**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee held at 8pm on Thursday 11 January 2024 at the Earley Day Centre, Kenton Road, Earley**

**Present**

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| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) | Peter Woodward (Vice Chairman/Area 1)  |
| Steve Feltham (Secretary) | John Saunders (Area 13/Treasurer) |
| Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) | Patricia Brown (Editorial Team) |
| Judy Clark (Area 5) | Bob Collins (Area 14) |
| Chris Haines (Area 12) | Pamela Roberts (Area 10) |
| Celia Smith (Area 6) | Elaine Spratling (Area 4) |
| Cllr Norman Jorgensen (Wokingham BC) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**Apologies received**

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| Anne Booth (Area 9) | Viv Canning (Area 14) |
| Patsy Collis (Area 8) | Rosemary Cook (Area 11) |
| Cllr Stephen Newton (Wokingham BC) | Tim Marsh (ACER) |

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023 were signed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Grass cutting: roundabout sponsorships**

The Treasurer reported that he had contacted an insurance company at Lloyds of London, but like the local insurance companies contacted, they did not appear to be aware of the type of cover suggested by the council. Accordingly, he was still unable to establish the likely premium cost of such cover.

Cllr Newton was continuing to assist in this matter and he had proposed a meeting with Cllr Paul Fishwick. The volunteers had been updated and were still happy to proceed with the project.

The Chairman stated that the council must have had in mind a specific insurance policy when they devised the council’s own policy on this matter, and indeed, a figure of £150 had already been mooted. It was therefore surprising that the local authority could not provide the name of an insurance company that could provide the type of cover required.

It was suggested that Martin & Pole (Estate Agents) might be able to assist in suggesting a suitable policy, but it was thought that perhaps when they sponsored the roundabout they used council employees or contractors to carry out the planting. This would be worth following up in case this revealed a possible solution.

A progress report would be submitted to the next meeting.

**Geese**

The Chairman advised the Committee that the Secretary had not received a response from the British Trust for Ornithology to date, despite chasing them early in the New Year. It had been hoped that they could provide MERA with some material for the next magazine and also a speaker for the May 2024 AGM.

It was stated that the Secretary could overcome to the problem of an article, but further suggestions might be required for a speaker.

**Royal Mail**

The Chairman reported that no further complaints had been received regarding missing Royal Mail deliveries.

**Earley Town Plan**

The Chairman stated that the Secretary had advised the Town Clerk of MERA’s proposed amendments to the Town Plan for its next revision.

**Buses**

The Secretary reported that he had written to Cllr Fishwick and others to point out that although there were signs to the park and ride services at Winnersh and Thames Valley Park, there were no signs indicating the location of those services for motorists who were new to the area.

Cllr Fishwick had now confirmed that he had discussed this issue with officers, who were reviewing the signage on the approaches to the two P&R services to ensure that there was a satisfactory signed route to the entrances. Cllr Fishwick confirmed that an update would be provided when there was further information.

**Housing development in Wokingham**

The Secretary confirmed that he had circulated the link to Sir John Redwood’s blog with the minutes, as promised.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman reported that he would be attending the next NAG meeting on 15 January and would update the Committee at the February meeting. The agenda included items on speeding, including the continuing problems in finding volunteers for Speedwatch; parking; 20mph speed limits; and county lines issues.

The Chairman stated that in view of NAG’s concern about the lack of volunteers for Speedwatch, he would ask the Secretary to prepare a press release drawing attention to the scheme in the hope that more volunteers could be encouraged to come forward.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer reported that all the advertisers had paid for the advertisements appearing in the last magazine.

The total balances were now £1,497.36 (current account) and £2,003 (deposit account) including £2.31 interest for December.

The Treasurer stated that he had looked into other investment accounts to fund a better rate of interest for the Deposit Account funds as discussed at the previous meeting. There were several possibilities, but the most appropriate appeared to be the variable NatWest rates of 3.2% (with 35 days’ notice of withdrawal) or 4.17% (with 95 days’ notice of withdrawal).  The Deposit Account currently paid 1.45% (variable). The Treasurer suggested that £1,000 of the existing Deposit Account could be put into a 35 day notice account and a further £1,000 into a 90 day notice account, while keeping the existing Deposit Account open as a contingency arrangement in the event that there was a need to revert in the future.

