**DRAFT**

**Minutes of the 57th Annual General Meeting of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association held at 8pm on Thursday 11 May 2023 at St Nicolas Church, Sutcliffe Avenue, Earley**

**Executive Committee officers present**

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| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) – in the Chair | Peter Woodward (Vice-Chairman/Area 1) |
| John Saunders (Treasurer) | Steve Feltham (Secretary) |
| Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) | Patricia Brown (Magazine Editorial Team) |
| Constantina Ainsworth (Area 7) | Peter Ainsworth (Area 7) |
| Judy Clark (Area 5) | Rosemary Cook (Area 11) |
| Pamela Roberts (Area 10) | Celia Smith |
| Siyu Smith (Area 2) | Tim Smith (Area 2) |
| Cllr Tahir Maher (Honorary Member) |  |

**Other members present and signed in**

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| Stephen Bedman | Mark Blumenthal | Marilyn Bowden |
| Mark Calway | Judith Church | Bob Collis |
| Patsy Collis | John Cromwell | Mary Evans |
| Steve Froud | Brian Hackett | Jean Hackett |
| June Holmes | Marion Howell | Martin Howell |
| Terry Huggins | Mike Letton | Vera Letton |
| Nick Marshall | Hanu Parimi | David Roberts |
| Pat Saunders | Brian Smith | Jackie Smith |
| Pat Woodward |  |  |

**Speaker present**

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| PC Lee Turnham (Community Speedwatch Co-ordinator, Thames Valley Police) |

**Non- members present**

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| Helen Bilton | Cllr Stephen Newton |

**Apologies received**

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| Edwin Trout (Editorial Team) | Anne Booth (Area 9) |
| Chris Haines (Area 11) | Barbara Stansfield (Area 8) |
| Tim Marsh (ACER) |  |

**PRESENTATION**

The Chairman welcomed those present and introduced the Speaker for the evening, PC Lee Turnham, the Community Speedwatch Co-ordinator for Thames Valley Police.

The speaker described the Speedwatch scheme, its organisation, the reason for it and how the system operated in practice.

Members were advised that volunteers were always trained before deployment, and all equipment required for monitoring speed would be provided by the Police. A Speedwatch Co-ordinator would be designated in each area to organise the Speedwatch team and they would be responsible for the safe keeping of the equipment, organising rotas, etc. Teams would work in groups of two to four typically, with one person operating the camera, one or two recording the number plates and another might record the make, model and colour of the vehicle. A minimum of three people would be needed if they were using a gun device rather than a tripod mounted device. The speaker clarified that if the equipment was not used for a six-month period, it would be recalled.

Motorists who were found to be speeding would be issued with a warning letter. However, if they were driving at speeds above 50% of the speed limit, they would be dealt with more firmly. If the speed was above 100% of the speed limit, the police would visit the home of the offender and would also check up on the condition of the vehicle.

If the motorist was caught speeding a second time anywhere in the country, they would receive a final warning letter stating that further transgressions would result in a fine or even court action.

The meeting was informed that the scheme had proved very successful in persuading motorists to reduce their speed and that 92.7% of those issued with a warning letter did not receive a second one. It had been found that Speedwatch activity achieved a gradual reduction of speed in these areas.

If the vehicle identified as being driven at speed did not belong to the person receiving the letter, the police would carry out checks to identify the new owners. The speaker also revealed that the DVLA was considering re-introducing tax discs.

In response to a question, PC Turnham confirmed that the Speedwatch Team would identify suitable locations for carrying out Speedwatch monitoring, but each site must be approved in advance by the police.

Several questions were asked relating to the mechanics of the scheme. The speaker stated that the letters sent to those motorists flagged up by the Speedwatch team were despatched the same day, and so the process was very quick indeed.

The information that the team was required to collect was the speed, registration number, vehicle make, model and colour, the time of the offence and any additional comments that might be necessary. The progress made on the information provided by the volunteers to the police would be accessible to the Speedwatch teams.

PC Turnham also clarified that speed limit areas that were monitored were located within 20, 30 or 40 miles per hour limit zones. He explained that the localities selected by the volunteers and the position of the team in that locality would need to be approved by the police for safety reasons.

