**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee held at 8pm on Thursday 9 November 2023 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) | Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) |
| Anne Booth (Area 9) | Bob Collins (Area 14) |
| Rosemary Cook (Area 11) | Chris Haines (Area 12) |
| Pamela Roberts (Area 10) | Celia Smith (Area 6) |
| Siyu Smith (Area 2) | Elaine Spratling (Area 4) |
| Tim Marsh (ACER) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**Apologies received**

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| John Saunders (Area 13/Treasurer) | Judy Clark (Area 5) |
| Patsy Collis (Area 8) | Cllr Norman Jorgensen (Wokingham BC) |
| Cllr Stephen Newton (Wokingham BC) |  |

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2023 were signed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Grass cutting: roundabout sponsorships**

The Secretary advised that Cllr Newton had spoken at length to an officer in Highways regarding the proposed creation of a community garden at the Kenton Road roundabout. He was told that the plan put together by John Saunders and local residents was unlikely to be approved because being highway land, there were power and other services beneath the ground. Accordingly, this meant that anyone working on such land would need to have been fully trained, provide a risk assessment and method statement for the planned work, and also have public liability insurance to a minimum of £5k.

The Secretary stated that given the nature of the work and the considerable depth below ground of any pipes or cables, these requirements may not be necessary, and he advised the Committee that the residents planned to appeal if their application was refused. This would be on the basis that the pipes and cables underneath the ground need not be disturbed due to the shallow digging that would be required, and that alternatively, raised beds could be created to avoid such disturbance.

It was confirmed that the residents were not interested in finding an alternative site, and that the work on the roundabout was attractive to them owing to the proximity of the land to their homes.

**Geese**

The Secretary advised that Cllr Newton had written to the Town Clerk with a view to having the problems with the geese at Lakeside and the surrounding area added to the business of a future Town Council meeting. In the meantime, the Committee was informed that the Secretary had written to the RSPB for advice on how the problems of interaction between Canada Geese and residents might be managed.

**Royal Mail**

The Secretary reported that despite a reassurance that the Royal Mail was ‘trying their best’ to rectify the delays in mail deliveries, he subsequently experienced 9 consecutive days when the postman did not turn up at all. This was confirmed by video footage from his security cameras.

He reminded the committee that Ofcom had received a complaint regarding Woodley and Earley deliveries and that Ofcom were investigating this problem. He went on to state that he had spoken to a local postman who had told him that the staff were very dissatisfied with their management and they were no longer covering for staff absences due to holidays or sickness.

Any new developments on this issue would be raised at a future committee meeting.

**School streets and speed restrictions**

The Secretary advised the committee that an item on this issue would be published in the next MERA Magazine, and any feedback from members would be discussed at the December meeting. There was agreement that 20mph limits should be targeted at problem areas such as outside schools or busy shopping areas and that blanket limits on all residential roads would not be a wise move. The problems with blanket speed limits in Wales and other areas was discussed.

**Earley Town Plan**

Members were asked for any further suggestions for amendments to the Town Plan. Tim Marsh conveyed his views on new driveways, stating that the main issue was drainage. It was important that driveways laid were porous to allow excess water to be absorbed within the curtilage of the property, and the Borough Council’s own Design Guide stated that soft landscaping was also required where driveways replaced front lawns. This was laid down in policy TB06, but was rarely, if ever, enforced in his experience.

The consensus was that although this was a Borough Council matter, the proactive promotion of this policy in the Town Plan would be very helpful. It was also suggested that plans for new driveways and the associated soft landscaping should be in keeping with the character of the street.

The Secretary stated that he would put forward a form of words for the next meeting. In the meantime, if Committee members had any other proposals, they should let the Secretary know before the meeting so that a suggested amendment to the Plan could be agreed without further delay.

**Buses**

The meeting was informed that Wokingham Borough Council had announced that it planned to use Department of Transport Bus Service Improvement Plan money to fund free bus travel from local bus stops within the Wokingham Borough on selected Saturdays and Sundays between 18 November and 24 December. The arrangement would apply on every Saturday within those dates, and also on Sunday 26 November on service 4/X4 for the Wokingham Extravaganza only, and on Sunday 3 December on service 13/14 for the Woodley Carnival only. Travel to or from destinations outside the Borough would be available only in relation to travel from Wokingham Borough bus stops.

Additionally, the council had announced that the Winnersh Park and Ride service would reopen on a trial basis on Saturdays only and would run every 20 minutes. Funding was guaranteed only until the end of March 2025, and if the service did not prove viable within that time, it would be withdrawn. However, if it proved to be successful, Reading Buses may decide to expand the service to include Mondays to Fridays.

The meeting was advised that should the Park and Ride service prove unviable, the Secretary would suggest that service 17 be extended to operate non-stop between the Park and Ride and the Three Tuns bus stops, which might well be an economically workable alternative.

**Bins**

The Chairman reported that the Executive meeting of the Borough Council had endorsed the proposal of the Community and Corporate Overview Committee not to proceed with the suggested removal of certain bins and a reduction in collections. A Task and Finish Group had been set up to scrutinise the provision and emptying of bins across the Borough and to submit its recommendations to a future meeting of the Executive.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman advised that he would be attending the NAG meeting on 13 November and he planned to update the meeting with the main issues that MERA was currently considering. Members had no specific issues they wished the Chairman to raise at NAG.

