**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee held at 8pm on Thursday 14 March 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) |
| Bob Collins (Area 14) | Patsy Collis (Area 8) Patsy Collis (Area 8) |
| Chris Haines (Area 12) | Pamela Roberts (Area 10) |
| Celia Smith (Area 6) | Siyu Smith (Area 2) |
| Tim Smith (Area 2) | Elaine Spratling (Area 4) |
| Cllr Stephen Newton (Wokingham BC) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**Apologies received**

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| Anne Booth (Area 9) | Judy Clark (Area 5) |
| Rosemary Cook (Area 11) | Cllr Norman Jorgensen (Wokingham BC) |

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2024 were signed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Roundabout sponsorships**

The Treasurer reported that he had attended a site meeting with Cllrs Newton and Fishwick and two officers from the Borough Highways Department. Jackie Smith and Pat Saunders were also in attendance.

He reported that the officers expressed concerns over members of the public carrying out tasks on a roundabout at a busy road junction. The need for accreditation and attendance on a 5-day course costing around £2,000 per person was necessary. However, it was pointed out to the officers that the aim was to improve the appearance of the site and all those involved were volunteers.

The Treasurer informed the Committee that there also appeared to be a gas pipe in the vicinity although at this stage, the exact location was not known. Electrical cables were also present at the site. Those present agreed that the pipes and cables would be at least one and a half feet below the surface, and therefore would not interfere with work being carried out on raised flower beds.

The group agreed that the beds could be laid in such a position to avoid any interference with excavations for cable repairs. The Treasurer had written to Tivoli, who were responsible for maintenance work, to establish whether there was any arrangement that would enable the aims of the group to succeed. There had been no response to date.

The Treasurer stated that the council’s Highways representative had agreed to look into the matter further and he would contact him when he had done so.

Cllr Newton provided further advice to the Committee. He confirmed that Cllr Fishwick understood the position and was supportive of the project. Unfortunately, the purdah period would commence on 22 March, and it would not be possible to progress this matter from that date until after the elections in May.

**Geese**

The Secretary reminded the Committee that hope had been expressed that the Canada geese droppings around Lakeside, the adjoining roads and beyond would be cleared up regularly by Earley Town Council during the months of May and August, when the problem was particularly severe.

The Secretary stated that he had presented MERA’s case for tackling the problem at a meeting of the Town Council’s Amenities and Leisure Committee on 6 March 2024. Rosemary Cook also spoke and provided some well researched background on the subject.

The Town Clerk advised that cleaning the pavements was not an activity that was within the council’s remit as street cleaning was the responsibility of the Borough Council. This was not disputed, but the reason for contacting the Town Council first of all was that the authority was responsible for the management of the reserve and their refusal to act to control the numbers of this invasive species threatened to drive out other wildlife and increase the problems the presence of so many geese created for residents.

Fortunately, the members of the committee expressed interest in looking at Edwin Trout’s suggested ways of controlling numbers and encouraging the geese to forage within the nature reserve itself. These ideas included reducing the number of nesting sites and providing more areas of cut grass within the grounds. After discussion, it was agreed that expert advice would be sought and further consideration would then be given to the matter.

Cllr Newton added that the Canada Geese were being driven away from the lake by the swans, and the problem experienced by residents was aggravated by the fact that there was less mown grass available within the reserve. Additionally, with the hedges grown differently now, the cleared areas allowed the geese to access Lakeside more easily. There was a concern that numbers could increase substantially this year due to the large number of hatchlings that survived in 2023. It was speculated that the playing area near Beech Lane was a potential area for the geese to graze.