In order to volunteer, members were advised that they could go to the Speedwatch website, register and create a new group. (A form had also been placed in the reception to enable those present to register their interest in receiving further information on joining the scheme).

At the conclusion of the time reserved for questions, the Chairman thanked PC Lee Turnham for speaking to the AGM and for answering the questions raised at the meeting. The speaker then left the meeting while the meeting adjourned for a refreshment break.

**MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 12 MAY 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2022 were accepted as a correct record. The Chairman duly signed the minutes in line with the procedure set out in the Constitution.

**MATTERS ARISING**

The Chairman asked the Secretary to detail a small number of matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting as an update for members.

**Presentation by Robert Williams, CEO of Reading Buses**

The Secretary referred to the statement made by Robert Williams at the last AGM that passenger numbers had fallen to 11% of normal levels during the pandemic and that they had recovered to only 72% of normal. Since then, numbers have continued to recover slowly and at the beginning of this year they stood at 81% of normal. There was still some way to go before passenger numbers were likely to be fully restored, and members were encouraged to use the Little Oranges services as much as possible for travelling to Reading and the hospital.

The Secretary stated that the government had been subsidising bus services during the pandemic and continued to do so for the time being. Currently, they were running a scheme that enabled single fares to be reduced to no more than £2, which it was hoped would enhance passenger numbers outside of Reading for a limited but undefined period.

The meeting was also advised that the Borough Council had decided to continue to further subsidise the ‘Little Oranges’ services until September, and that in the meantime, tenders would be invited to continue to provide these or similar services for three years beyond that. MERA would continue to make the case to improve services using different routes to lessen the level of subsidy required for these services.

A question was raised regarding the proposals that had already been made by MERA to adjust bus routes to encourage further use of services in Maiden Erlegh. The Secretary responded that these proposals had been put forward to the Town and Borough Councils as well as to Reading Buses, but to date these had not come to fruition. However, MERA would continue to make the case for an improvement in the bus service through the Maiden Erlegh estates with a view to attracting more passengers and reducing or eliminating the amount of subsidy required.

**3G football pitches**

The Secretary reminded the meeting that following MERA’s successful campaign in association with the Marefield residents and the Earley Environmental Group against the proposed use of Laurel Park as a 3G football pitch, it was reported at the last AGM that a further application for a 3G pitch at Maiden Erlegh School had been submitted. Although the hope was expressed at that meeting that a formal objection would not be necessary, the subsequent open evenings at the school and our inspection of the grounds revealed very clearly that some of our members’ houses in Avalon Road would be severely impacted by the proposal. Accordingly, the Executive Committee decided that the proposal was unacceptable as presented.

The Secretary stated that following MERA’s written representations to the council and its additional communications with council members, together with the concerted campaign by those residents affected to persuade the council of the inappropriateness of the plans, the local authority finally decided to stop the work at the site. There would now be a complete review of sites where a 3G pitch might be more suitable, the result of which should be available this summer. MERA had also been clear in its responses to the council that it had major concerns about the safety and environmental impact of 3G pitches.

The meeting was advised that MERA would be monitoring the situation closely with the objective of ensuring that its members were not adversely impacted by any proposal emanating from the review. Members would be kept updated through the MERA Magazine and the website.

**Proposed roundabout at the junction of Gipsy Lane and Rushey Way**

The Secretary confirmed that the petition signed at the last meeting in relation to the proposal to install a roundabout at the junction of Gipsy Lane and Rushey Way was submitted to the Borough Council shortly after the 2022 AGM.

The Council confirmed on 1 March 2023 that a site assessment would be carried out to enable the council to make an informed decision on whether a roundabout or a mini roundabout would be suitable for this location. The council stated that MERA would be notified of the decision made, and this would be reported by way of the magazine and website, as well as by way of an update at the next AGM.

The Chairman asked members whether they had any further matters arising from the minutes that they wished to raise. A question was put forward on whether there had been any further news on a possible replacement for Maiden Erlegh Library, which had previously been located at Maiden Erlegh School. The Secretary replied that following representations made to find a new location for the library, the Council had decided not to replace it on the grounds of poor levels of usage, cost and the fact that alternative libraries were available in Lower Earley and Woodley. In view of the financial pressures facing the council and the need to fulfil its statutory responsibilities, this decision, while regrettable, was understandable.

