

MINUTES ECONET AGM

31st July 2025, 7pm

RISC Reading

Attendees: David Barks, Sandra Jackson, Keith Alexander, Steve Lloyd, Marcus Wheeler, Cathy Holwill, Adrian Larkham, Peter Scudamore, Phil Griffin, Liz Carr.

Apologies: Steve Ayres, Trisha Marcouse, Teresa Verney-Brooks, Mike Mahoney, Judith Oliver, Mike Cox.

Minutes from previous meeting: Approved.

Election of officers:

- Sandra and Dave agreed to stay as joint Chair which was approved.
- Marcus agreed to stay as Secretary which was approved.
- Cathy agreed to stay as Treasurer which was approved.

News from Econet work groups:

CRoW: The program is full, and going well with continued variation of tasks. Various members mentioned their continued interest in looking for new sites and work opportunities.

Friends of Clayfield Copse: Good number of tasks, roughly 2 every month, well attended. Judith has previously raised the issue of out of date woodland management plans by RBC. We need authority from RBC to provide a level of legitimacy if

challenged. Pedro Borralho of RBC has access to our website and is aware of what work is being done on which sites and is happy for us to continue.

Friends of Waterloo Meadows: With a few members work has proceeded well in improving the biodiversity of the site. The main problem this year has been the over-zealous cutting of areas by the council contractors. A suggestion was made that some volunteers may be interested in doing more site surveys which might provide evidence of the effectiveness of our work.

Friends of Mapledurham Playing Fields: A good range of work, including orchard maintenance, has been carried out, with pleasing attendance.

Friends of Ruscombe Wood: Steve reported that they had as many volunteers as they could handle and work was going well. A recent orchid survey indicated an increase in numbers.

Friends of Reading Old Cemetery: Work continues, with between 3 and 7 volunteers. Teresa has produced an action plan.

Econet Charvil: Five regular volunteers have done tasks including orchard planting and invasive species removal. A recent survey of tree species has been conducted, with a map showing locations. It was felt that this might be something we should consider doing for other sites where we regularly work. The group has been asked to get involved with wild flower planting in other areas of Charvil.

Econet Broad Hinton Copse: This new group has been involved in hedge laying, isolated hazel coppicing and the removal of over dominant species and invasive garden

species. They have completed a bat survey with the Berkshire and South Bucks Bat Group and installed a bird box. The response from locals and casual walkers has been mainly positive.

Friends of the Cowsey: Work continues well. Keith pointed out that representatives from Nature Nurture attend along with other volunteers on a regular basis. Nature Nurture were also trying to secure more funding with a view to installing information boards and nature walk markers.

Financial Report:

Our accounts have been switched from Santander to Lloyds. Recent investment in training and new equipment had outstripped income, but the accounts were still healthy. The importance of the Christmas tree sale and bean-pole day was noted.

Safeguarding:

Our policy has been approved and signed and will be available on the web-site shortly. All task leaders have now been trained. All active volunteers will be made aware shortly of the policy and as asked to watch a video regarding implementation.

Health & Safety:

We have obtained scythes, and several members have been trained to use them. Their use should be included in safety talks. 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.

Any Other Business:

New groups: In her absence Tricia mentioned the possibility of a Reading University conservation group joining Econet. It is early days and the group, whilst positive about encouraging younger people to be involved in conservation, thought we should wait to see how things develop. If however in the meantime, loaning tools to such a group if necessary would be no problem.

Corporate groups: In the past Econet has been contacted by corporate groups to provide team bonding work experience. It was suggested that Econet could accommodate such groups but ask for a financial contribution. It was suggested that this might be a significant financial source.

Insurance: Vicky reported that there were no changes needed, but we should keep an 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.

Christmas trees: Our usual site is no longer available. We need a new site. Keith suggested the Englefield estate and has agreed to investigate. Steve Lloyd suggested Bramshill, which is managed by the Woodland Trust. It was agreed to continue looking for suitable sites.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8:15pm

