**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee held at 8pm on Thursday 8 December 2022 at Earley Day Centre, Kenton Road, Earley**

**Present**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) | Peter Woodward (Vice Chairman/Area 1) |
| John Saunders (Area 13/Treasurer) | Steve Feltham (Secretary) |
| Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) | Patricia Brown (Editorial Team) |
| Constantina Ainsworth (Area 7) | Anne Booth (Area 9) |
| Rosemary Cook (Area 11) | Pamela Roberts (Area 10) |
| Siyu and Tim Smith (Area 2) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**Apologies received**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Judy Clark (Area 5) | Celia Smith (Area 6) |
| Barbara Stansfield (Area 8) | Tim Marsh (ACER) |
| Cllr Tahir Maher (Wokingham BC) |  |

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2022 were signed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Proposed 3G football pitch at Maiden Erlegh School**

The Secretary stated that the Avalon Road residents continued to be very active in opposing the installation of a 3G football pitch at Maiden Erlegh School. It was fair to assume that the councillors were well aware of the opposition to this proposal. The Committee agreed that MERA’s actions were appropriate to date and that the agreed letter of objection would be sent as a response to any planning application that may be submitted.

**Member review of Brookside surgery**

The Secretary referred to his suggestion made at the last meeting that he could forward MERA’s letter to Sir John Redwood MP to the NORA Secretary, for distribution to other residents’ associations as a prompt for them to take similar action if they were also receiving complaints about the level of service currently being provided by the NHS.

However, in view of the Minister’s detailed response that was distributed to the Committee, in which it was made clear that the Government had its own plans to deal with the problems with the service, thus ruling out the setting up of a Royal Commission for the time being, he had not sent the communication to NORA.

**MERA modernisation programme**

The Secretary advised that he had not yet drafted the report in relation to MERA’s catchment area for the AGM as he had not yet received the magazine costings from the printers. He stated that he would present a report to the January meeting instead, with or without the costings information.

**Speaker and venue for 2023 AGM**

The Committee was asked whether there were any further suggestions for a speaker for the 2023 AGM. Members were reminded that a police representative to present an outline of Speedwatch was suggested at the last meeting.

A proposal was received that the Earley Town Council Park Ranger could be approached to make a presentation at the AGM. This was considered to be a very good suggestion, but the Chairman advised that on balance, he thought that a talk about Speedwatch might be preferable on this occasion, given that the Town Council was looking for volunteers to carry out speed monitoring in Earley, and this would be a good opportunity to seek to persuade those present to put their names forward. The suggestion regarding the Park Ranger would be carried forward for the following year, as it was agreed that such a presentation would be of considerable interest to residents.

The Chairman then suggested that St Nicolas Church be booked again for the 2023 AGM, as this venue provided the flexibility to cope with both high and low attendance levels with none of the usual task of setting out chairs. It was also a better venue in terms of catering for any visual aids that may be required by the speaker. The Committee agree that such an arrangement would be appropriate, and the Secretary would make the necessary booking arrangements with the Church.

**Back issues of MERA newsletters and magazines**

The Chairman stated that he had now obtained a copy of all the magazines and newsletters produced by MERA since 1964. This was a complete archive that could be used for future reference. The Chairman was now looking at digitising all of these publications, which he would attempt to do using his equipment at home. Tim Smith stated that he could help with producing pdf documents.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman reported that he had attended the NAG meeting on 14 November 2022. A number of items of interest to MERA were discussed, including the Speedwatch initiative. It was suggested that this might feature in the next MERA Magazine, which appeared to be a good idea, particularly given the decision made to invite a Speedwatch representative to the next MERA AGM.

Other matters discussed included anti-social behaviour, which was reported to have been better in the last 6 months. The pet shop and the post office had closed, which provided community officers with useful accommodation on site. Thefts had not increased, but the number of cycle and car number plate thefts remained of concern. It had been established at the ‘Have Your Say’ event recently that fraud was one of the highest concerns for residents. It was suggested that information sessions about this could be aimed at older people, perhaps at residential homes. Another ‘Have Your Say’ event was planned to be held at The Parade, Silverdale Road in late January or February 2023.

The site at the Laurel Park barrier had been surveyed prior to the installation of a rising barrier on a timer. The gate would be retained for backup if necessary. It was also the case that the funding for an extra car park at Laurel Park had been dropped as Laurel Park had been eliminated as a 3G site. It was considered that a more radical solution should be considered in relation to weekend parking at the site, and NAG would leave this matter on future agendas to enable further discussions to be had on how to fund the development of another car park.

There had been no further damage to The Orchard, although some fruit had been taken. The Fireworks display at Laurel Park was considered a success, with 4,000 people attending. However, there had been unacceptable instance of violence over car parking, which had not benefited from the calming police presence there should have been due to an earlier incident in which a volunteer had suffered a heart attack and unfortunately died two days later. However, it was reported that the police were exemplary in dealing with the incident. The display would require more volunteers and support if the event was to continue in 2023.