**CHAIRMAN’S REPORT**

The Chairman drew attention to his report, which was contained in the agenda papers. The report was duly noted.

**TREASURER’S REPORT**

The Chairman paid tribute to Don Box, who for many years audited MERA’s books and which had been very much appreciated by the Executive Committee. Sadly, he passed away last January, and condolences went to his family, and particularly to his wife Vera, who also for many years performed her role as Joint Area Representative for the eastern section of Silverdale Road. Don Box would be sadly missed by all who knew him.

The Chairman asked John Saunders to present his report.

The Treasurer started by thanking Ryan Yao-Smith for everything he had done for MERA in his role as Treasurer until he moved on to pastures new. He had successfully modernised the system and digitalised the accounting system.

The Treasurer also thanked Siyu Smith, who stepped forward as auditor to replace Jane Shen on this occasion.

The Treasurer’s Report, which included the auditor’s statement of accounts, were set out in the agenda. No questions were raised in connection with the Treasurer’s Report.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS, AREA REPRESENTATIVES AND AUDITOR**

The Chairman announced that Barbara Stansfield (serving Area 8) had decided to retire and did not wish to stand for re-election in 2022/23 and he thanked her for her years of voluntary service to MERA as Area Representative. The meeting was advised that Patsy Collis had put her name forward to take over the role.

The Chairman advised that all other existing officers, area representatives and the editorial team who were willing to serve for a further term had indicated their wish to be re-elected. The Chairman therefore proposed that the Nominations List as set out in the agenda be approved and that Patsy Collis be elected to replace Barbara Stansfield as area representative for Area 8. This was seconded by Judy Clark. Having been put to the vote, it was

**AGREED:** That all nominations for election to the honorary officer, area representative and auditor appointments be accepted.

**RESOLUTIONS AND RULES PROPOSED BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Chairman announced that a new rule was proposed by the Executive Committee and he asked the Secretary to introduce the item.

The Secretary referred to his report contained in the agenda, which proposed that the Executive Committee be empowered to include additional roads into MERA’s catchment area provided that they fell within the historical boundaries of Maiden Erlegh. He stated that this would have the advantage of increasing the Association’s influence with local authorities and service providers in the area because MERA would be more representative, and that it would provide a bigger pool from which volunteers could be secured to carry out its officer and area representative roles. Additionally, the additional members would generate an increase in subscription monies, enabling MERA to become more involved in community projects.

A list of the residential roads that might be included in the catchment was set out in the agenda (Appendix 1 of these minutes), but it was emphasised that this was not necessarily exhaustive. It was also clarified that where MERA served only certain houses in existing roads within the catchment area, those gaps could be filled provided they were within the historical Maiden Erlegh boundary.

The meeting was advised that it was not proposed to admit all the areas listed immediately, but instead they could be taken on board as demand dictated and on condition, where appropriate, that the area was able to provide an Area Representative to service the residential roads within it. If agreed, an amendment would be made to the constitution to enable the Executive Committee to include such areas at such times as was appropriate.

The Secretary went on to explain that as a consequence of this review, it occurred to the Executive Committee that the circulation of the MERA Magazine could be offered to MERA’s sister residents’ association, ACER, which operated within the Whitegates area of North Earley. The items that appeared in the magazine were likely to be of equal interest to ACER members, who would be invited to contribute to the magazine and whose items, as was currently the case, would be subject to the editorial control of the Editor and his team. This would enhance the variety of topics that could be included in the magazine.

It was believed that this would assist ACER to expand its membership, given the popularity of the publication. As a pump priming exercise, it was proposed to charge ACER members 80p for the first year and the full £1 price thereafter. The additional income this was likely to generate was £26 per 100 members in the first year and then £46 per 100 members thereafter.

The Secretary stated that this was the final stage of MERA’s modernisation process, which commenced before the pandemic in 2019.

