Clearing brambles

She also informed Econet that they had 3 new members one of which found out about the group through the Econet website.

Conserve Reading on Wednesdays (CROW)

CROW managed to fill their summer programme and their winter programme is full up until December. About half of their tasks were outside Reading as there are not enough tasks for RBC. Caversham Court is on hold for the winter due to redesign. CROW built three insect hotels, one of them in Caversham Court (pictures on website). There is a possibility of building more on allotment sites, encouraged by Carolyn. To make a whole task volunteers could hunt for materials in the morning and make it in the afternoon. CROW has built a Stag Beetle breeding pile in Caversham Court and Oxford Road Community Gardens, there is also a possibility of doing this in allotments as well. If there was funding it would also be nice to put green roofs on allotment sheds (community sheds not private sheds). Tricia suggested sedum as it grows almost anywhere. There may be funding from Green Roofs through the council, this would need to be applied for but the construction would need to be simple, weight and waterproofing would need to be considered. John Little may know some simple construction techniques. Carolyn is to give Tricia, John Little's email address. There was also another suggestion of building bat boxes.

Clayfield Copse

The group feel there is a need to have a seminar to discuss ragwort, as they often take on the task of removing it. They feel there is a need for some kind of policy, so they know what they are doing each year and they are not just pulling everything. The councillor Elizabeth Ward has got involved in this issues and is keen on having a meeting. Chris Webster may also like to be involved in this meeting. Dave Rees from Oxford Woodlands Group will buy coppice bundles at £5- £6 each, he will take 5 bundles at a time. The group have been having good attendance and had 9 people on Sunday.

Andy Noyes could not get to the tool store at the weekend as it was blocked with goal posts. Carolyn is to check the situation with the Parks Dept. The strimmer is chained up and he did not have a key. John explained that there are 3 strimmers and he has the keys and plans to talk to Andy about it. Judith is to give Tricia and John, Andy's new email.

BTCV

Oonagh Kelleher the new Community Project Officer has taken up post since the last meeting. BTCV are running several training courses which are advertised here www2.btcv.org.uk/display/training. Paul wants to identify a venue in Reading for the one of the training course, it was suggested that he consider Prospect Park and Maiden Erlegh. BTCV have received lots of Employee Action Days enquires. Reading is a good location to run these but they need sites to run them on and they also tend to be requested in the summer. If anyone has any sites to suggest please do so. Dave Booth knows what needs doing in Reading and regular contact between him and BTCV could be advantageous. Kings Meadows needs some flower beds weeded and wood chip to be scattered, it is a big job and maybe suitable for an EAD group. In regards to volunteer enquires in the area, BTCV has been passing on information about Econet, but are not able to follow up whether the people who enquire actually volunteer with members. BTCV is considering setting up a week day group that would cover Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, this would be linked with Climate Change Action Teams. This should not affect other member's volunteer numbers as it would not necessarily be regular tasks. BTCV are offering

vouchers for tools and plants to Econet members in exchange for information about young people (16-25yrs) that have been volunteering with them in the last year. Oonagh is sending out an email in the next week with more detail. The deadline for replies is the 6/10/08.

Reading Urban Wildlife Group

The Reading Urban Wildlife Group gave their opinion on the Station Road development.

The group had an event where Leslie Dunlop an archaeologist/geologist gave a guided tour of Reading describing the geology of the stone of different buildings. They are considering doing something similar in Hungerford in partnership with the Wildlife Trust. This event will be opened to local councillors so they get to know the area and understand what they are talking about in the future. Martin Swift might be a good contact for funding.

Dave Booth is hunting for funding and is going to put in a bid for all 13 woodlands in Reading to be surveyed. This will assist in creating management plans and applying for further funding. The issue of the lack of survey information was raised as much has been done in the past but much has been lost. BBOWT should have Heritage Site survey information and this would also be lodged with Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre (TVERC). Tricia will email Tina Gower to see if there is more.

Accounts

Alan provided the following information regarding the accounts.

Financial Year ending March 2008: During this period the Group organised over 80 conservation tasks.

Bank balance fell by almost £900 to £2,578 although £245 was owed to the Group for task charges (now paid). Main reason was expenditure on tools, £769.

Reading Borough Council grant of £500 was used to provide insurance. Tools insurance was increased to cover those stored at Prospect Park.

Task charges made by CROW exceeded task expenses by £115.

A change to the bank account result in an almost threefold increase in the interest received to £142.

Current Year: Bank balance £3,094 at 1st September, this includes grant of £500 received from Reading Borough Council which will be used to pay insurance due in December.

