**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee (online) held at 8pm on Thursday 14 January 2021**

**Present**

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| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) | 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) | Rosemary Cook (Area 11) |
| Pamela Roberts (Area 10) | Celia Smith (Area 6) |
| Siyu Smith (Area 2) | Tim Smith (Area 2) |
| Elaine Spratling (Area 4) | Tim Marsh (ACER) |

**Apologies received**

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| Anne Booth (Area 9) | Paul Medlycott (Area 12) |
| John Saunders (Area 13) | Barbara Stansfield (Area 8) |
| David Chopping (Luckmore Drive RA) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**MINUTES**

It was agreed that the item ‘Areas 12/13: Reported Complaints’ in the minutes of the last meeting be amended to read ‘…Martin Heath had responded to MERA’s request…’

Subject to this amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2020 were agreed.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Planning matters**

The Secretary reported that he had not yet received a response from the council on this matter, but that he was clear after looking into this further that as the council tax was calculated on the property rather than the number of people living in it, the amount of the council tax liability would not change if the owner of the property decided to rent part of it out. If the whole of the property was rented out, it would be the owner’s responsibility to inform the council of the position. Tim Marsh pointed out also that if the owner was the only person living in the property other than the new tenants, the council tax reduction for single occupancy of the property would no longer be claimable.

The Secretary also stated that if there was a restriction relating to whether or not the property could be rented out, this should be set out in the planning consent and the duty would be on the owner to ensure that the limits of the consent were not exceeded.

**Areas 12/13: reported complaints**

The Secretary reported that vehicle that had been parked for most of 2020 in Repton Road was still in place, and that given the flat tyre had not been inflated, it was reasonable to assume that the MoT had now expired without having been renewed.

It was agreed that given the circumstances of the pandemic and the financial difficulties that many residents were facing, MERA would take no further action for the time being, but would review the matter after the restrictions were eased. The Secretary pointed out that Wokingham Borough Council’s parking enforcement service were aware of the vehicle and may decide to take action against the owner of the vehicle anyway without further prompting.

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

The Secretary reported that he thought the flooding issue had now been resolved, although further work may be necessary at the site.

**Berberis nuisance at 1 Instow Road**

The Secretary stated that the Localities Team had reminded the Highways Department that this problem had still not been dealt with and had asked for an update.

**Kenton Road waste bin**

The Secretary advised that subsequent to his earlier report regarding the Kenton Road waste bin, Celia Smith had reported that at the times she carried out her litter pick, she had seen that the problem had not gone away and the bin was still very full on those occasions. Accordingly, the Secretary carried out a further inspection on Monday evening and he found that the bin was indeed very full. He took a picture of the bin and sent it to Cllr Mickleburgh, who was grateful for the update and confirmed that he was urging the Borough Council to install a larger freestanding black bin for this location.

**Air quality - bonfires**

The Secretary reported that Judy Clark’s request for an item on bonfires and fuel use in homes had been passed on to the Borough Council’s Communications, Engagement and Marketing Manager, who stated that he would look at the most appropriate means of circulating this information to residents. The Manager advised that the next newsletter would not be published until March, and as this may be dominated by coronavirus issues, he would consider alternatives.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman submitted the following report:

‘Many of the committee have taken part in Zoom meetings, and have found these rewarding, both as opportunities to discuss our issues and to keep in touch, albeit virtually, with other members.

But I am very aware that this has not involved all members, and I want to assure everyone that I and Steve are very anxious to resume normal events for everyone as soon as possible. We are very heartened by the news that vaccines, particularly the Oxford/Astrazeneca one that is easier to distribute, are now being rolled out. Most of us are in a priority category, and, for example, my wife Dayle had her (Pfizer) vaccine last Thursday. I hope that enough of us can be protected, and that the vaccine can be shown to give sufficient protection, to allow us to meet again, perhaps soon after Easter.

If we can meet again by May we will hold our AGM then. Otherwise it seems prudent to wait, in the hope that it will not be too long before we meet in person. Of course if there is little prospect of this we will consider how to hold the AGM using Zoom. I very much hope that we will avoid this.

I hope that, in spite of necessary social restrictions, you have been able to enjoy your Christmas festivities; and I wish you all a Very Happy New Year. The last one has been dreadful, and I hope that it is not too presumptuous to hope that 2021 will turn out to be a great improvement.’

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer submitted the following report:

'Our accounts continue to be in a healthy surplus, and the Online Banking system is working smoothly. Last month we made our first outgoing online payment, and this system will hopefully act as a secure and swift way of doing transactions.

I am also happy to report that 16 advertisers in the magazine switched to paying their invoices by direct online bank transfer for the latest magazine issue, which means our invoices are being paid much more efficiently. They expressed their desire to continue paying invoices in this way going forward, which is excellent.'