One member was concerned about the divergence of concerns that might apply in areas J, K and L that were sited along the main Wokingham Road (A329). This appeared to be a legitimate concern, and the Secretary proposed that no admission to MERA’s catchment would be made from those areas without the prior agreement of the AGM. This was accepted as being an appropriate way forward.

A question was also raised regarding the exclusion of Finch Road in the list of roads proposed to be included in the catchment area. The Secretary responded that most of the properties located in this road appeared to be rented, although some of these may have been bought by the tenants subsequently, but he would establish whether there was a good reason for residents’ associations to exclude rented properties. He stated that there was a possible conflict of interest between the owner and the tenant and their respective aspirations for the area.

Stephen Proud proposed that the motion relating to recommendations 1,2,3 and 5 as set out in the agenda and as amended at the meeting be accepted, and this was seconded by Jean Hackett. Having been put to the vote, the recommendations were accepted.

Rosemary Cook proposed that the motion relating to recommendation 4 of the report concerning the distribution of the MERA Magazine to ACER members, (subject to agreement being reached between both Associations) be accepted, and this was seconded by Constantina Ainsworth. Having been put to the vote, the recommendation was accepted.

**AGREED:** That

1. MERA’s catchment area be extended over time within the historical boundaries of Maiden Erlegh according to demand.
2. The Executive Committee be empowered to oversee the inclusion of new residential roads and missing properties in existing residential roads within the historical boundaries of Maiden Erlegh as they see fit (subject to any proposal regarding Areas J, K and L in Appendix 1 being referred to the AGM for approval) and to ensure that they are added to the catchment area at an appropriate pace and subject to the identification of suitable new Area Representatives willing to serve these areas.
3. Given the co-operation achieved with MBOS (Marefield and adjacent roads) in respect of the 2022 Laurel Park campaign and our shared interests in relation to Laurel Park, (eg preserving the peace and tranquillity of the nature reserve and associated issues relating to the park), the Executive Committee be authorised to liaise with the residents of the Marefield area with a view to enabling their residents to join MERA.
4. The Executive Committee be authorised to implement any revised arrangements relating to the distribution of MERA Magazines to ACER members, subject to agreement being reached between both Associations, on the basis set out in the report.
5. A progress report be made to the next meeting of the AGM.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Honorary membership**

The Chairman advised that the Constitution provided for councillor representation at MERA’s Executive Committee meetings to assist in achieving the objectives of the Association on behalf of its members. Following the local government elections in May, the Chairman had agreed with the Secretary that Cllr Stephen Newton should be invited to represent the Town and Borough Councils at Executive Committee meetings, and that he would be MERA’s main council contact until the next election.

The meeting was further advised that although the Borough Council was effectively run by the Liberal Democrats, it was the case that they were not able to rule with a majority, and therefore it was considered appropriate also to invite the other Maiden Erlegh councillor, Cllr Norman Jorgensen, who represented the Conservative Party. This would ensure that the Association could more effectively deal with and have resolved the issues members raise with MERA in respect of matters that fall under the remit of both councils. There were no Labour or Independent councillors elected to the Maiden Erlegh Ward.

The Chairman concluded by reassuring members that MERA remained politically independent and that member views were important to the Executive Committee no matter which of the political parties they supported, as well as those who did not support any political party at all.

**Silverdale Road shops**

A member requested an update in relation to the Silverdale Road shopping area, with specific reference to the PTA’s request for safety measures to be put in place. The Secretary responded that the council had proposed a one-way traffic system for The Parade car park, although MERA had pointed out that this would not satisfactorily resolve the problem. The council had been asked to consider extending the railings along the driveway into the schools up to the point at which pedestrians crossed the road between the two parts of the shopping parade, and that a crossing be painted onto the road to give priority to pedestrians rather than cars.

The Secretary stated that this would not remove the safety concerns relating to the area close to the junction with Silverdale Road, but that the Highways Officer leading the project would be consulted to establish whether any further solutions might be possible.

Another member drew attention to safety issues for pedestrians at the Tesco entrance. The Secretary agreed to draw this also to the attention of the Highways Authority.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.44pm.

***Date of the next AGM***

Thursday 9 May 2024 at 7.30 for 8pm.

***Date of next Executive Committee***

Thursday 8 June 2023 at 8pm.