**Minutes of the 56th Annual General Meeting of the Maiden Erlegh Residents Association held at 8pm on Thursday 12 May 2022 at St Nicolas Church, Sutcliffe Avenue, Earley**

**Executive Committee officers present**

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| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) – in the Chair | Peter Woodward (Vice-Chairman/Area 1) |
| Ryan Yao-Smith (Treasurer) | Steve Feltham (Secretary) |
| Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) | Patricia Brown (Magazine Editorial Team) |
| Judy Clark (Area 5) | Paul Medlycott (Area 12) |
| Pamela Roberts (Area 10) | John Saunders (Area 13) |
| Siyu Smith (Area 2) |  |

**Other members present**

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| John Booth | Marilyn Bowden | Mary Evans |
| Jean Hackett | Chris Haines | June Holmes |
| Raymond Hanover Jones | Margaret Marshall | N Marshall |
| Chris Morrison | David Rains | Pat Saunders |

**Speaker present**

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| Robert Williams (CEO, Reading Buses) |

**Non- member present**

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| Philip Brown |

**Apologies received**

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| Anne Booth (Area 9) | Rosemary Cook (Area 11) |
| Brian Hackett | Celia Smith (Area 6) |
| Barbara Stansfield (Area 8) | Tim Marsh (ACER) |

**PRESENTATION**

The Chairman welcomed those present and introduced the Speaker for the evening, Robert Williams (CEO of Reading Buses).

The speaker stated that he had worked as CEO for the company for the last 3.5 years, and in that time, Covid had changed how Reading Buses worked. He stated that he was committed to ensuring that Reading Buses was the best company they could be. It had to be financially sustainable and people-focussed.

The pandemic had produced a serious depletion of passengers which created a very serious situation for the company, but government funding was made available to ensure that the financial impact was kept to a minimum. During the lockdown, passenger numbers reduced to 11% of normal levels, but numbers had since continued to recover and now stood at 72% of normal. These were still challenging times, with more people working at home than before, fewer people travelling to the station to catch trains and fewer people choosing to travel by bus at the present time. Fortunately, the recovery grant, which was originally planned to finish by April 2022, had been extended until the end of September this year.

To reflect the reduction in the number of passengers using bus services since the pandemic, reduced frequencies had been introduced on some services, including the reduction from every 15 to every 20 minutes on the Claret 21 services. The company was currently working with the University to introduce a night bus for the 360 Club, which was a popular venue for the students.

The meeting was informed that 60% of the funding for the 19 services was provided by Wokingham Borough Council and that the local authority would be conducting a review of these services this autumn, with bids for service provision being submitted in October. The 19b service was about self-sufficient prior to the pandemic, but this was no longer the case at present.

Robert Williams explained why the Tiger service 7 had to be temporarily withdrawn. He stated that passenger numbers had reduced to 49% before suspension and that Hampshire County Council had closed a large section of the route for road works which meant that passengers along that stretch were unable to access the bus. During the suspension of services, the company had been working with Wokingham Borough Council, who stepped in with additional funding to restore the route between Reading and Riseley.

The speaker stated that the Leopard service 3 was self financing and the 8/9 was funded through the housing contribution, but that the pandemic had reduced the amount of funding that was left considerably.

The Park and Ride services in the area were suffering from serious passenger reductions, due in part to the temporary closure of the Winnersh facility. Patronage was only 28% of normal at the Thames Valley Park site, and Mereoak stood at 68%.

On the National Bus Strategy, new funding would be available in line with the suitability of bids put forward by local authorities. Only those bids which would deliver lasting benefit qualified for the new government grant and Reading received the welcome news that they had been granted £26m, which should be transformational. This money would be spent on new bus lanes, ticketing and so forth. The Wokingham bid was not accepted owing to the lack of bus priority measures contained within their proposal.

Robert Williams was asked about the company’s ‘green credentials’, to which he responded that one-third of the bus fleet used bio-methane as fuel, and this contained 82% less carbon. The company had taken delivery of its first electric bus, and the remainder of the fleet was low-sulphur diesel. The whole fleet had now been upgraded to the latest diesel standards.

The speaker stated in answer to a question on whether the 19b route would be withdrawn given that passenger numbers had reduced, that the 19b was the most used of the Little Oranges routes and therefore stood a better chance of survival. He thought that there might be a way of re-imagining routes in the area, but the network review had not yet started.