The Committee was also informed that as a result of amendments agreed by the AGM in May 2023, additional income of £238 was received this year, against which the cost of printing additional MERA Magazines needed to be offset. These printing costs amounted to £108 for 200 additional copies, bringing the net increase in income to £130 for 2023/24.

The increased income could be used to keep MERA’s subscription fees at £1 per member per annum, and could help fund or contribute to community projects in the future as new streets within the agreed list approved at the AGM joined the MERA community.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Chairman advised the meeting that the Treasurer was unable to be present, but had produced a report for the committee.

He stated that the bank balances currently stood at £2,830.03 in the current account and £845.93 in the deposit account, which included £1.07 interest in September.

There was some discussion regarding a possible review of the current account to establish whether some of the money unlikely to be used in the current year could be transferred to the deposit account, and it was agreed that this matter would be discussed with the Treasurer.

**Editorial Report**

The Editor confirmed that the MERA Magazine was likely to be published on or around 20 November.

The Chairman reminded the meeting that this would be the first collaborative edition with ACER, and he wished to thank Jonathan and Patricia Brown as well as the rest of the Editorial Team for making this possible and on schedule. The work of all the team was appreciated by the whole committee, as well as all of our members.

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on 22 January 2024, when a review of the first joint issue would take place.

**CONSULTATIONS & PETITIONS**

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

**Polling places review** – closing date 19 November 2023.

**Eat well, get active survey** – closing date 26 November 2023.

**Developing a vision for Wokingham Borough** - closing date now extended to 30 November 2023.

**Petitions**

There were no current e-petitions.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**Refuse, songbirds and parking**

The Secretary advised the Committee that Helen Bilton, a member from Area 14, had raised a number of issues that concerned her relating to recycling and general waste being mixed together by the bin men, the massive decline in songbirds that she had noticed in her garden this year and her concerns about parking in Ramsbury Drive close to its junction with Wilderness Road.

On the first issue of food waste being mixed with general waste, the Committee was informed that a Shinfield resident had complained about this very issue, and had produced video footage of binmen emptying her green waste bags into her blue bins sacks on a number of occasions. Cllr Pauline Jorgensen had taken this up and Veolia had admitted that refuse collectors had ‘made a mistake’ and told to ensure it did not happen again. Some committee members had observed similar practices in the past, and it was agreed that everyone would watch out for such unsatisfactory practices in the future and ensure they were reported back to this Committee. The Secretary agreed to write to Cllr Jorgensen to advise her that this practice had been a matter of frustration to MERA Members for many years and that what was required was better monitoring of the contract, with penalties for continued non-complance.

With regard to songbirds, the Secretary reported that he was not clear whether this was a very local problem or a general problem, but he had written to the RSPB for advice on songbirds, and he had also taken the opportunity to see if they had anything useful to tell MERA about controlling the number of Canada Geese as well, as discussed earlier in the meeting.

In view of the interest of our members in birds generally, the Secretary stated that he had asked whether the RSPB could send someone to speak on the subject at our next AGM. The MERA Magazine Editor thought that it would be desirable to write to the British Trust for Ornithology for advice and for a speaker, and it was agreed that this would be explored.

In relation to parking, the Secretary had explained the position on this to Helen Bilton, including the work being carried out on parking too close to junctions, obstructions and the new parking laws expected later this year.

**NEW ITEMS**

**Rules and resolutions proposed by the Executive Committee**

The Chairman stated that the Secretary would be commencing work on the agenda for the May 2024 AGM shortly, and that any new resolutions and rules changes proposed should be identified sooner rather than later to ensure these matters could be debated in good time.

Although the Constitution allowed for such matters to be raised by at least five members no later than 14 days before an AGM, this was too late for the Executive Committee to debate such proposals, and could result in the Executive Committee not being able to support the proposal due to the lack of information and debate.

The Chairman advised that the Secretary would ensure that the proposal to include Finch Road as part of MERA’s catchment area would appear on the AGM agenda.

Should any Committee members wish to discuss any proposed new rules or resolutions to be put to the AGM, they should raise this at the January 2024 meeting, when this item will be included on the agenda.

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

**Reading Transport Strategy Consultation**

The Secretary reported that Cllr Newton had requested views on the Reading Transport Strategy consultation so that he could raise any issues important to MERA to the Executive Member for Active Travel, Highways and Travel by 5 November 2023. The Secretary stated that unfortunately this did not allow time to refer the matter to members, and therefore he had compiled a response from the clear views expressed by the Executive Committee at previous meetings. A copy of the response given was circulated for information.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Reading University**

The Vice-Chairman attended a dinner at Reading University at which the Vice Chancellor stated the importance of the university having contact with the community and five people had been appointed to various outreach occupations, including Dylan Parkes as Head of Strategic Engagement (Climate and Environmental Sustainability). The Vice-Chairman stated that he lived locally and advised on green matters, including for Maiden Erlegh School, and was willing to write a piece for the MERA Magazine. He raised the possibility of inviting him to speak at our AGM in the future.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

14 December 2023 (Festive meeting) at Kenton Road Day Centre.

The Chairman would bring liquid refreshments to the meeting, and Siyu Smith kindly volunteered to prepare the nibbles.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.15pm.