**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee held at 8pm on Thursday 10 August 2023 at the Earley Day Centre, Kenton Road, Earley**

**Present**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) | Steve Feltham (Secretary) |
| John Saunders (Area 13/Treasurer) | Bob Collins (Area 14) |
| Rosemary Cook (Area 11) | Chris Haines (Area 12) |
| Celia Smith (Area 6) | Siyu Smith (Area 2) |
| Tim Smith (Area 2) | Elaine Spratling (Area 4) |
| Pamela Roberts (Area 10) | Cllr Norman Jorgensen (Wokingham BC) |
| Cllr Stephen Newton (Wokingham BC) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**Apologies received**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Peter Woodward (Vice Chairman/Area 1) | Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) |
| Patricia Brown (Editorial Team) | Anne Booth (Area 9) |
| Viv Canning (Area 14) | Judy Clark (Area 5) |
| Patsy Collis (Area 8) | Tim Marsh (ACER) |

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 were signed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Preparations for AGM**

The Chairman informed the meeting that the Secretary had now booked the Church Hall for the 2024 AGM on 9 May 2024.

**Proposed changes in The Parade**

The Secretary reported that the Borough Council’s proposals to reduce the number of litter bin collections due to budgetary pressures was likely to be detrimental to Maiden Erlegh, particularly if the number of collections from bins located at The Parade were to be even less than at present. He referred to the recent site meeting at The Parade where councillors commented on the overflowing bins and the litter blowing about, which may deter some people from shopping there. The point was made that EASI had been formed by the late Peter Soul, who wanted to clean up Earley so that it was a more attractive place in which to live. The proposed new reductions in bin collections would detract from that objective and make the work of the litter pickers more time consuming.

The meeting was advised that the Secretary had asked the Cleaner and Greener Team for larger litter bins to be provided in The Parade to alleviate the problem, and whether the council would be prepared to install new bins if external funding could be made available. A response had been received stating that this would not be possible due to budgetary restraints, which appeared to ignore MERA’s offer to investigate whether external funding could be considered. The Secretary asked whether the members present would be able to establish whether the Borough Council would be supportive of such a proposal, and it was agreed that the Secretary would submit the request in writing.

The meeting was advised that no further information was available regarding the involvement of the Anti-Social Behaviour Team in requesting Herbies to provide a litter bin to ease the problem. Bob Collins pointed out a similar arrangement had been made between the Earley Co-op near the Three Tuns and the council.

The Secretary confirmed that he had now received a reply to the various issues raised with the Town Clerk. In terms of the telephone box, it was advised that the preference of councillors was to retain it in its present position. The Secretary expressed disappointment that this was the case, and pointed out that the telephone box was in a dilapidated condition, with black masking tape around the door, seven panes knocked out, and it needed repainting. Furthermore, no suitable ideas had been put forward for an alternative use as the location was unsuitable for the kind of solutions that had been successful elsewhere due to the likelihood of vandalism. The location of the telephone box was also preventing an additional proposed safety measure to be introduced in that location.

The Town Clerk also stated that Earley Town Council did not have the manpower to open and close the Mays Lane car park gates for the purpose of dropping off and picking up the Aldryngton and Maiden Erlegh school pupils. The Town Clerk also noted that the PTA had not written to the council to request such a measure, although it was made clear that the PTA representatives had requested this at the site meeting held recently at The Parade. The Secretary believed that a way around the issue of opening and closing the car park at Mays Lane was to provide the caretaker of Aldryngton School or the PTA with a key to open and close it at appropriate times, in the same way as Marefield residents had been responsible for opening and closing the car park at the pavilion serving the nature reserve and playing fields. A formal letter from the PTA requesting this could be sent to the council to request this if necessary.

The Secretary reported that the additional safety measures considered at the site meeting had now been submitted formally to the council. Cllr Newton asked for a copy of the submission and reference number so that he could monitor the progress made on this proposal. The Secretary agreed to write to Cllrs Newton and Jorgensen regarding the outstanding matters as discussed.

Finally, it was confirmed that the second car that had been permanently parked in The Parade car park had now been removed.

**AGREED: That the Secretary provides written confirmation of the outstanding matters of concern to the Committee to Cllrs Newton and Jorgensen.**

**Grass cutting: roundabout sponsorships**

The Secretary reported that residents of the Crescent had expressed interest in the idea of planting wild flowers within the roundabout located in that road, but had been disheartened when asked by the Borough Council for a ‘planting plan’, without any guidance as to what it should contain. Cllr Newton stated that he would be happy to make inquiries to establish the position, and Cllr Jorgensen indicated that he was also supportive of simplifying the process of granting permission to residents for this purpose. The Treasurer agreed to send the emails regarding the request from residents of The Crescent to plant flowers on the roundabout in their road to Councillors Newton and Jorgensen.