The Secretary stated that a reporter for the Reading Chronicle was present at the council’s Amenities and Leisure Committee meeting, and in a discussion afterwards, the Secretary confirmed to him that the allegation made, reportedly by a councillor, that MERA was in favour of culling the birds was incorrect, as stated in MERA’s presentation. The reporter agreed, and he revealed that he had seen MERA’s minutes, and had not discovered any reference to a cull of the Canada Geese. The Secretary advised Area Representatives to make this clear if residents raised the matter on the doorstep. It was pointed out, however, that MERA had inquired whether the Town Council was planning to oil some of the eggs in line with previous efforts to control numbers, and had been advised that this method of managing the reserve had been discontinued. For this reason, MERA was looking at how to deal with the consequences of the increase in numbers.

The Committee was reminded that at the last meeting, it was agreed that a petition would be drawn up to circulate to the residents of Areas 1 to 6 requesting Earley Town Council to take action to clear up the goose droppings during the period May to August to ensure that the health risk to children was addressed. It had been envisaged that the petition could be signed at the doorstep when the March edition of the magazine was circulated, but alternatively, the petition could be made available at the AGM in May for those attending to sign if they wished. This was agreed.

Finally, the Secretary summarised the media attention the matter was receiving, including the appearance of articles in the Reading Chronicle and Wokingham Today. Contact had also been made by a news agency that had links with the BBC.

**Earley Town Plan**

The Chairman stated that the Secretary had sent a copy of the proposed amendments to the Town Plan to Cllr Newton, as requested. Cllr Newton stated that a cross-party working group had been established to revamp the Town Plan and that the format of the Plan would be changed following the work that had been done. The revised plan would now comprise a mission statement, a vision for Earley, objectives, timelines and budget implications.

**MERA AGM**

The Secretary updated the Committee on the preparations for the AGM to be held in May. He stated that Peter Woodward and Rosemary Cook had both decided not to stand for re-election in May. The Secretary thanked them both for their contributions to MERA over the years, which had been valued by the Committee. Committee members were asked to let him know as soon as possible if they no longer wished to carry out their roles so that arrangements could be made to replace them at the AGM.

The search for a speaker at the meeting was continuing because no reply had been received from the suggested names that had been agreed upon at previous meetings. However, following the favourable report received regarding the speaker from the Anti-Social Behaviour team at a recent NAG meeting, it was proposed and agreed that the council’s ASB officer be contacted with a view to speaking at the AGM.

The Treasurer agreed to liaise with the Auditor to produce the Statement of Accounts and Treasurer’s Report to submit to the next Executive Committee meeting.

The Secretary stated that he had completed his report for the AGM in relation to the rule change regarding Finch Road, the increased membership relating to the catchment area and ACER collaboration changes. The report was agreed and would now be submitted for endorsement by the AGM. Members were asked to submit any further rule changes they wished to have discussed before the next Executive Committee.

The Committee endorsed the use of MERA’s regular printers, Minuteman Press, to print the flyers and the AGM agenda in relation to the forthcoming meeting.

The Chairman had produced his Chairman’s Report, and the Secretary would now incorporate this into the AGM agenda.

The Chairman had also offered to donate the wine, fruit juices and disposable cups for the AGM, and Siyu and Tim Smith offered to donate the nibbles, disposable plates and cutlery.

The arrangements for ‘meeters and greeters’ on the door would be discussed at the next meeting.

**Parking too close to junctions**

The Chairman confirmed that the Secretary had forwarded MERA’s proposals to deal with the problem of vehicles parking too close to junctions to Wokingham Borough Council.

**Cigarette butts at The Parade**

Following his conversation with the shop owner, the Chairman was pleased to report that the problem of cigarette butts littering a part of The Parade had been resolved.

**Presentation of ‘The Foxtrot’s Easy’ novel**

The Chairman advised the Committee that Andrea Russell’s daughter was taken to hospital and was unable to attende the planned book readings as discussed at the last meeting. Instead, it was presented very well by Lesley and Grahame Hawker, and 15-20 people attended.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman gave a report on the issues discussed at the March NAG meeting. In particular, he highlighted a presentation that had been given by the Borough Council officers regarding anti-social behaviour, which was very informative.

The Chair of NAG informed the Group that the plans for a Speedwatch Scheme were now being developed following the successful press release issued by MERA. A watch was planned to be set up on Rushey Way between Carshalton Way and Kilnsea Drive when the evenings were lighter.

