

## Annual Report 2010 – 2011

### **Network Development**

GRE welcomed Reading Cycle Campaign, Transition Wokingham and West Berkshire Green Exchange as new member groups during the year, bringing the total number of group members to 26. Individual direct membership grew to exactly 100, to which the hundreds of people who are members through their respective groups can be added.

GRE's new publicity flyers were designed and (5,000) printed in January along with the design of a template and 150 copies of a preprinted poster to use for events publicity. The flyers have been distributed to key locations, including libraries, and used at events. Our thanks again go to Berkshire Community Foundation for funding this.

Network members have increasingly used the events listing function over the past year, and of course, group members' details are publicly available at all times. The sharing of news and other information through the web site has been much less well used. One reason may be that our planned guide to using the web site did not materialise – something that remains an outstanding priority. Although, we took some steps to encourage use of the messaging facility, this has essentially remained moribund since GRE moved from the original Yahoo group to the web site – an unfortunate side effect that we still haven't really understood the reason for.

In terms of public recognition, anecdotally this continues to grow, and, in particular local politicians have said they find it useful to be able to engage with 'green' groups via GRE and the media have started to approach us proactively.

However, the impact of our publicity flyer aimed at individuals is not clear. Whilst membership has grown slightly, web site hits have remained about the same over the past year as the one before (1,400). This does not indicate a big level of usage and thought probably needs to be given to how the site can become more widely known, which in turn must be a function of being useful to users.

During the last month, we have finally made progress in utilising email addresses collected from people attending GRE meetings and events. A GRE MailChimp account has been set up and all those contact details, together with member contact details added to the database, so that we have a current mailing list of around 390 local people. This can be added to, as new details are collected, and provides an easy way to communicate directly with all our contacts. The facility has been used for the first time to promote our Planning for Who? event on 30 November.

### **Events**

The first event in the past year was the GRE quiz night on the evening of the last AGM. Whilst this was geared toward the social aspect that members had asked for and attracted sufficient keen quizzers to make it a highly competitive event, it did not cover our costs in hiring the Global Café.

The second stage of the GRE sponsored events promoting renewable energy in the community and energy efficiency took place on 11 June. This time the focus was domestic householders and over 30 people came along to the event, organised by Reading Friends of the Earth and Reading Energy Pioneers. Participants were able to find out what they could do in their homes to take advantage of the Feed-in-Tariffs scheme for solar power and to save money – and energy – through insulation,

draught-proofing, and improved energy management. Thanks are again extended to Reading Borough Council for the 'community green grant' that made these events possible.

GREN has also jointly sponsored two events with RISC in the past year. On 31 August 2011 a packed hall listened to a challenging talk from Nicole Foss on how the interaction of the financial crisis and peak oil will impact on our lives, whilst on 24 November Sarah Reader of World Development Movement reported on the gloomy prospects for the COP 17 Climate Change Summit in Durban, as the UK and US engage in their usual, corporate interest driven, bullying tactics in the run up to the summit.

Finally, GREN has organised the Planning for Who? event, to follow this years' annual general meeting. This will try to shed light on the likely impact of the Government's new National Planning Policy Framework on our local neighbourhoods in Reading. We would particularly thank Friends of the Earth and Councillor Pete Ruhemann for making this possible, and express our regret that neither of our Reading MPs, who were both invited, is able to take part.

### **Engagement, Lobbying and Campaigning**

Based on what our members attending the 'Vision for a Sustainable Reading' event in June 2010 had said, GREN worked hard though last Autumn and Winter to get your views included in the new 'Vision for Reading 2030' and Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). These don't look much like anything we would write ourselves of course, but you can see elements of GREN members' influence in there <http://www.reading2020.org.uk/library/public/file88>, which provide a good basis for lobbying for practical action toward achieving these aspirations in the longer term.

In particular, it is rewarding that a 'step change in the scale of renewable energy' in Reading became one of four key 'building blocks' identified by the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) toward delivering the new strategy (SCS). This in turn led to the LSP investing its entire capital grant available in 2011 into putting solar panels on the roofs of community buildings across town and to commit the resultant income from Feed-in-Tariffs to support a proposed energy social enterprise for Reading – see below.

Much of the input into the SCS for Reading took place via our representation on the Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP), which brings together business, community and public sector representatives to promote and facilitate local action on climate change. The RCCP action plan can be found here <http://www.reading2020.org.uk/library/public/file100>

GREN has played a key role in developing two main strands of the Partnership's work in the past year; the proposals for a Reading Energy Social Enterprise and RCCP's work to better understand the dynamics of personal behaviour change in relation to Climate Change mitigation.

Late in 2010, GREN produced an initial proposal for the creation of a social enterprise in Reading with the aim of bringing the benefits of solar electricity generation, alongside home insulation measures to thousands of homes across the borough. The particular focus would be on lower income households in harder to treat properties that the commercial operators do not reach and where fuel poverty could be significantly reduced as well as dangerous climate change emissions.

In May the LSP board, agreed to fund consultancy work to develop the GREN proposals. A consultancy, led by Urbed, was selected to report on the organisational models and feasibility for such an organisation. Urbed produced an initial report in August, outlining the main options available. These require key decisions locally about the form of organisation that the partnership thinks would be appropriate to Reading and which could best access the tens of millions of £'s capital investment required. Regrettably, this process has been overtaken by the Government's announcement to cut the Feed-in-Tariffs that are central to the business model by more than 50% at short notice. Further development of the scheme awaits the outcome of their 'consultation' and any special provisions that might be made for organisations such as this, which lock-in FiTs for community benefit purposes.