So far this year £208 has been spent on tools (loppers, shears x2, saw blades) and £68 on volunteer expenses. £52 interest has been received on the bank account.

Outstanding items: Task charges to be invoiced £150. Volunteer expenses to be paid £95.

Estimated income from future tasks £160, volunteer expenses arising from those tasks £126.

Bank Account Changes: From the 1st August changes to the interest paid on the Reserve account mean we will receive 1.5% compared to 3.95% recently enjoyed. This will be further reduced to 0.5% should the balance fall below £2,000.

Consideration should be given to changing the bank account. One option would be a Nationwide Treasurer's account currently paying 2.5% gross (2% net) on all balances. Interest is paid twice yearly, AER 2.52%. This is a passbook account which can be operated through any Nationwide branch.

Interest is currently paid gross, by default the Nationwide interest would be paid net. We would need to contact the Inland Revenue regarding having the interest paid gross.

If we move to Nationwide, it is suggested that both our Reserve and cheque accounts (the latter pays no interest) are closed and we operate with a single account. Given the number of Nationwide branches, the lack of a cheque book should not be a problem.

Grant: Preparation of this year's application in progress. Input from Clayfield Copse, Mapledurham Playing Fields, McIlroy Park and Waterloo Meadows on the task work done over the last year would be welcome (email sent).

In regards to the bank account changes. Carolyn suggested linking one account to another. Not every bank gives groups free banking. The Tilehurst Globe have the money in a 6 month bond in which they make more interest when they don't take money out within this period. Nationwide can offer a cheque account which may solve the problem. There may be a need for a sub-group to sit down and sort out this problem.

Alan has put together an Annual Report to present to the council, which was passed around for the group's approval. Econet would like to congratulate Alan on the report, they think it has been done very nicely and to go ahead with it.

Health & Safety

There were no issues.

Publicity

Alan has designed a business card to give to people who ask questions on site. As a business card it is convenient.

Future Management of Kings Meadow

Alan has had an enquiry from Jeremy, a National Trust ranger at Osterley Park who knows Christine Brewster. They are planning to build a bird hide from chestnut with access via a living willow tunnel some 30 metres in length. To construct the tunnel they need some 300 x 10m lengths of willow. I have explained it would be unlikely that we could obtain this from Kings Meadow however they may also be interested in whips to create screening.

If they are interested in obtaining material from Kings Meadow, one or two National Trust rangers would join a CROW task for the day, at the end of which they would remove the material they require.

Dominic the weaver will not be cutting willow this year. So the group needs to find another user as it seems pointless to cut it and then chip it. Here are some ideas:

- Carolyn may have contacts in schools
- (There is an example of a willow tunnel at Hosehill Nature Reserve)
- Have a working day of cutting the willow and making something.
- CROW could do hedge laying
- Albert Rd want an arch
- Parks - but there are H&S issues here and maintenance
- There may be a possibility of getting a community group grant to hire somebody. In this case they need to get a price from Dominic or Chris for a day's work and pre design work.
- Sara Kopp, ex Caversham Court, may also use some.
- Reading in Bloom is another opportunity, as it would be advertised in the Post so would get plenty of publicity - send a proposal to Carolyn.

AOB

The Parks Department are planning another project in a park but don't know where yet and will it be a joint project. They will accept any suggestions of a site that needs 50 people working on it: Coal Woodland for tree planting, bulb sowing and bench making, and The Cowsey where suggested.

The group were informed about the GREN Climate Chance event and were invited to share the thoughts at the AGM after the event.

Damaged Tools: Loppers have been roughly treated and they are pretty sure it is not CROW. Other tools are missing. John will speak to Dave Booth.

BTCV offered their tools to anyone that needs to borrow them.

The Mapledurham group and the Clayfield group may begin to share tools and house more in Caversham. (Judith)

Don't forget the opportunity to get free vouchers for tools from BTCV.

The British Waterways may have work along the Kennet and Avon Canal even in Reading, in Partnership with BTCV next summer. RUWG have a portable folding boat that can be used for these tasks.

A new ecologist has been employed by the council who will be surveying woodland and other sites in the Parks Action Plan. He will also be looking at Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) targets. He needs baseline data from which to work. The council are having a seminar on 23rd October on their legal obligation to biodiversity, this is closed to the public but Carolyn will keep the group informed on the outcome.

Carolyn would like to be kept informed of any issues eg not to mow at King Meadows at certain times of the year due to a rare moth. Tricia informed Carolyn of the services wires bound to the tree at Market Square which are too tight and also a few on Broad Street.

Date of Next Meeting

16th March 2009, Parks Department Offices, Prospect Park at 7.30pm.

RBC Feedback