**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee held at 8pm on Thursday 13 July 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) |
| John Saunders (Area 13/Treasurer) | Steve Feltham (Secretary) |
| Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) | Patsy Collis (Area 8) |
| Pamela Roberts (Area 10) | Cllr Norman Jorgensen (Wokingham BC) |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**Also present**

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| Vivien Canning (Area Representative candidate) | Bob Collins (Area Representative candidate) |
| Stephanie Johnson (Lakeside resident) |  |

**Apologies received**

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| Anne Booth (Area 9) | Judy Clark (Area 5) |
| Rosemary Cook (Area 11) | Chris Haines (Area 12) |
| Celia Smith (Area 6) | Siyu and Tim Smith (Area 2) |
| Elaine Spratling (Area 4) | Tim Marsh (ACER) |
| Cllr Stephen Newton |  |

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman introduced Vivien Canning and Bob Collins, who were standing for election to the position of MERA Area Representatives for the new Aldbourne Avenue area.

The Chairman advised the Committee of the sad news that Jean Beck, who had served as Area Representative for the Association for many years, had passed away.

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2023 were signed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Preparations for AGM**

The Chairman informed the meeting that he and the Secretary had presented flowers to Barbara Stansfield to thank her for the long service she had given to MERA as Area Representative for the Loxwood / Lind Close / Instow Road area.

The invoice from St Nicolas Church for the hire of the hall for the last AGM held in May had now been received and passed to the Treasurer for payment. The amount charged was £42.50. It was agreed at the meeting that the Church should be booked for the 2024 AGM to be held on 9 May 2024.

**Proposed changes in The Parade**

The Secretary provided an update on the position regarding the council’s proposals for The Parade / Silverdale Road area. To ensure that all actions were either considered or implemented, the council and others participating at the site meeting in an official capacity were presented with a summary of actions to be carried out.

The Highways Officer, Abdul Karim, agreed with the action list, but he emphasised that there was no agreement at this stage to the erection of a second bollard at the end of the railings by the existing telephone box (which we hoped would be moved), or indeed the proposed new pedestrian crossings at the driveway into the school and to the east of The Parade. He stated that these proposals would need to be submitted as a separate proposal via the council’s website, which the Secretary had now done. He also advised that he was unable to agree to a chicane or any other obstruction on Sevenoaks Road near the junction with Silverdale Road as this would lead to traffic congestion and may well be a hazard.

Reassuringly, the officer confirmed that the council would not be likely to object to a proposal to move the bus shelter, but he emphasised that the objection received from a resident would need to be considered.

The Secretary had now written to the Earley Town Clerk to request the removal of the telephone box, the replacement of the bus shelter when the bus stop was moved and also to consider the PTA suggestion that the car park at Mays Lane be opened for use by parents dropping off and collecting their children to and from school, thus relieving congestion in the driveway into the school and the surrounding car parks.

The Secretary had pointed out previously to Hicks Baker, the owner’s representatives, that two cars had been permanently parked at The Parade for some weeks, and it had been established that the council would be ensuring their removal. As a result, one car had been removed and the other now had a notice placed on it to require removal within 7 days or it would be taken away.

It was also interesting to note that the councillors at the site meeting were unhappy with the amount of litter at The Parade, and the Secretary had written again to the Cleaner and Greener Team to ask for an update on their recent survey of bins in the area. However, they had responded that the ongoing cost of serving any additional litter bins was a matter they were unable to consider currently due to budget restraints. However, they would ask the ASB team to approach Herbie’s to establish whether they would be willing to provide and empty a bin outside of their shop, as that was where most of the litter was emanating. The point was made that the council’s decision regarding bin collections was being called in and would have to be considered by the Executive Committee before implementation.

In the meantime, the Secretary had written to Cllr Newton to establish whether the council would be prepared to permit external funding to be made available for one or more of the existing bins at The Parade to be replaced by bigger bins. The intention was that if the Executive Committee was prepared to agree to fund or part-fund the installation of bigger bins, perhaps the issue could be resolved. A response was now awaited.

Finally, following a complaint by a shop owner, an additional commercial bin had now arrived to provide additional capacity for waste from Fad’s, which was causing an offensive smell as well as litter blowing about in the car parking area to the rear of the shops. The Chairman stated that the positon should be monitored to ensure that the problem was resolved.

**Grass cutting: roundabout sponsorships**

The Secretary advised that following Cllr Newton’s suggestion that residents could apply to the council to obtain permission to plant wildflowers in roundabouts at the end of culs de sac, the Treasurer had reported that the process appeared to be bureaucratic, and required applicants to submit a ‘planting plan’ having already stated the flowers and shrubs they intended to plant. The Secretary had contacted the councillor to establish whether the application process could be streamlined.

**Extension of catchment area**

The Chairman announced that the proposed Aldbourne Avenue / Ramsbury Drive / The Knapp area had now been added as part of the catchment area for receiving MERA services in line with the decision made at the last meeting. This was approved following an application made by Vivien Canning, who had volunteered to undertake the role of Area Representative, having ensured that there was sufficient interest amongst the residents of the area.