The speaker was asked whether the buses could be re-routed to serve elderly people who needed to attend Brookside surgery as the bus stop on Silverdale Road proved difficult for them to access from that location. It was pointed out that the Volunteer Drivers Bureau was not currently operating due to the impact of the pandemic. In response, it was stated that while this idea could be considered, it was too early to provide a response to that question at this stage.

Robert Williams confirmed that Covid had made a difference to staffing at the company. The HGV lorry crisis led to some people leaving in response to the government call for HGV drivers. The company had been working hard to recruit to cover the staff shortages, but at the same time, employees were still leaving the company. These vacancies were being covered by an increase in overtime working.

In response to a member question on whether more women were being recruited, it was stated that although Reading Buses was not specifically targeting women, he was able to confirm that 40% of the intake was female prior to the pandemic.

The speaker was asked whether real time information could be introduced at bus stops on the 19a, b and c routes. In response, it was stated that this would be difficult to achieve at every bus stop. Highway infrastructure was a council responsibility, and this was not at the same level in Wokingham as in Reading. He pointed out that there was an on-going cost to keep them working.

Concern was expressed by a member who referred to the fact that Wokingham was not in receipt of a grant from the Bus Service Improvement Plan and pointed out that the frequency of services was not improving. He asked whether a given increase in service levels could be equated to the likely impact on passenger numbers. In answer, the speaker stated that it was not easy to predict, but generally, it could be expected that patronage would increase by possibly 60% if frequencies were doubled.

An increase in bus prioritisation in Reading was put forward as an incentive for people to use the bus services, and Robert Williams stated that the company did request increased measures quite frequently. In some cases, equipment such as sensors was broken, and of course upgrading would be subject to the availability of finance.

Finally, the question was raised on whether a small number of school buses could be introduced by Reading Buses. In answer to this, it was stated that the challenge was funding. It was pointed out that outside term times, there would be no use for the buses earmarked for school use.

The Chairman thanked Robert Williams for speaking to the AGM and for answering the questions raised at the meeting, and the membership responded with applause for the speaker.

**MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 9 MAY 2019**

Raymond Jones proposed that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2019 were accepted as a correct record and this was agreed by the membership.

**MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

**CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

The Chairman drew attention to his report, which was contained in the agenda papers. The report was duly noted.

**TREASURER’S REPORT**

Ryan Yao-Smith stated that he had taken over the role as Treasurer from Pamela Tames, who had decided to retire from the position in July 2020.

The Treasurer informed the membership that he had been asked to modernise the Association’s financial system, and during his early months he had duly updated the system, which was now fully computerised. Online banking had been introduced, which simplified the payments system.

He referred his report and the audited Statement of Accounts which were available for inspection and he thanked Jane Shen for carrying out the audit for the last two accounting periods after MERA’s long serving auditor, Don Box, stood down in 2020. Jane Shen had kindly agreed to put her name forward to audit the accounts for the ensuing year.

The Treasurer advised that MERA’s annual expenditure had been lower recently due to the fact that there were no meetings at the Day Centre during the period of the emergency measures introduced during the pandemic. As meetings were held virtually during that period, there were no hall costs incurred at that time.

The Treasurer announced that the subscription rate would remain at £1 per annum for the ensuing financial year.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS, AREA REPRESENTATIVES AND AUDITOR**

The Chairman announced that Paul Medlycott (serving Area 12) had decided to retire and did not wish to stand for re-election in 2022/23 and he thanked him for his service. The meeting was advised that Chris Haines had put her name forward to take over the role.

It was also announced that Ryan Yao-Smith would not be able to spare all of his time to carry out his duties as Treasurer in the forthcoming year because he was going back to university in the autumn. It was therefore proposed that for 2022/23, he and Siyu Smith be appointed as Co-Treasurers. Additionally, as the Treasurer had reported, Jane Shen was content to act as MERA’s auditor for the new financial year.

The Chairman advised that all other existing officers, area representatives and the editorial team who were willing to serve for a further term had indicated their wish to be re-elected. The Chairman therefore proposed that the Nominations List as set out in the agenda be approved and that Chris Haines be elected to replace Paul Medlycott as area representative for Area 12. This was seconded by Marilyn Bowden. Having been put to the vote, it was

**AGREED:** That all nominations for election to the honorary officer, area representative and auditor appointments be accepted.