A sub-group of Reading Climate Change Partnership, established to review how current knowledge about behaviour change might influence projects and communications to engage local people in CC mitigation made some very useful links with experts in behavioural economics at Reading University. These have enabled us to develop a joint proposal for research into Behaviour Change in relation to Climate Change, on the basis of which Reading University secured initial funding for a research post and project that commenced in September. The project will look at the behaviour changes arising from Reading Borough Council's engagement of people in the Safer, Warmer, Greener initiative. We hope that this pilot will provide a basis to secure funds for a much larger local research project next year, providing a sound evidence base for action on climate change mitigation that actually works.

The Climate Change Partnership has demonstrated the real benefits and added value in different sectors working together to develop strategy and take action; we shouldn't forget that the RCCP only exists due to GREN's lobbying in the first place. It is a shame that those responsible for Reading's transport strategy seem unable to appreciate the benefits of broad cross sector partnership working in a similar way – see below.

On the basis of GREN members 'Vision for a Sustainable Reading' a meeting was held with the joint leaders of the Conservative/Lib Dem administration last year, see GREN web site resources, meeting agendas and minutes <http://www.gren.org.uk/Resources.cfm#1>

We were then invited to meet with the Transport lead Councillor on issues such as 20mph speed limits (which he could not broadly support). More recently GREN representatives met with the new (Labour) lead Councillor for Transport, a report of which has been posted on the web site.

GREN made a response to the Council's consultation on its new Transport Strategy, but it is not clear what impact, if any, this had. We have engaged with the Council's Cycle Liaison Group, but again it is not apparent that the Council has much regard to the issues raised by us or the various cycling groups there. These are consultative processes, rather than the engagement through a partnership approach that is working so well in relation to climate change.

For this reason, GREN has been lobbying for over a year to bring Transport strategy and planning into that LSP framework. Finally, the response from the LSP board in November was that 'transport was a cross boundary issue and it was more appropriate to deal with it within the framework of the (Thames Valley Berkshire) Local Economic Partnership!

What is clear from the responses to the Council's recent general public consultation is that Transport is something that residents think is important to quality of life, needs improving and want to get involved in; to say this will be done through a Berkshire wide unelected body focused on economic growth is unacceptable; the County Council was abolished so decision making would be more local.

It is notable that this section of the annual report is the longest; this reflects what active members have wanted to pursue and perhaps the area where working together through the network can be most effective. This is well demonstrated by the campaign that GREN members have collectively mounted in response to the Government's proposals to slash the feed-in-tariff payments for PV (solar) electricity generation at such short notice; implementing changes before consultation ends! GREN group members' statement, press release and letters to Reading MPs are available on the web site under Resources in the relevant sections <http://www.gren.org.uk/Resources.cfm#1>

## **Finances**

A statement of GREN finances from the Treasurer is attached. With a balance of £75.64, less the cost of room hire for the AGM/Planning event, we will urgently need to find funds to cover web site maintenance and other costs. We are very grateful to the Stronger Together Consortium for covering all of our general meeting costs in the past year and for placing a £75 deposit for advance room hire.

**Paul Harper, Chair, Greater Reading Environmental Network  
30 November 2011**

## Treasurer's report of income and expenditure to 30 November 2011

Date	Company/Organisation	Income	Expenditure	Status
08/12/2009	RBC	£1,500.00		received 9/12/2009
16/12/2009	Donations	£102.78		received 16/12/2009
22/12/2009	Loud 'n' clear		£550.00	paid 22/01/2010
29/01/2010	Tilhurst Methodist Church		£52.15	paid 10/03/2010
28/01/2010	Annemoritzdesign		£200.00	paid 03/2/2010
25/02/2010	Annemoritzdesign		£200.00	paid 16/03/2010
	Donations Reading West			
20/03/2010	Election Meeting	£63.00		received 22/03/2010
30/04/2010	Loud 'n' clear		£550.00	paid 30/04/2010
	Donations Reading East Election			
23/04/2010	Meeting	£40.54		received 23/04/2010
08/05/2010	Reading Friends' Meeting House		£23.75	paid 24/06/2010
	Reading Borough Council Green			
18/08/2010	Grant	£150.00		
	Berkshire Community			
13/10/2010	Foundation Grant	£565.00		
03/12/2010	Annemoritzdesign		£275.62	paid 06/12/2010
25/11/2010	RISC - hire of cafe		£110.00	paid 15/12/2010
29/11/2010	Donations from Quiz	£52.00		received 23/12/2010
	Reading Quaker Meeting			
06/01/2011	(23/11/10		£65.00	paid 12/01/2011
28/01/2011	Greenhouse graphic - flyers		£216.25	paid 02/02/2011
28/01/2011	Greenhouse graphic - posters		£87.91	paid 02/02/2011
25/02/2011	Donation	£30.00		
07/09/2011	Reading Friends of the Earth		£85.00	
26/09/2011	Loud 'n' clear		£12.00	
<b>Totals</b>		<b>£2,503.32</b>	<b>£2,427.68</b>	
<b>Total</b>		<b>£75.64</b>		

Oonagh Kelleher, 30 November 2011