

## Minutes of GREN Members' Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2016 at RISC

### 1. Welcome, introductions, and apologies:

Meeting was quorate with more than six members, including at least three Committee members, present.

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

GREN members: Jackie Oversby; John Oversby; Eleanor Pitts; John Hoggett; Paul Harper; Chris Burden

Apologies: None

### 2. Minutes of last member meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2015

<http://www.gren.org.uk/resources/151007GRENMembersMinutes.pdf>

- Agreed correct

### 3. Updates from GREN Officers and Committee:

- Chair – PC – no issues to report. Was starting to investigate reasons for perceived lack of involvement of members of minority communities with GREN member groups. Was getting introductions to community groups from Rob White – initial impression was that environmental concerns were widely shared but did not result in involvement with GREN groups. TM said Econet had been asked to provide a speaker for a group that met at Battle Library – she would forward details to PC. WA said Bike Kitchen had been a useful way to meet a wide variety of people – central location and drop-in were assets.
- Treasurer – AC – Account was in the black. It was agreed to renew website Domain Registration for an additional 2 years (to 2019) for £12 before the price went up (JB to inform Loud'n'Clear). GREN are grateful to Loud'n'Clear for not billing for website support.
- Secretary – JB  
GREN Membership:
  - Website – October 2015 was 194 – now 203 registered – perhaps a few lapsed?
  - Website Groups – New – Pangbourne and Whitchurch Sustainability Group – Total now 29
  - Facebook – October 2015 was 203 – now 223. Several recent postings had been 'seen by' over 50 people and one by 61.

#### EcoChurch:

Following on from the Bishop of Reading's 'Reading Climate Day' in December JB planned to meet with Rev'd Dr Liz Ratcliffe (Curate of Christchurch) and Joanna Laynesmith on 15<sup>th</sup> March to discuss future collaboration. TM and probably AC would be involved – anyone else interested should contact JB.

Liz and Joanna had attended launch of EcoChurch – <http://arocha.org.uk/> - an award scheme – and had arranged a series of local meetings and were encouraging take-up of the Big Shift campaign to encourage change to a green electricity supplier.

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### 4. Updates from GREN representatives on other bodies:

- Cycling Forum – TR

Broad Street: At the last Forum meeting there had been discussion of proposals to allow cycling everywhere in Broad Street, rather than just at the eastern end as at present. This was now going to a statutory consultation run by the Council which closes on 10<sup>th</sup> March – on-line at <http://www.reading.gov.uk/cyclingconsultation> .

Noted that Berkshire Disabled against the Cuts objected to cycling in Broad Street and it was not popular with some other individuals.

GREN members' opinions were divided as to whether defined lanes (perhaps colour-coded) would be useful but there was general agreement that if it went ahead there was a requirement for improved signage and speed limits and that cyclists should give priority to pedestrians. Information about the consultation was already on GREN Facebook - should be posted to website. It was suggested Tanja should try to take to the College radio station Blast 1386 and John should contact UoR students' 'Environment and Ethics' Officer to seek involvement.

Funding for Cycling: Another topic had been the request by Green Councillor Jamie Whitham that the Council should devote 1% of its transport budget to cycling infrastructure. This had been turned down by Councillor Page.

- Reading Climate Change Partnership – RCCP – JB

Changes to Board Members:

- New Chair – Dan Fernbank - UoR
- New member – Chris Beales – EA – replacing Sally Coble
- Returning member – Jonny Riggall (Peter Brett Associates) – replacing Jenny Allen

RCCP Board Meeting held in January 2016 – minutes awaited

- Ben Burfoot staying in post after inputs to budget consultation from GREN and RCCP – but will change role to access other funding.
- Issues for RCCP with loss of other staff, especially Summreen Sheikh from end March 2016, because of budget cuts.
- RCCP had had £50k to invest in PV before autumn deadline – had loaned to RISC who were able to use it for pre-registered projects.
- RCCP has thousands of pounds to give as grants from annual income of around £25k – applicants welcome.
- New Theme Lead – Helen Garforth – Education Chapter
- RCAN Newsletter – link <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/news-events/rcan-newsletters/> – includes offer of loan of Thermal Imaging Camera to anyone who wants to check insulation.

TM asked JB to post information on grants to GREN website and Facebook to remind members.

- Social Value in Public Commissioning Project

TM had been nominated by GREN to work on this government-backed collaborative project which had looked at how the new legal requirement to incorporate social and environmental values in public commissioning could be achieved.