A report on MERA’s recent activities was reported to the Group, and the Chairman of ACER stated his concerns over parking and congestion problems at the Mosque, which remained unresolved.

The NAG Chair was satisfied with the current arrangements for the control of traffic at matches taking place at Laurel Park.

David Hare stated that he had not seen the new Playing Field Strategy, and he stated that details would not be revealed until after the Local Plan update.

In response to the issue of the Local Plan update in the Chairman’s Report, Cllr Newton confirmed to the Executive Committee that councillors had not yet seen the consultants’ report on the Playing Field Strategy. He explained that the Local Plan update had been delayed because legislation had been awaited that would take into account the oversupply of housing already approved. Unfortunately, it was now clear that, contrary to the advice previously received from the government, the new legislation did not so provide, and land to accommodate a further 2,000 homes now had to be identified.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer reported that the 95 day deposit account had now been approved and that he had now transferred £1,000 into this account as previously agreed. The balances now stood as follows:

Current account: £1,505.36

Deposit account: £5.84 (including 1p interest)

35 day notice deposit account: £1,002.72 (including £2.54 interest)

95 day notice deposit account: £1,001.83 (including 1.83 interest).

In the process of obtaining the 95 day account, it came to light that a former Treasurer was named on MERA’s account, and this needed to be rectified.

**AGREED: That the bank be informed that the names of all previous MERA Treasurers be removed from the signatory list and from MERA’s mandate.**

**Editorial Report**

It was confirmed that the spring editions of the magazine would be available at or around 20th of the month.

**CONSULTATIONS & PETITIONS**

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

**Cost of living survey** – closing date 23 February 2024.

**Petitions -** The Chairman advised that the petition relating to the safety of pedestrians crossing the roads at the Just Tiles roundabout in Woodley was still current. The petition was available to be signed until 18 April 2024.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**Paving at The Waterfall**

The Secretary reported that two complaints had been received relating to a tripping hazard caused by a new area of paving outside the Waterfall restaurant. He discussed this problem with the owner on his return from holiday, who responded that the new paving was laid while he had been away, and he had returned to find that the work had not been finished as instructed. However, the edges of the new paving had now been smoothed out and this appeared to have stopped any further complaints and the unfavourable comments that had been posted on social media. Responses had been sent to the complainants.

**Gas works – Betchworth Avenue**

Judy Clark had emailed the Secretary to point out that there should be signs at the Kenton Road/Silverdale Road, Silverdale Road/Gipsy Lane and Kenton Road/Radnor Road junctions stating that there was no access to Wilderness Road. The Secretary was aware of this issue but it had been explained by the officer in charge of signage that bespoke signs took 9 weeks to make, and so it would be too late to undertake that work now. It was confirmed that the project was due to be completed on 15 May 2024.

**NEW ITEMS**

*(None)*

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

**‘Have Your Say’ event**

The Chairman advised that Thames Valley Police had staged a ‘Have Your Say’ event on 12 March 2024.

**Grass cutting**

The Chairman reported that the mowers had commenced grass cutting in the Borough, but that it would take a few weeks before they would arrive in Earley, by which time it was to be hoped that the ground would have dried out sufficiently to allow the heavy machines to be used without damaging the grass.

**Huge Earley Litter Pick**

The Chairman announced that the annual litter pick would be held on Sunday 24 March. Sessions would commence from the Interpretation Centre from 10am and at 2pm. Alternative venues were London Road/The Drive (morning and afternoon); Maiden Place Community Centre car park (morning only); and Chalfont Park car park (morning only).

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Identification marking of bicycles**

The Treasurer asked whether MERA would support a request for Tesco to provide an area for the police marking of bicycles to enable them to be retrieved if stolen. The Committee agreed that this would be a benefit to the community which MERA would be happy to endorse.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

11 April 2024 at Kenton Road Day Centre.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.10pm.