The Treasurer suggested that the council could provide a plaque to acknowledge those providing flowers for this purpose, which Cllr Newton noted.

Rosemary Cook suggested that the Park Ranger be contacted to explore the means by which he obtained the council’s permission to plant flowers on council owned land.

**AGREED: That:**

**1. The Treasurer would send copies of the emails relating to planting flowers on the roundabout at The Crescent to Cllrs Newton and Jorgensen.**

**2. The Secretary would confirm MERA’s support for simplifying the process in an email to Cllrs Newton and Jorgensen.**

**3. The Park Ranger would be asked how he had previously obtained permission from the council to plant wild flowers on council owned land.**

**Telephone Box**

No further ideas for an alternative use for the telephone box were forthcoming at the meeting.

**Consultation: proposed railway station ticket office closures**

The Chairman reported that the consultation period in respect of the proposed railway station ticket office closures had been extended until 1 September. A list of the existing functions carried out by ticket office staff that did not appear to have been taken into account by train companies had been supplied by Anne Booth, and copies of this list were available at the meeting. If individual Committee members wished to respond, they were encouraged to do so, and the Secretary stated that he would forward information on this with the minutes.

**Query from Ian Jobson**

The Chairman reminded the Committee of its discussion at the last meeting in which a question was raised about the possible inclusion of Finch Road within MERA’s catchment area. He stated that the Secretary had confirmed that other residents’ associations did include tenants within their membership, and that some associations had been formed with only tenants in mind. There was some concern over a possible conflict of interest between the views of tenants and the views of the property owners, but this did not appear to be an issue for other associations, which also liaised with the owners where appropriate.

Accordingly, there now appeared to be no substantial reason to argue that tenants should not be permitted to join MERA, and it was noted that many properties in Finch Road were thought now to have been bought by the current occupiers in any case. Therefore, the view of the Committee was that provided there was sufficient interest from the residents of Finch Road and that a volunteer could be found to perform the role of Area Representative, a recommendation could be made to the AGM on 9 May 2024 for the admission of this road to the catchment area.

**Parking too close to junctions**

The Secretary referred to the discussion at the last meeting in which it was put forward that in view of the apparent lack of support for a national campaign given the response of other residents’ associations, MERA should instead raise matters with the council on a case-by-case basis. It was clarified that MERA would be concentrating on those areas which appeared to be causing problems for motorists.

In addition to the road junctions already identified, further possible problem areas were put forward at the meeting, including Ramsbury Drive/Wilderness Road, Aldbourne Road/Wokingham Road and Beech Lane/Wilderness Road. The Secretary stated that he would investigate these new areas identified once term time re-commenced so that he could confirm the position, and he would report back to a future meeting.

Cllr Newton advised that requests for double yellow lines should be made through the website, and he requested a copy of any submissions made.

**Wokingham Borough Council budget**

The Secretary reported that he had now received a response from Sir John Redwood to MERA’s query regarding a proposal that Ministers be requested to consider the poor level of funding for the Borough Council, pointing out that both the present Liberal Democrat and the former Conservative administrations had agreed that the council was the worst funded in the country in terms of government grants received.

The MP responded that the Borough Council had received an increased grant this year, which was higher than Windsor and Maidenhead, and he stated that he had often put the case for increased funding for identified needs. He also stated that the council did not send him a case to lay before Ministers based on budget figures and forecast costs for the current year.

The Secretary stated that the increasing unpopularity of service reductions that was evident from discussion forums and anecdotally through discussions with residents could be the foundation for such a bid if there were no other sensible means of restoring the shortfall in the council’s budget.

Cllr Newton asked for a copy of the MP’s email, following which he would raise the matter with council members. The Secretary agreed to forward the email to both Cllrs Newton and Jorgensen.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman confirmed that he would be attending the next NAG meeting on 4 September and that he would be reporting back to the next meeting.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that he had circulated an invitation from Reading University for volunteers to be a part of a Steering Group which would be established to consider community engagement. Members of the Committee were asked to consider the request and advise the Secretary if they wished to put their names forward. All nominations had to be received by Wednesday 6 September 2023.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer reported that all the advertising invoices relating to the last magazine had now been sent out and that only 4 remained to be paid.