The Chairman also reported that he had received no further communications from the council in relation to MERA’s proposal for trees to be planted on grass verges in Lakeside, which had received overwhelming support from Lakeside members.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer reported that the printers had been paid for Issue 188 of the MERA Magazine. 19 invoices to advertisers had been sent and only 4 remained outstanding. The current account balance stood at £2.278.90 as at 1 December 2022 and the reserve account stood at £837.24.

**Editorial Report**

The Editor had no further news to report on this occasion.

**CONSULTATIONS & PETITIONS**

The Chairman advised of the following ongoing consultations and petitions:

**Moving traffic offences** – The Borough Council had announced that it planned to apply for powers to enforce penalties for moving traffic offences such as driving through ‘No Entry’ signs. The council was consulting on the proposal and the locations where initial enforcement should take place. Most of these locations were within Wokingham town. Closing date – 2 January 2023.

**Protection of trees –** The Committee was reminded that there was a consultation in which residents were asked for their views on how existing trees were cared for, and new ones planted, in the Borough. The closing date for these responses was 22 January 2023. Rosemary Cook commented that the Veteran Trees Association would like more people to complete the survey.

**Petitions**

The petition opposing the council’s decision to construct 4,500 houses at Hall Farm was due to expire on 22 December 2022. MERA had already responded to this proposal. There were 3 other petitions appearing on the Borough Council’s website. These related to Ryeish Green Swimming Pool, the removal of bollards on the A327 at Arborfield, and the removal of the one-way system at Evendons.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**National Health Service**

The Chairman stated that the Secretary had circulated the letter received from Sir John Redwood’s office in response to the concerns regarding the problems Earley residents were experiencing with the National Health Service. As this had now received ministerial consideration, it was now clear that the government was not minded to set up a Royal Commission as it had its own plans to resolve these problems over time.

However, problems continued to be aired on Facebook regarding Brookside Group Practice, with more problems being flagged up about difficulties in making appointments to see a GP. It was considered that an item should be added to the next AGM to establish whether residents remained dissatisfied with the service following the end of the busy winter period.

**Housing allocation policy**

The Secretary referred to the letter received from Sir John Redwood’s office relating to the concerns raised by Earley residents regarding the high volume of housing that the government required to be built within the Borough. The Secretary acknowledged the role the previous and existing Leaders of the Borough Council had played in highlighting the issue to government and the efforts made by Sir John Redwood in raising the issue in the House of Commons.

The amendments made to the Levelling Up Bill enabled more flexibility to be exercised with national targets, and the Leader of the Borough Council now had an opportunity to negotiate a lower allocation more in keeping with the Borough’s needs with the Housing Minister Lucy Frazer. It was understood that the Minister had agreed that a meeting with the Leader of the Council could be arranged.

The Committee was advised that setting a lower figure for the number of houses to be built would itself be controversial because fewer builds would impact on prospective house buyers in the Borough.

**NEW ITEMS**

*There were no new items referred to the meeting.*

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Town Mayor’s Christmas Reception**

The Chairman reported that the Secretary and he had accepted an invitation from the Town Council’s mayor to attend his reception on 10 December. The mayor’s chosen charity was ‘Arthritis Matters’.

**Protective stones on grass verges**

The Secretary reported that Tim Marsh had contacted him to draw attention to the fact that the arrangements for applying for protective stones to be placed on grass verges to discourage motorists from parking there appeared no longer to be in place. There was no reference to the policy on the Borough Council’s website and there appeared to be a reluctance to look into the matter.

The Secretary stated that if the opportunity arose, he would raise the issue with one of the councillors at the Mayor’s Reception, but if that did not appear appropriate, he would attempt to establish the position before the next meeting.

**Assistance with canvassing for new members**

The Committee was advised that Rosemary Cook had emailed the Secretary to raise the fact that some residents in her area were confusing her role as a councillor when acting in her capacity as Area Representative, and that in the circumstances, it might be better if another person carried out the canvassing for new members to ensure that MERA was not missing opportunities due to this political connection.

The Secretary was minded not to start canvassing until the spring, bearing in mind the cost of living crisis, financial pressures over the Christmas period and the prospect of the cold winter months ahead. He requested that if anyone wished to assist in canvassing for more members in this area, they let him know.

**Planning issues**

Rosemary Cook advised that the lack of enforcement of the planning rules was of concern to the Town Council. She drew attention to the link on the Town Council website that could be used to make an enforcement complaint. A list of Earley planning applications could also be found on the site.

**Tesco cycle rack**

John Saunders drew attention to the dilapidated state of the bicycle rack at Tesco, which currently allowed only one bicycle to be tethered to it. The Secretary stated that he would raise the issue with the store.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

12 January 2023 at Kenton Road Day Centre.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.05pm.