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She said social and health issues had predominated but she had managed to achieve some progress on environmental matters. For example measures might include a commissioning body using Food4Families as a partner organisation.

Guidelines on setting objectives and evaluating results had been prepared. The final open meeting, where there should have been some sort of buy-in from Reading Council and Health Authority, was supposed to be on September 28<sup>th</sup> 2015. Progress appears to have stalled – for unknown reasons.

It was surmised that the delay could be because commissioning bodies did not want to make the effort to consider non-financial matters – but the law did require this to be done. Another possibility was issues arising from transfer of health responsibilities to local authorities.

It was suggested that GREN could complain formally but decided that this would not have useful effect because GREN not an important partner.

JB commented there were contrasts to recent issue with government arguing that Councils should not be allowed to boycott suppliers or countries – when Councils were required to take social and environmental issues into account by law. Government was insisting that Councils only had freedom to act within government policy.

### 5. GREN Climate Change Seminars

This initiative had grown from a suggestion from Dr. Rayner Mayer (Institute of Education). GREN AGM had suggested that RCCP should run a series of talks but GREN was an option to run them. RCCP preferred it to be GREN-badged and had agreed funding £300 to cover 4 events – subject to events being documented for publication in RCAN website.

A 'steering group' consisting of GREN Committee plus Rayner Mayer, and Dan Fernbank and Chris Beales (both from RCCP Board) had been established and Rayner, Dan and Chris had met with JB.

JB distributed notes from this meeting:

Initial series of 4 meetings to run to June 2016 but hope a second series (of 4?) will run in autumn/winter 2016. First series seen as relatively detailed exploration of topics, aiming to allow lots of discussion. Target audience 'Green Groups' and Green Party but should advertise widely.

Proposed topics for first series:

- Extreme Weather Events – Chris Beales – *Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March*
- Carbon Fee and Dividend – Clive Elsworth of Citizens Climate Lobby – *Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> March – maybe later in April if GREN not running a Hustings*
- Impact of Climate Change on Agriculture - *Rayner to seek speaker from Walker Institute – April to early June?*
- What COP21 achieved – is it sufficient? - *Rayner to seek speaker from Walker Institute – April to early June?*

In discussion members questioned technical level and audience for these events – agriculture topic could be of interest to gardeners and food growers but risk that speaker might be an exponent of complex technical fixes and be unable or un-prepared to communicate at appropriate level for the audience. Accepted that choice will partly depend on what willing speakers can be found.

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Would be good to broaden to wide audience - e.g. collaborate with unions – national FoE's 'Climate Rising' event had been in collaboration with Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) whose Mark Serwotka had taken part.

John Oversby said would be good to have a topic around the psychology of change – recommended contacts at UoR Katherine Maskell (Walker Institute) and Marina Della Giusta (Economics) – JB said he was already in touch with both of them.

WA suggested could involve Organic Research Council (from West Berks.) in food/agriculture topics.

### 6. **Local Plan 'Issues and Options'** consultation

JB explained that RBC was consulting on 'Issues and Options' for a revision of the Local Plan. They wanted comments on policies and on sites around the Borough – both on sites suitable for development for housing or business and those to be retained for wildlife. These comments would inform preparation of a draft plan which would go to further consultation before a formal Examination by Planning Inspectorate, probably in 2017 or 2018.

JB said process was driven by central government requirement for local authority to plan to meet objectively defined 'housing needs' (699 homes per year until 2037) and accommodate economic growth, with little regard for environmental implications. Regional and sub-regional strategic planning had been abolished by the coalition government. Under previous government 'environmental footprint' of South East region (excluding London) had been assessed as 29 times land area so rationally should be looking to reduce population, at least in the long term, to reduce environmental impact, if sustainability was the aim.

TM encouraged response to the consultation saying that it was much more difficult to get changes at later stages of the process.

John Hoggett drew attention to the LEAP Manifesto <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/sign-the-manifesto/> as advocated for Canada by Naomi Klein, and said he would like to work towards something similar to create Climate Jobs and Caring Jobs in the UK, rather than trying to work through the Council's Plan which he saw as rooted in the current paradigm, undemocratic, and offering false hope.

Eleanor Pitts commented that it was difficult to work out how to make a difference.