The current account now stood at £2,246.90 excluding the printing cost for the latest issue of £544.50, which would bring the balance to £1,702.40. The deposit account balance was £842.89, which included interest of 95p.

**Editorial Report**

The Chairman reported that the Magazine Editor was unable to attend the meeting and that there was nothing to report on this occasion.

**CONSULTATIONS & PETITIONS**

The Chairman advised of the following ongoing consultations and petitions:

**Customer experience strategy draft –** The survey as reported at the last meeting would close on 16 August 2023.

**Deciding new planning applications: local validation list –** Residents were invited to comment on the council’s local validation list, which detailed the local arrangements relating to the supporting information required when submitting planning applications to the council. Any comments should be submitted by 17 August 2023.

**Proposed railway station ticket office closures** – As discussed earlier in the meeting, this consultation had been extended until 1 September 2023.

**Petitions**

There were no current e-petitions. The comment was made that the new website did not display the e-petitions prominently and it was now difficult to find the site without conducting a search. Cllr Newton asked the Secretary to write to him with the details of the problem, which was agreed.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

The Chairman reported that there was no new correspondence to report other than complaints about geese and some routine inquiries that had been dealt with.

**NEW ITEMS**

**Geese**

The Chairman drew attention to the higher number of complaints about the Canadian Geese this year, due to the substantial increase in the number of goslings that had hatched, touring Lakeside, Silverdale Road, Allendale Road, Andrews Road and even roads on the north side of Silverdale Road. He stated that Earley Town Council was not prepared to take any action such as oiling the eggs to control the numbers to reduce the problem in future years. However, the matter could not be left there, because residents were now tending to regard the proliferation of the geese as a problem, due to the amount of mess they left behind, which was a health risk.

Measures such as path and border edgings, picket fences or even two lines of string or wire (one about six inches from the ground and the other 18 inches high) would prevent geese from entering gardens. Advice to residents could be issued in the Spring 2024 edition of the magazine to assist residents.

As far as the mess left on the pavements was concerned, this was the council’s responsibility, and a request could be made for regular street cleaning during the summer months next year. However, budget constraints would clearly be an issue for the local authority.

Cllr Newton and Cllr Jorgensen were sympathetic to the points raised and requested an email to set out the case for resolving this problem. It was agreed that the Earley Environmental Group should be involved in working up a solution, and the Secretary agreed to write to the Chairman of the Group.

Tim Smith made the point that as well as the problems associated with the large number of geese walking around the neighbourhood daily, the health of the lake itself should be considered in deciding whether to put in place measures to control the numbers.

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

**Buses**

The Secretary reported that the Town Council had agreed to a request from the Borough Council to use some of its community infrastructure levy funds to support local bus services in Earley. An annual contribution of £1,293.21 had been agreed for three years.

The Secretary also stated that although he had not yet seen any information regarding new tender bids for the revised services to be introduced from September 2023, he had noted that the Reading Buses website stated that new timetables for the service would be published shortly.

**Recycling**

The Chairman advised that coffee pod recycling facilities had been introduced at re3’s operations at its Bracknell and Reading centres.

**Moving traffic offences**

The Chairman reported that the council’s application to take responsibility for enforcement of moving traffic offences had been approved by the government, and the rollout would commence from September 2023. Enforcement would involve the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras.

**Proposed changes to street cleansing and grounds maintenance**

The Secretary reported that the council had now confirmed that changes to litter bin collections and grass cutting would be brought in only after the formal decision-making process, and public consultation on how the changes should be implemented would commence in September 2023. He advised that the item would appear on next month’s agenda, and therefore if anyone had any concerns, they should be brought to the attention of the Committee at its next meeting.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Earley Town Council response to proposed train station ticket office changes**

Cllr Newton confirmed that the Town Council had agreed unanimously its response to the proposed train station ticket office closures.

**Review of Earley Town Plan**

Cllr Newton stated that Earley Town Council had set up a Working Party to review the Earley Town Plan. If approved, he would wish to engage with the community on the revised Town Plan, which would set out short, medium and long term objectives, measured on a quarterly basis. He stated that there would be a window in which to feed ideas into the discussion.

**Maiden Place meeting**

Cllr Newton advised that a community corner meeting was being arranged to be held at Maiden Place, and the ASBO Team would be present to answer any public concerns.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

14 September 2023 at Kenton Road Day Centre.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.30pm.