**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee held at 8pm on Thursday 11 August 2022 at Earley Day Centre, Kenton Road, Earley**

**Present**

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| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) | Peter Woodward (Vice Chairman/Area 1) |
| Ryan Yao-Smith (Treasurer) | Steve Feltham (Secretary) |
| Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) | Rosemary Cook (Area 11) |
| Chris Haines (Area 12) | Pamela Roberts (Area 10) |
| John Saunders (Area 13) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**Apologies received**

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| Anne Booth (Area 9) | Judy Clark (Area 5) |
| Celia Smith (Area 6) | Barbara Stansfield (Area 8) |
| Tim Marsh (ACER) |  |

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Accident at entrance to Maiden Erlegh School**

The Secretary reported that he had written to the Traffic Management, Parking & Road Safety Team Manager in support of Earley Town Council’s request for an independent safety assessment of the Maiden Erlegh School entrance area.

**Bus service improvement plan**

The Secretary updated the Committee on the current position in respect of local bus services 19a/b/c and drew attention to the response received from the Community Transport Manager, in which it was confirmed that bus services were still running below their normal carriage levels and the cost of fuel had increased substantially. It was also stated that Reading Buses were not at all warm to the idea of diverting any Claret services through Silverdale Road. This would suggest that a possible re-routing of these Maiden Erlegh services was not a matter that the company was prepared to consider in an effort to make the 19a/c service more profitable.

However, it was noted that one possible solution might be to extend the Thames Valley bus services serving the Toutley Road area to Reading via the Hatchmill Estate, Rushey Way, Gypsy Lane and Silverdale Road. Given the size of the new housing development in that area, there was every possibility that such a service could operate on a more solid financial footing.

The Secretary also confirmed that he had written to Sir John Redwood, MP, to establish the position regarding further national funding of bus services, and his Parliamentary Assistant and Senior Caseworker had responded that local transport policy and funding was completely within the jurisdiction of Wokingham Borough Council. This would suggest that no further national funding would be forthcoming.

The Secretary advised the committee that there was a very real danger that the 19 services could be reduced or withdrawn altogether from April 2023 following a review that would be carried out by the Borough Council over the coming months. To avoid this eventuality, the Secretary would promote the proposal to extend the Toutley Road services through Maiden Erlegh in the hope that this would be seen by the council as reducing or perhaps eliminating the need for subsidisation of these services.

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

The Secretary drew attention to the Council’s reply to his request for further information regarding the proposed 3G football pitch at Maiden Erlegh School. This appeared to address most of MERA’s concerns apart from the car parking issues. Accordingly, he would prepare a proposed response to the forthcoming consultation seeking mitigations to lessen the impact on residents.

**Member review of Brookside surgery**

The Secretary advised that he would be bringing forward to the next meeting a proposed communication to Sir John Redwood MP regarding the deteriorating service offered by the NHS and to make known MERA’s desire to see a root and branch review of the service to improve the user experience.

**‘The Duck and the World’**

The Chairman reported that he had asked the Secretary to investigate whether it would be possible to arrange for ‘The Duck and the World’ information sign at Lakeside to be remounted or replaced. The Treasurer was of the view that funding would be available for such a project assuming that the cost was not excessive. Accordingly, the Secretary had written to the Town Clerk to request a quote on the cost of the work so that this matter could be progressed within the next few weeks.

**MERA modernisation programme**

The Secretary reported that he and the Chairman had met with Jonathan and Patricia Brown, together with Tim Marsh and Mary Bather from ACER to discuss the possible expansion of the circulation of the MERA Magazine, including whether ACER members could be added to enhance the attraction of becoming members of the Association.

It was agreed at the meeting that this was an idea worth considering, and the MERA Magazine Editor would look at the practical implications of increasing circulation and the number of pages in the magazine to recognise the increased area that would be of interest to all readers. The ACER Chairman confirmed that he would consider the suggestion that his members could benefit from this arrangement, which would cost £1 per member.

Separately, the Chairman and Secretary had been discussing the idea of expanding MERA’s catchment area, and several options were considered, as outlined in the paper circulated to the Committee. The options were to consider ‘infilling’, which would involve expanding the existing boundary into pockets of roads within Maiden Erlegh that were not currently covered (option 1); expanding the catchment area into the historical Maiden Erlegh boundary (option 2) or extending the area into the political boundary of Maiden Erlegh. Alternatively, the existing catchment area could remain unchanged.

The Committee was advised that Option 1 would be the best course for MERA to take, but that this would be achieved on a demand-led basis, and each of these areas would require prior identification of an Area Representative to serve the area. The first of the areas set out in the Secretary’s paper would be Area A (Ramsbury Drive/Aldbourne Road/The Knapp); all or part of Area E (Brean Walk/Clevedon Drive/Somerton Gardens); and Area F (Marefield/Barkby/Owston/Sibson). The Secretary stated that whichever option was taken, the Committee would be asked only to make a recommendation, which would be considered at the next AGM in May 2023.