**AGREED: 1. That £1,000 be paid into a 35 day notice NatWest Investment Account and a further £1,000 into a 95 day notice NatWest Investment Account, to be transferred from the existing Deposit Account with the bank.**

**2.  The existing Deposit Account be retained alongside the new Investment Accounts.**

**Editorial Report**

The copy date for articles in respect of the next meeting was 20 February 2024.

The next MERA Magazine Sub Committee would be held with ACER on 22 January 2024 to discuss ACER’s views on the magazine and to agree any further changes that may be necessary. The Secretary asked members to draw to his attention any issues that needed to be discussed at the meeting by 15 January as he would be sending out the agenda early in the week following this meeting.

**CONSULTATIONS & PETITIONS**

The Chairman advised of the following ongoing Borough Council consultations and petitions:

**Local Transport Plan** – closing date 23 February 2024. The Chairman requested that Committee members consider their responses on this document and deliver their views at the next meeting.

**Petitions**

The Chairman drew attention to the petition had been submitted in relation to the future of St Crispins leisure centre, as highlighted at the last meeting. The petition remained available to be signed until 4 February 2024.

The Committee was reminded that since the petition was lodged, it was reported that the council had decided to repurpose the centre for extra school places while continuing to offer important amenities for residents and community groups.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**Speeding**

The Committee was advised that a response had now been received from the Meadow Road representative, and the Secretary had referred her to Tim Marsh, who had offered to loan his speedwatch camera to any of the residents of that road who had been trained on its use. There was no take-up at this stage on the suggestion that the residents might wish to apply for MERA membership.

**NEW ITEMS**

**MERA AGM**

The Secretary stated that work was now commencing in earnest on the preparations for the next AGM, which would be held on 9 May 2024 at St Nicolas Church. He stated that the priority would now be finding a speaker for the meeting, and so far there had been no response from the Ornithology Trust or the RSPB to speak to members about goose control and wild birds generally. The Park Ranger of the nature reserve would now be contacted to establish whether he would be able to give a presentation on the wildlife and his achievements as Park Ranger.

Members were informed that an action list would be prepared for the next meeting, but in the meantime any suggestions for a speaker for the meeting would be welcomed.

**Parking too close to junctions**

The Secretary stated that he would be reporting on his review of those roads that had been causing problems due to motorists parking too close to junctions at the next meeting, and he gave a summary of his preliminary recommendations.

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

**Gas works in Earley**

The Secretary updated the meeting on the position relating to gas repairs in Maiden Erlegh. He reported that Cllr Newton was attempting to have the work at Betchworth Avenue and Silverdale Road postponed until the school summer holidays to minimise disruption. Cllr Newton had also raised the poor state of Silverdale Road, particularly between Moor Copse Close and Avalon Road, and he had asked for consideration to be given to repairing this section of the highway.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Planning application: Moor Copse Close**

It was reported that a planning application for a dwelling in Moor Copse Close was a cause of concern to other householders in the road because it included a proposal to convert a garage into two studio apartments, which would almost inevitably increase the parking problems in the area. Additionally, it was stated that the plans were not in keeping with other homes in the close.

The Committee noted this concern, but was of the view that this was best left to residents to object to the planning authority if they wished to do so. It was the case that objections had already been registered against the proposal.

There was a general view that homes of multiple occupation often caused parking pressures and the Secretary would consider bringing this issue forward to a future meeting to discuss options.

**Park Ranger**

The Chairman reported that Anne Booth advised the Secretary prior to the meeting that Grahame Hawker would be retiring as Park Ranger at the end of February. The Editor confirmed that an article would appear in the next MERA Magazine. It was agreed that the Secretary would contact Grahame to wish him well and to ask him to speak to the membership about his work over the years at the May 2024 AGM.

**Cigarette butts**

Judy Clark raised the issue of the unsightly proliferation of cigarette butts which were strewn around the Turkish barber shop. The Committee was informed that this issue was being reported to the council and an update would be provided at a later meeting.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

8 February 2024 at Kenton Road Day Centre.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.45pm.