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

**Present**

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| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) | Ryan Yao-Smith (Treasurer) |
| Steve Feltham (Secretary) | Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) |
| Judy Clark (Area 5) | Rosemary Cook (Area 11) |
| Pamela Roberts (Area 10) | John Saunders (Area 13) |
| Celia Smith (Area 6) | Elaine Spratling (Area 4) |
| Tim Marsh (ACER) | Caroline Smith (Town Councillor) |

**Apologies received**

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| Peter Woodward (Vice Chairman/Area 1) | Anne Booth (Area 9) |
| Paul Medlycott (Area 12) | Barbara Stansfield (Area 8) |
| David Chopping (Luckmore Drive RA) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Berberis nuisance at 1 Instow Road**

The Secretary reported that the overhang of the berberis bush had been removed.

**Tackling fraudulent activity**

The Secretary confirmed that he had written to NORA to request assistance in gaining the support of other residents’ associations in tackling the growing problem of fraudulent activity through telephones and the internet. The NORA Secretary had confirmed that he would write to NORA members and circulate MERA’s report on the subject.

**Borough Planning and Design Guide**

The Chairman advised the Committee that ACER had met with Wokingham Borough Council planning officers and the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement on 12 February 2021, the purpose of which was to draw ACER’s concerns regarding the non-enforcement of its design code when approving planning applications, which was having a negative impact on North Earley. The papers, which included the submission made to the council, had been circulated to the committee in advance.

It was pointed out that the issues highlighted by ACER were specific to North Earley, and that Maiden Erlegh did not have all the same problems. However, it was appropriate for the committee to consider ways of improving the appearance of Maiden Erlegh so that it appeared more attractive to residents and visitors to the estate.

The Chairman updated the committee on his proposal that small trees could be planted on the grass verges along part of Lakeside. There had been twenty responses received from Lakeside residents, 18 of which were very positive and enthusiastic about the prospect of this idea. He had now written to the Town Council and had received a response from the Deputy Town Clerk, who had advised that she would consult the council’s next committee about the proposal either at its March or April meeting. If the Town Council was in favour of the idea, this would be passed to Wokingham Borough Council for consideration.

Rosemary Cook stated that she would like ACER’s agreement to take their report to Earley Town Council. Tim Marsh stated that ACER had offered a presentation to the Town Council’s Planning Committee, following which the Chairman had approached the Town Clerk to pursue this suggestion, which he supported. The presentation would now take place at the next Planning Committee meeting.

Following a comment made by Rosemary Cook that the paving over of front gardens was of particular concern, Tim Marsh commented that where such work was carried out, the paving had to be porous. He also made the point that there were some front garden soft landscaping requirements in the design guide and a policy on front gardens that was not always clear to some as to whether these conditions applied only to new build. However, it was clarified at the planning meeting that these conditions also applied developments of existing dwellings.

Tim Marsh was thanked for the work ACER had carried out on this topic, which was very helpful indeed.

The Secretary asked the committee to continue to think about other improvements that could be put forward to enhance the environment of Maiden Erlegh. The item would be added to the April agenda to discuss any further proposals.

**Swallows Meadow**

The Secretary reported that Cllr Hare had written to Wokingham Borough Council to establish the current status of the Town Centre’s request to designate Swallows Meadow as Green Space. If approved, this would impact adversely on the likely success of any planning application to develop the area.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

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

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer reported that it had been a very quiet first quarter, although with the publication of the magazine this month, there would be more work to do. In his written report to the Secretary, he stated that MERA’s finances were strong, with the total amount in the MERA main account standing at £1,846.11, as confirmed in the latest NatWest statement. There had not been any outgoings since January 2021. Online banking continued to operate smoothly.

**Editorial Report**

The Magazine Editor confirmed that the next MERA Magazine would be published within the next week or two.