The initial view taken by the Committee was that option 1 should be pursued as a possible way forward. In the light of this, the Chairman and Secretary would carry out further work to establish the full implications of these proposals and the matter would be discussed in more detail at future meetings.

**Membership lists**

The Secretary confirmed that most of the updated membership lists had now been circulated to Area Representatives.

**Earley community bus**

The Chairman referred to the recent discussion relating to the need for volunteers to drive the Earley community bus and stated that Celia Smith had provided a contact number for those interested in volunteering. The telephone number had now appeared on MERA’s website.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman reported that he had received a response from the Green Infrastructure Special Project Manager, Laura Buck, who explained that she hoped that planting could be carried out on grass verges during November, subject to an assessment by the Highway and Operational Tree Team as to the suitability of the Lakeside grass verges for this purpose.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer confirmed that the main account balance currently stood at £1,500.

**Editorial Report**

The Editor confirmed that there was no further update, having recently distributed the latest magazines.

**CONSULTATIONS**

The Committee was advised of the following consultations:

Proposed 3G football pitch at Maiden Erlegh School – Consultation likely to commence from September 2023.

Communicating and engaging with residents – closing date 19 August 2022.

Local cycling and walking infrastructure plan – closing date 19 August 2022.

Woodley to Reading Active Travel route – closing dated 19 August 2022.

There were a number of petitions on the Borough’s website, including the MERA petition for the roundabout at Rushey Way/Gipsy Lane. There had been only one response to this petition so far and the closing date for responses was 21 September 2022.

The petition for the proposed the installation of a pedestrian and cyclist crossing on Wokingham Road, opposite Earley Station would be running until 21 October 2022.

The petition to save the skylarks at Hollow Lane, Shinfield would be running until 27 September 2022.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**Member contact regarding food bags and the proposed 3G football pitch at Maiden Erlegh School**

The Secretary reported that a resident of Sevenoaks Road had commented on an article that appeared on the website in which concern was expressed that residents may reduce the recycling of food as a result of the council’s decision to stop distributing the green food bags. He wanted to know the basis for the statement and whether there were any figures to back it up. The Secretary had responded that the statement had been made on the basis that the more difficult it was for residents to recycle, the fewer residents were likely to participate.

The resident also confirmed that he supported the proposal for a 3G football pitch to be installed at Maiden Erlegh School. The Secretary reassured him that MERA had not decided to object to the proposal at this stage, and that mitigations to reduce the impact of the development on residents would be sought.

**Reading University: opportunities for collaboration**

The Secretary reported that he had received a communication from the new Community Relations Manager at Reading University, who asked whether there were any potential opportunities for collaboration with MERA.

Given that Maiden Erlegh was not currently encountering issues with students from the university, it was not immediately clear whether there was a need for collaboration with the university, apart from ensuring that the tree overhangs at Wilderness Road were removed.

The Secretary stated that the assistance given to MERA by the University in relation to establishing its website was very much appreciated, and it might be possible to receive some further help in upgrading this in the future.

**NEW ITEMS**

**Laurel Park: security and parking issues**

The Chairman reported that he had attended the last meeting of NAG and that one of the matters discussed related to the car parking arrangements at Laurel Park. There was concern that now the 3G pitch was off the agenda as far as Laurel Park was concerned, the car parking issues would not be addressed. Additionally, the council was exploring a later time to be established for the closing of the barrier to the car park, which residents opposed. MERA had been asked whether the removal of the barrier would be of concern to their members.

The Committee was informed that although Laurel Park and the western field were both outside of MERA’s area, any antisocial behaviour there was bound to impact on some members – particularly those living in Instow Road. Accordingly, it was considered that MERA should register an interest in the matter at the next meeting of NAG.

**Feedback on mental health issues**

The Secretary advised that Cllr Maher had been appointed as Governor for the Berkshire Healthcare Foundation, which was a body dealing primarily with the service provided for mental health. The councillor had requested comments on whether MERA could assist in obtaining feedback from within the community regarding these services.

The view of the Committee was that the best method of publicising requests for resident input would be through the MERA Magazine, but there was a lead-in time due to the delay between submitting proofs and receiving the printed magazine. Added to this, the magazine was only printed three times a year. A more immediate method would be through MERA’s website, but it was clear that the majority of residents did not access this site on a regular basis.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Books for Earley**

It was reported that a question had been raised by a resident regarding an item relating to books on Earley which had appeared in a recent MERA Magazine. In response, it was confirmed that an item had appeared in the Spring 2022 edition of the magazine, and the books were available from the Earley Town Council offices.

**Neighbourhood Watch**

A member had raised a question relating to joining a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. The Secretary stated that he would forward the necessary details for the member concerned.

**Trees obscuring signs and sight lines**

It was reported that some signs on Rushey Way were obscured by vegetation and that sight lines at the Springdale/Beech Lane junction were also affected by tree growth. The Secretary stated that the Borough Council often dealt with this problem at the end of the summer, but that he would monitor the situation and report the issues to the council where appropriate.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

8 September 2022 at Kenton Road Day Centre.

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