**Concerns for future of field at Laurel Park**

A green field at Laurel Park that is used by Earley residents for leisure activities may be reduced or destroyed with hardcore to ameliorate the car parking problems encountered by Marefield residents on fun days and when Laurel Park is used for football matches. The proposal envisages that the site is used as a car park on those days, but this has run into opposition from some local residents living in the affected roads in Marefield and Sibson who would prefer the field to be left as it is.

The field, located opposite the pavilion at Laurel Park and bordering a children’s playground close to Maiden Erlegh lake and a nature reserve, is owned by Wokingham Borough Council.

In 2016, Maiden Erlegh residents contacted MERA to express their concern that hedgerow trees, possibly containing nesting birds, had been felled to create an entrance to the site, which is now left exposed. Since then, the site has been occupied by travellers for almost two weeks, causing concern to local householders.

Negotiations are currently proceeding for the transfer of land at Laurel Park to Earley Town Council, which under the previous Administration was believed to be sympathetic to the idea of converting the field for use as a car park and might therefore decide to proceed with plans for the conversion. MERA has requested that a public consultation be carried out by the council to discover the extent of support and opposition to the plans, and the Town Clerk has provided some reassurance that this will be done.

MERA is supportive of the Football Club and recognises that the proposal aims to reduce the parking nuisance on match days, but converting the field would likely be regarded as an inappropriate solution if the green space is lost for a car park that will be used on perhaps only 30 days in the year. The field is a public amenity and it is the only place left for children and families to use when all the remaining fields are unavailable due to organised football matches being played.

MERA is campaigning to ensure that the public have their say before any decision on the car park proposal is approved. The Association would like to see alternatives considered before the green light is given to this proposal. The number of cars using the existing car park could be reduced by offering to bus in participants or do more to direct traffic to the Maiden Place car park, for example.

If residents are to lose this important green space, MERA would like to see the grass protected with a specially designed mesh so that after match days, the field could still be used as the public amenity for which it was originally intended. The roots of the hedgerow trees at the new entrance to the field also need to be protected from the weight of the vehicles using the car park entrance to gain access to the car park. We would like to see a lockable gate put in place at the entrance to the field for security reasons.

MERA is asking residents to make their views known so that a decision could be made that was supported by the majority.

*MERA members are invited to submit their views, for or against the proposal, by email to* askmera@virginmedia.com.