

Minutes of GREN Committee meeting held on 26th February 2015

1. Attendees and Apologies etc.:

GREN Committee members: Peter Chan (PC) (Chair); John Booth (JB) (Secretary); Tony Cowling (AC) (Treasurer); Tricia Marcouse (TM); Tanja Rebel (TR).

GREN members: Chris Burden (Reading FoE member).

Apologies: Paul Harper.

Meeting was held from 6:00 pm in the 'Library' of the Great Expectations in London Street.

The meeting had been called to consider specific agenda items so did not review minutes of previous meetings, lists of actions, or general progress.

2. Underfloor Insulation Project –

AC had applied on GREN's behalf for £9,800 to trial a novel underfloor insulation technique in a "Community Energy Competition" run by DECC. See proposal at http://www.gren.org.uk/resources/Underfloor_Insulation_1st_Feb.pdf

A number of potential risks had been identified, but because timescale to application date had been short the GREN Committee had agreed by e-mail that the application should be submitted with the proviso that - in the event that funding was granted – the Committee would review whether or not to go ahead.

JB said he thought that, as it was primarily a networking and lobbying organisation, GREN was not the right group to undertake this sort of project, but that if funding were granted it should try to find a way to carry it through.

AC said that he had learned that two other entries to the competition had been rejected but he had heard nothing of this one, so he was still hopeful that it might succeed. He had spoken to DECC and believed he could meet their timescales for invoicing.

Concerns were expressed about damp rising through the insulation material, and about the insulation causing problems with underfloor pipes or cables. AC said he was aware of these possibilities and was confident they could be managed. Humidity sensors would be fitted and monitored.

He said that he hoped to try the technique on five different types of suspended floor – it was a technique that was reversible and had been tried elsewhere, and he would use professional contractors who would have their own insurance. TM said that the proposal to move a Nursery from Rivermead to Palmer Park might provide an opportunity for a demonstration site.

JB had confirmed with Reading Voluntary Action that as an 'Unincorporated Association' GREN Committee Members would be personally liable for any liabilities that exceeded GREN's funds. AC said that would be unacceptable and he would ensure that liability for the project fell on a CIC (Community Interest Company - where liabilities are limited to £1 per director).

It was agreed that if GREN is granted funding AC would contact DECC and seek to have funding and responsibility for the project transferred to a CIC – either the Reading Sustainability Centre or a new CIC established for the purpose.

3. Elections 2015

It was agreed that GREN's 2014 local election hustings meeting in the Quaker Meeting House had been a useful event. In 2015 there would be both local and national elections on Thursday 7th May.

A number of organisations – Churches Together in Reading, Quakers, University of Reading, etc., were proposing to run hustings this year – but none on a specifically environmental theme.

Chris Burden said he had considered running an event – not specifically on an environmental theme - in St Laurence's Church on a Saturday in April – to give the public the opportunity to engage with candidates. He had stopped working on this because he did not think it could be achieved in time. Comments were that: this would only work as a drop-in if politicians were prepared to be there for a long time; people shop in town on Saturdays, but Sundays would be better for local people coming in with more time to spare (there was some doubt about this).

There was general agreement that GREN should seek to run activities with specifically environmental aims, and that it should also seek to help its members to ask environmental questions at other hustings.

Agreed:

- Information on other groups' hustings meetings should be made available to GREN members via the internet.

JB said we should be clear on benefits we might hope to achieve: publicity for environmental issues in the media; GREN members and public able to question politicians and hear their responses; politicians motivated to research and engage with environmental issues.

Hustings:

There was much debate as to whether GREN hustings meetings should focus on local or national elections – or cover both. Eventually it was agreed that it would be impractical to hold three meetings (to cover Reading East, Reading West, and the Council elections) and to work towards a single central hustings with each party invited to nominate one representative, giving a maximum panel size of 5.

There were many local issues to discuss – cuts in services, cycling, biodiversity in parks, third Thames bridge, etc. - politicians would find it harder to avoid commitment on specific local questions than they would when discussing national policies.

Timing of a hustings was discussed – weekday evening was preferred. Local politicians are used to 6:30 start for Council meetings, but that is rather early for people who do not work in central Reading. 7:30 was provisionally agreed as a sensible time.

Agreed:

- PC would assess St Laurence's Church as a possible town-centre venue for evening or weekend meetings.
- JB should approach Prof. Gavin Parker to chair the meeting (as in 2014) and check availability of possible venues.

Other ways to engage:

There were a number of additional possibilities as well as hustings meetings:

- Local radio stations could host live debates

Minutes of GREN Committee meeting held on 26th February 2015

- Web-chat format – collect questions from members and public, get answers from candidates, publish answers on website and to media – suggested publish answers from all candidates simultaneously to avoid disputes over favouritism.
- Live web-chat – suggestion that ‘getreading’ probably has facilities for this, and could perhaps hold sessions on different topics at different times.

Agreed:

- AC would contact ‘getreading’ to ask what they could do, and seek co-operation.
- JB would contact FoE London office - who were supposed to be generating a list of questions for candidates – to find out when their questions would be available.

4. Action AWE Reading Affinity Group

Action AWE Reading Affinity Group’s application for GREN Membership had been reviewed by the Committee before the meeting, and agreement had been reached to accept their application for GREN membership, so it was not discussed further.

5. Plan GREN Members’ Meetings

JB said GREN’s Constitution required it to have three GREN Members’ Meetings per year. They were needed to give members opportunities: for networking; for deciding on future GREN activities; and for reporting on work by GREN representatives on other bodies such as the Reading Climate Change Partnership. For some meetings speakers or activities had been pre-arranged to encourage members to attend, with some success.

Suggestions for ‘outdoor’ summer meetings received – and comments - included:

- A Burger BBQ on Thames Meadow – perhaps a part of a litter-pick, and/or a joint effort with Dreadnaught and Waterside.
- MERL – there could be quite large entry costs involved
- University Botanic Garden (Harris Garden?) – Harris Garden would need permission.
- Expedition - perhaps one early summer evening – by ‘green’ means of transport (bike, walk, canoe) where possible – jointly with members of The Reading Sustainability Centre to Mapledurham to see the mill and hydro scheme there – to include refreshments.
- Outdoor meetings could include football to encourage interaction between people in different groups

Suggestions for indoor locations included:

- A social lunch meeting at a Repair Café – which now has a meeting room and some degree of kitchen facilities on-site at Jackson’s Corner.
- TR offered to give a talk on Eco-Philosophy as part of any meeting.

No decisions were taken – Mapledurham and the Repair Café options were favoured - Thames Meadow to be explored further.

6. AOB

Thames Meadow:

Member Roger Williams had asked by e-mail if GREN might consider adopting Thames Meadow – east of the Horseshoe Bridge – as an Area of Interest.

Minutes of GREN Committee meeting held on 26th February 2015

JB said this area was in Earley and he had arranged for Mr. Williams to be contacted by the Earley Environmental Group – a GREN member group – which does some work in the Thames Meadow area, and this contact had taken place in 2014.

It was suggested that Mr. Williams could form a 'Friends of' group, and/or could seek assistance from CROW or Econet if practical work was needed.

It was agreed that JB should contact Mr. Williams with these suggestions and find out what more GREN might do. GREN saw its role primarily as networking and lobbying– it would support groups and individuals with particular interests in particular areas. GREN did not see it as its role to take on on-going site-specific responsibilities.

East Reading Festival:

Member Roger Williams had asked by e-mail if GREN would like to participate with a promotion at the East Reading Festival.

It was agreed that JB should investigate this further with Mr. Williams.

Minutes by John Booth Version: 05/03/2015