**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee (online) held at 8pm on Thursday 11 February 2021**

**Present**

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| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) | Steve Feltham (Secretary) |
| Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) | Anne Booth (Area 9) |
| Rosemary Cook (Area 11) | Pamela Roberts (Area 10) |
| John Saunders (Area 13) | Celia Smith (Area 6) |
| Siyu and Tim Smith (Area 2) | Tim Marsh (ACER) |

**Apologies received**

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| Peter Woodward (Vice Chairman/Area 1) | Ryan Yao-Smith (Treasurer) |
| Judy Clark (Area 5) | Elaine Spratling (Area 4) |
| Barbara Stansfield (Area 8) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2021 were agreed.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Planning matters**

The Secretary reported that Tim Marsh wished it to be known that his comments regarding increased occupancy by tenants not affecting the amount of the council tax liability was his understanding of the position, and he was not an expert on the subject. This was accepted, but the Secretary confirmed that it was the case that if the owner of the property took in tenants, the council tax liability would not change, although any discount available for single occupancy would no longer apply.

**Flooding problems at the rear of 86-90 Silverdale Road**

John Saunders reported that work was continuing at the site by the brook, but the flooding no longer appeared to be causing issues.

**Berberis nuisance at 1 Instow Road**

The Secretary reported that a response from the Highways Department was still awaited.

**Air quality - bonfires**

The Secretary confirmed that Borough Council’s Communications, Engagement and Marketing Manager had ensured that an item on this subject appeared in the Wokingham Borough Council newsletter on 15 January, as promised.

**Tackling fraudulent activity**

The Secretary confirmed that he had circulated the report he promised to produce in respect of his proposals on tackling scams and fraudulent activity. The intention was to commence a campaign to persuade the government to do more to reduce these crimes which were proving to be a blight on the lives of the many people who were targeted.

The report had been amended to take account of issues that had been raised during consultation, and the section relating to withholding telephone numbers had been withdrawn. The Secretary explained that the systems were already in place to allow the exercise of discretion by callers, enabling them to reveal their hidden numbers to close contacts, although he did believe that the system could be made simpler.

The report also recognised that one of the problems with changed telephone numbers appearing on the caller display related to the fact that caller IDs could be changed as they passed from carrier to carrier when the call was transmitted. This was due to varying caller ID formats being used by different companies. Accordingly, one of the new recommendations was to ensure consistency of formatting, which would avoid this problem.

**AGREED: That the revised report be sent to NORA with a view to establishing whether the support of residential associations nationally would be forthcoming to pressure the government to review current legislation, with the intention of reducing fraudulent and unwanted activity as described in the report.**

**Social distancing – Maiden Erlegh School pupils**

The Secretary reported that a response had been received from the Head Teacher of Maiden Erlegh School, who intended to reset expectations on behaviour both in and out of school. The matter of social distancing would be addressed at that point.

MERA was also advised of the school start and finish times so that residents could avoid these busy periods if they wished to do so.

**Borough Planning and Design Guide**

The Chairman thanked Tim Marsh for presenting his report on this issue, and for putting forward his article for the next MERA Magazine. He stated that from MERA’s point of view, an obvious improvement would be to plant more trees on front gardens and grass verges.

Tim Marsh acknowledged that each street had its own character, which should be preserved and enhanced, but instead, but he was concerned that everything seemed to be disappearing under concrete and cars. He stated that Wokingham Borough Council would be convening a talk on 12 February to discuss the Guide, and ACER would be participating in this discussion.

A discussion ensued in relation to types of trees that could be planted to avoid root damage to properties. Rosemary Cook pointed out that there were many big trees in Lower Earley, and housebuilding in the past did not take sufficient account of the damage to properties that would be caused by having such trees too close to housing. As a result, all too many trees were having to be felled to address the problems they had caused.

The Committee was asked to consider other measures that could be taken in Maiden Erlegh that could enhance the appearance of the area. The Secretary would bring forward this item for further discussion at the next meeting.

**Covid vaccination programme**

The Secretary confirmed that he had posted an item on the website regarding the good progress made by Brookside General Practice in relation to the COVID vaccination programme.

**Swallows Meadow**

The Secretary reported that the virtual village meeting was held in 28 January, but that residents were expressing disappointment at the choice of questions selected for an answer, and there was a feeling that the consultation was inadequate. It was pointed out that residents themselves could organise their own Zoom meetings to continue the debate and hear objections. The Secretary made clear that there would also be an opportunity for those opposed or in support of the plan to build on Swallows Meadow to put forward their views after the formal planning application was made during the period allocated for objections.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman advised that he had nothing to report on this occasion.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Secretary confirmed that the Treasurer had informed him that there was nothing to report on this occasion.

**Editorial Report**

The Magazine Editor confirmed that the copy date for the next MERA Magazine was 20 February.

**CONSULTATIONS**

**New Homes Strategy**

Wokingham Borough Council was currently consulting on its review of its New Homes Strategy and had requested comments by 21 February 2021.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**NORA**

NORA had provided its monthly newsletter together with additional information which had been circulated to members previously. The Secretary highlighted information that might be of particular interest to the Committee, including the problems of gulls nesting on rooves and the progress being made in relation to introducing legislation banning parking on pavements.

There was some discussion on the gulls item, given that there had been an increase in the number of these birds in the area around Lakeside. The Secretary was concerned that gulls could be quite aggressive and that if they started taking food from residents while in their gardens, complaints would be received. However, Rosemary Cook pointed out that while herring gulls could be a problem, the black headed gulls which were resident in the area were not likely to be a nuisance.

**NEW ITEMS**

There were no new items.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Former Executive Committee members**

The Secretary reported that one of MERA’s former Executive Committee members was unwell and confined to bed.

**Libraries**

The Secretary reported that Anne Booth had notified him that libraries were now offering a ‘click and collect’ service.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

11 March 2021.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.35pm.