**CONSULTATIONS**

**Healthy child programme online survey (closing date 29 March 2021)**

**Greenways route B (closing date 19 April 2021)**

**Active Travel Fund (closing date 26 March 2021)**

**Community Safety Partnership (closing date 22 March 2021)**

**Poverty in Wokingham Borough (closing date 14 March 2021)**

The Chairman drew attention to the current consultations being carried out by Wokingham Borough Council, details of which could be found on the council’s website.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**NORA**

NORA had circulated proposals for changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, with the opportunity for local authorities to apply for funding under a pilot programme to apply design coding in their areas. In a further communication, NORA drew attention to proposals to overhaul the planning rules by allowing homeowners to vote to replace rows of post-war bungalows with Georgian-style terraces.

Judy Clark thought that the bungalows would be compulsorily purchased and drew attention to the remarkable lack of vehicles shown on the road in the drawing. John Saunders stated that there was a demand for bungalows such as those in The Crescent, and it was agreed that these were very suitable dwellings for older people and should not be replaced with houses.

**Reading University**

The Secretary drew attention to an email from Reading University which related primarily to the re-opening of the university as the lockdown was eased. He stated that if members wished to see the links within the pdf that was circulated, he would forward the original email to them.

**Earley Town Council**

The Town Clerk had contacted the Secretary to advise that the Town Plan had been updated and was now available to view on the Town Council’s website. The council would welcome any views MERA wished to submit in relation to the plan. Rosemary Cook advised the committee that MERA had been mentioned as an interested party and would welcome the Association’s views on the Town Plan.

Members of the committee were asked to consider the plan over the next few weeks and to come forward with any comments that they would suggest are taken into account at the next meeting.

**NEW ITEMS**

**Normalisation of MERA meetings after emergency measures cease**

The Secretary drew attention to the announcement of the ‘road map’ out of the Covid emergency as put forward by the government, which anticipated an end to the temporary lockdown measures introduced by 21 June 2021. This was likely to be the earliest date on which halls and meeting rooms would be permitted to re-open. The Secretary advised that it may be possible to meet again at a venue instead of online by the July meeting, although this was by no means absolutely certain.

The Committee was advised it might be an opportune time to consider whether to continue to use the Kenton Road Day Centre for MERA’s monthly meetings, or whether an alternative venue, such as St Nicolas Church, might be a better alternative. However, after a short debate, it was agreed that the venue for regular monthly meetings would remain unchanged.

The Secretary reminded members that the last AGM was held in May 2019, and he had been discussing with the Chairman whether to convene a meeting at the earliest opportunity, or whether to cancel the 2021 AGM as well.

The Chairman advised that given the need to arrange for a speaker and the fact that July to September would be the holiday season, the best earliest time for an AGM would be October 2021 but given that the 2022 meeting would be held anyway in May 2022, it would be better to cancel this year’s AGM. The Secretary advised that the committee would be asked to endorse the auditor’s report and Statement of Accounts as last year, with an explanatory item submitted to the 2022 AGM. This was agreed.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Collection of subscription monies**

The Secretary reported that Pamela Roberts had drawn attention to a problem in relation to the ability of residents to pay for their subscriptions in cash. The problem had been made worse by the pandemic, which had led most people to make more use of their debit and credit cards rather than paying by cash. It was also the case that fewer people were paying by cheque, many opting to pay by direct transfers.

Members were advised that a solution to this problem had not been found to date and the matter would be investigated further. While bank transfers appear attractive in one sense, the payments made would be very difficult to check by the Treasurer, with over 900 subscribers to MERA.

Pamela Roberts stated that card readers were available for £29, although concerns were raised that there may be other charges involved as well, and that this would be a sizeable amount to find from the budget, with 13 Area Representatives collecting subscriptions. It would not be desirable for just the one device to be shared.

The Secretary advised that the matter would be considered further and considered again at a later date.

**Proposed mini-roundabout at junction of Gypsy Lane and Rushey Way**

The Secretary reported that Paul Medlycott had raised with him the suggestion made at our AGM in 2019 that a mini-roundabout be put in place to ease the traffic queues during busy times. This would be raised with the council again once the Covid emergency restrictions were eased, as many council staff had been redeployed to Covid duties during the lockdown.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

8 April 2021.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.34pm.