**RESOLUTIONS AND RULES PROPOSED BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

There were three new rules proposed by the Executive Committee.

**Draft response to proposals to install 3G football pitches in Maiden Erlegh**

The Chairman referred to the successful campaign launched by MERA, MBOS Residents and the Earley Environmental Group to prevent Laurel Park from being closed to full public access to enable a 3G football pitch to be installed at the Lower Field, which would be surrounded by acoustic fencing. He stated that the Borough Council’s plans now were to investigate whether Maiden Erlegh School was a suitable alternative location, and he asked the Secretary to explain the position.

The background to this report was explained in detail by the Secretary, who requested approval for a letter of objection to the Laurel Park proposal, which could be submitted to the council if the proposal was revived, and also for Maiden Erlegh School, unless it was possible for suitable mitigations to be put in place to avoid considerable disturbance and inconvenience to local residents. The Secretary explained that if either of these proposals were actually brought forward for consultation, he may need to change these letters to comply with the means by which the consultation process was carried out. However, the areas of objection listed in the report would remain.

The Secretary advised that a meeting with the Head Teacher of Maiden Erlegh School would be requested after the meeting, and it was hoped that clarification of the proposals would provide an acceptable solution, and that a letter of objection would not be necessary in that case.

After some discussion, the recommendation of the Executive Committee in relation to Maiden Erlegh School was proposed by Judy Clark and seconded by Jean Hackett. The recommendation in relation to Laurel Park was proposed by Margaret Marshall and seconded by Raymond Jones. Upon being put to the vote it was

**AGREED:** That the points of objection as set out in the agenda in relation to the Laurel Park and Maiden Erlegh School be approved and that officers be authorised to seek a satisfactory conclusion in relation to both proposals, as appropriate.

**Proposed revision to Constitution**

The Secretary advised the meeting that during the period in which emergency measures prevented MERA from proceeding with their AGMs, the Executive Committee agreed a proposal to extend the catchment area to include The Crescent, Earley, subject to confirmation of the AGM.

In answer to a question on whether other roads could be added to the Constitution to allow additional members to join, the Secretary stated that he would raise this issue at a forthcoming Executive Committee meeting, but there was a balance to be struck to ensure that the Association did not become less manageable.

The inclusion of The Crescent was proposed by Paul Medlycott and seconded by Raymond Jones. Upon being put to the vote, it was

**AGREED:** That the proposed inclusion of The Crescent into MERA’s catchment area be approved and the Constitution be revised with immediate effect.

**Proposed roundabout at the junction of Gipsy Lane and Rushey Way**

The Secretary reminded the membership that at the 2019 AGM, the problems of negotiating the junction of Gipsy Lane and Rushey Way was debated. The clear view of the meeting was that a mini roundabout should be installed rather than traffic lights. Martin Heath (Traffic Management, Parking and Road Safety Team Manager), one of the speakers at that meeting, agreed to look at this issue but he had recently reported that it was not viewed as a priority by the Borough Council. Accordingly, the Secretary proposed that an online petition be commenced in an effort to move this matter up the agenda. A minimum of 10 names in support of any petition had to be received to enable an online petition to be commenced.

The Secretary acknowledged that some members considered that the speed of cars approaching the Gipsy Lane junction from Rushey Way ensured that turning right towards Asda and turning right into Gipsy Lane were difficult manoeuvres, particularly at busy times, and that a mini roundabout might be considered more dangerous. Accordingly, the Secretary now proposed that either a roundabout or mini roundabout be installed, in line with the best judgement of the Highways professionals.

Paul Medlycott proposed that the motion be accepted, and this was seconded by Raymond Jones. Having been put to the vote it was

**AGREED:** That the online petition be agreed and the Secretary would arrange to submit this to the Borough Council for inclusion on their website.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Fraud Prevention Information Evening**

The Chairman drew attention to a Fraud Prevention Information Evening that had been arranged by ACER, to be held at St Peter’s Church, Earley, on Wednesday 6 July at 7pm. Refreshments would be available from 6.45pm.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.41pm.

***Date of the next AGM***

Thursday 11 May 2023 at 7.30 for 8pm.

***Date of next Executive Committee***

Thursday 9 June 2022 at 8pm.