Question was put as to whether GREN should respond to the consultation which is at [www.reading.gov.uk/newlocalplan](http://www.reading.gov.uk/newlocalplan) – comments were requested by 7th March. It was agreed that time did not allow consultation with the membership to create an agreed response but that JB should put guidance notes (not as an adopted GREN position) on the GREN website to encourage members to make individual responses. JB said he would aim to do this by Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March, and that he would welcome proposals from members on what this guidance should say.

### 7. **GREN 'Hustings' for the local elections in May**

It was suggested GREN could try to run an event on environmental implications of EU Membership Referendum, but members thought it would be too much to try to do both. Agreed to maintain recent tradition of an Environmental Hustings for Reading.

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### 8. Members' Forum – Networking Opportunity

- AC said the proposal for a **Hydro scheme on the Thames** was making progress. A Community Benefit Company had been formed with 10 founders of whom 5 were Directors. Environment Agency Licence and Planning Permission were expected shortly and a Community Share Offer was being planned.
- AC said Berkshire Energy Pioneers had transformed into **Reading Community Energy Society** <http://readingenergy.coop/> which was part of the 'Energy4all family' aiming to install up to 600 kWp of solar projects on local buildings. A share offer was in preparation and was expected to go public in April. The projects had been pre-registered and had to be completed by September to qualify for a relatively high Feed In Tariff.
- AC said **Sustainability Centre** was still linked to the Hydro scheme and to some extent depended on successful progress with that scheme. A partnership with UoR and others might be a good way forward. Still no agreement on site – View Island was a protected site.
- John Oversby initiated a discussion of **Air Quality and Pollution**. The topic bridges transport, planning, and health issues. He had completed a 'Town Centre Detective Trail' which had found evidence of pollution in corrosion of gravestones in St Mary's churchyard. It was helpful for people to have visual evidence of an invisible threat. GREN might get involved in 'citizen science' using air quality monitors. He suggested GREN might run a hustings on air pollution in 2017.  
It was commented that RBC transport team had little incentive to improve air quality because health care came from a different budget.  
TM said it was important to encourage the public to think and be aware.  
Eleanor Pitts said it would be good if individuals and groups could combine to work on a topic to achieve change – that would be an example of genuine democracy.  
JB said AC had worked on air quality in the past, and it was also a FoE issue, and FoE had a national campaigner on the subject.  
Agreed that AC, Sustainability Centre, and Reading FoE should seek to co-operate on this – consider running a conference in the autumn, look for information on use of inhalers.
- JB mentioned the **RESCUE** clean-up initiative <http://readingrescue.org.uk/> running from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> March.
- Paul Harper spoke about the **Reading Town Meal Crowdfunding** proposal to raise £3k per annum so that the event could become annual. This will be live for six weeks, from early April. It was agreed that this could be promoted via GREN's standard website and Facebook communication channels and member organisations could be contacted.
- TR spoke about her campaign for '**Warm White**' LEDs for street lighting – national campaigner Simon Nicholas had visited Reading earlier in the month and spoken with opposition Councillors and green groups but not RBC officers. Wokingham and West Berkshire Councils had been more co-operative. RBC had offered them an opportunity to speak at Transport Users' Forum on 8<sup>th</sup> June, by which time decisions would probably have been made.
- JB said that Transition Reading were looking to run "**Green Fest**" with stalls and activities in and around St Laurence's church – in parallel with Waterfest on 11<sup>th</sup> June – and Alex Goater had arranged a planning meeting in Great Expectations on 29<sup>th</sup> February at 7:30. (Later changed to 2<sup>nd</sup> March)
- JB said Rayner Mayer was running a **Schools Poster Competition** – deadline end March. Publicity from GREN would be useful. See RCAN Newsletter for details.  
Design a poster to inform other students about -
  - The local changes in climate have you observed?
  - Possible local impacts you think could occur as a result of a warming world?
  - Possible local actions which could be started now to help limit such impacts and climate change
- JB said GREN was a member of **Reading Neighbourhood Network** (RNN) which continued to offer courses and assistance and had encouraged people to comment on provision of green spaces in the Local Plan consultation.

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- JB said **Nature Nurture** had been granted £41k by the People's Health Trust. This ten month project develops on existing work and will deliver a range of outdoor play activities for children aged up to 11 and their siblings and carers in three local green spaces.

9. **GREN's future activities** – what else should we be doing? - how can GREN help you or your organisation? – Not discussed.

10. **A.O.B.** – none.

11. **Date and location of next meeting.**

WA suggested we should look at RISC Roof Garden for a Saturday in May.

*Version: to website March 6<sup>th</sup> 2016*