**Editorial Report**

The Magazine Editor reported that the copy date for the next MERA Magazine was 20 February. The committee was asked for any items they wished to submit to be submitted by that date at the latest.

Elaine Spratling asked about the safety measures that should be taken when distributing the magazine in view of the Covid-19 concerns regarding the spreading of infection. The Secretary responded that this was a very good point that would need careful consideration, but that as the magazine was not due to be circulated until mid-March, it would be better to consider precautionary measures in the light of the conditions and regulations in force at that time. Accordingly, he would bring the matter forward for debate at the March meeting.

**CONSULTATIONS**

**SEND Strategy**

Wokingham Borough Council was currently consulting on its review of its Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) strategy and had requested comments by 31 January 2021.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**NORA**

NORA had provided its monthly newsletter, which was circulated to members previously.

**NEW ITEMS**

**Tackling fraudulent activity**

The Secretary explained his concerns about the high number of fraudulent activity and scams that were being regularly reported by the Police, which he stated was impacting disproportionately on vulnerable and elderly people. He questioned why the Government was not addressing the matter through effective legislation, although he acknowledged that this could not prevent all such crimes.

Members had been sent an outline of some of the matters that could be addressed in this way, which were generally well received. However, in view of some reservations that had been expressed, the Secretary stated that he would be happy to expand upon these ideas before taking them forward with a view to achieving government consideration of these proposals.

The Secretary proposed that if agreement of the Committee could be achieved following the provision of this information, he proposed to submit the proposals to NORA with a view to obtaining the approval of residents’ associations throughout the country to the idea of introducing legislation to deter such frauds and scams. Tim Smith offered to use his channels to persuade Sir John Redwood to take up MERA’s initiative.

**AGREED:** That the Secretary produce a further report for the next meeting and to consider appropriate means of bringing this issue to the Government’s attention.

**Temporary suspension of garden waste collections**

The Chairman referred to the two recent suspensions of the garden waste collection services, both of which were reversed before any collections were missed. Although the Committee appreciated the difficulties the council was facing with staff absences due to Covid, it was accepted that if collections were missed, compensation should be offered to residents subscribing to the scheme.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Social distancing – Maiden Erlegh school pupils**

The Secretary advised that he had not written to the Head Teacher of Maiden Erlegh School regarding the matter raised by the Vice Chairman at the last meeting in view of the fact that most children were not at school due to the lockdown, and he asked whether there was still a problem with the smaller number of children of key workers. The Vice Chairman replied that it remained a problem, although there were not so many children involved at present. This was agreed by the committee, and therefore it was:

**AGREED:** The communication to the Head Teacher be sent.

**Borough Planning and Design Guide**

Tim Marsh referred to the communication he had sent to the Chairman and Secretary regarding the Borough Planning Policy and Design Guide, making the point that planning decisions appeared to ignore the spirit and content of these documents. He explained that ACER viewed these matters very seriously, and it was primarily for this reason that ACER was brought back to life after a hiatus in recent years.

ACER had involved Matt Rodda MP in assisting to progress this matter and he was hoping to obtain a response from the government body dealing with planning design.

The Chairman responded that he thought this was an excellent campaign initiated by ACER, and Rosemary Cook stated that Earley Town Council would be very interested in this work. However, she was concerned that it would be difficult to compel residents to have grass in their front garden as many would prefer. Tim Smith pointed out that there were also drainage issues with surface within the curtilage of the property.

Rosemary Cook stated that she was also concerned that the Borough Council was not always notifying residents of planning applications relating to neighbouring properties.

The Secretary stated that he would ensure that this matter would be debated further at future meetings.

**Covid vaccination programme**

Rosemary Cook stated that the Covid vaccination programme being conducted by Brookside General Practice appeared to be progressing very well and the whole scheme was being run extremely efficiently. The Secretary stated that he would be happy to acknowledge this on MERA’s web site and in the next magazine. Rosemary agreed to provide further details to the Secretary.

**Swallows Meadow**

Rosemary Cook drew attention to the planning application for 40 homes and a superstore that was being proposed for Swallows Meadow. A virtual village meeting was being planned for 28 January 2021 between 5.30 and 7pm. The website with full information was available at [www.lowerearleyplans.co.uk](http://www.lowerearleyplans.co.uk).

**Oak tree at Swepstone Close, Lower Earley**

Rosemary Clark drew attention to an Oak tree at Swepstone Close which needed to be felled as the roots were destroying the foundations of five houses nearby. It was hoped that it would be possible to replace the oak or plant other suitable trees to compensate, but it was very unfortunate that the oak had to come down.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

11 February 2021.

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