Vivien explained that since the original proposal had been put forward, there had been a change to the names of the volunteers who wished to stand for election. It was confirmed that a joint application would be put forward, shared between Vivien Canning and Bob Collins.

The Chairman stated that he and the Secretary had attended a membership drive coffee morning at Aldbourne Avenue on 8 July, and that this had been very successful, resulting in over 20 new members. Vivien confirmed that other residents in the area who did not attend and were known to be interested in joining would be contacted.

The Chairman stated that Phil Marsh had also been contacted to establish whether demand existed for membership within the MBOS area, and a response was awaited. Further, Pamela Roberts would now add the remaining numbers in Radstock Road to her area.

In line with the Constitution, the Executive Committee was empowered to elect new Area Representatives where vacancies arose between meetings of the AGM, and he proposed that Vivien Canning and Bob Collins be elected as joint Area Representatives for the Aldbourne Avenue and surrounding area until the next AGM.

**AGREED: That Vivien Canning and Bob Collins be elected as joint Area Representatives to serve the Aldbourne Avenue / Ramsbury Drive / The Knapp area with immediate effect.**

**MERA Magazine: closer links with ACER**

The Chairman reported that a MERA Magazine Sub Committee had convened on 22 June 2023, and that agreement was reached on the way forward to progress the initiative. It was planned that ACER would join the circulation from the November 2023 edition of the magazine. An action list was circulated to the Committee for information.

**Commercial bins to the rear of The Parade shops**

The Chairman referred to the earlier discussion on the matter at this meeting and stated that the position would be monitored.

**Telephone Box**

There were no further proposals for the use of the telephone box at The Parade and the view was that it should be removed from its existing location.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman reported that the Secretary had attended the Zoom webinar regarding the car parking issues at Laurel Park.

The consensus of the residents was that the option of a new car park to the south of the upper field at Rushey Way was the most preferable. This would also provide for the entire periphery of the upper field lending itself to a one-way track for vehicles which would connect with the pavilion car park, thus relieving pressure on traffic in Marefield. Both the car park and the one-way track should be on the grass, protected by netting designed for the purpose, rather than tarmac.

A further proposal for a new pavilion located on the ‘scrub land’ between the upper and lower fields was not favoured by the residents as it would take away more trees from the area. However, the Secretary pointed out that as the new pavilion could also be used as a community facility, there might be room for negotiation on this point, for example with a quid pro quo that the Football Club also plant more hedgerow trees at the new entrance to the western field, thus blocking access to that field by vehicles.

The Chairman also advised the Committee that he had attended a further NAG meeting on 10 July. The police reported six new anti-social behaviour incidents to the police, including damage to a sign at Silverdale Road. Cllr Mike Smith had pointed out that routine (non urgent) reports of anti-social behaviour could be logged with the Borough Council, and the police representative confirmed that urgent reports should be made via 999.

Phil Marsh was still waiting for Speedwatch volunteers, which was rather disappointing, considering the concerns residents raised regularly about speeding motorists in the area.

Tim Marsh reported to NAG on the webinar, and the residents’ preference for a circuit road around the upper field and a new parking area at Rushey Way were approved unanimously. However, the Borough Council would not take any action until the report on sports facilities was published, and this was expected soon.

NAG was also advised that there was too much overgrown, unmanaged vegetation including trees blocking pathways. However, with the cutbacks on services due to budget restrictions, no solution was offered.

The Chairman informed the Committee that concerns were also raised regarding the amount of detail on the council’s website for reporting faults. The example was given of locations where there were clusters of lights, but with no ability to report which light was faulty.

As reported previously, the fireworks event at Laurel Park would in future be organised by the Laurel Park FC Youth Sports Foundation charity, and the Lions would assist. It was planned to broaden the appeal of the event with extra activities on the field.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer reported that all the invoices relating to the last magazine had now been paid.

The current account now stood at £1,930.90 and the deposit account at £841.94, which included interest of 79p that had been accrued.

The bill for the AGM hall hire of £42.50 had been paid, and this figure was not yet shown on the accounts.

**Editorial Report**

The Editor confirmed that the magazines should be printed by mid-month. In answer to a question regarding the Earley Fair, it was confirmed that there was no advertisement for the event in the magazine on this occasion, although there was reference to it in an article. The Secretary pointed out that early circulation of the magazine so that all members received it before 5 August was highly desirable.

**CONSULTATIONS & PETITIONS**

The Chairman advised of the following ongoing consultations and petitions:

**Understanding working habits** – The Borough Council was conducting a survey on the working habits of residents and employees in the Borough. No closing date appeared to have been given for responses.

**Customer experience strategy draft –** This followed the session that the Chairman attended, and the intention now was to obtain feedback from residents regarding the way in which the council interacted with its service users and how the service could be improved. The closing date for the survey was 16 August 2023.

**Proposed changes to home to school travel assistance policies –** Residents had been invited to comment on the council’s home to school travel assistance policies. The survey should be completed by 21 July.

**Proposed railway station ticket office closures** – South West Trains proposed that Earley Station would transition its ticket office staff to new multi-skilled roles with a clear focus on helping customers on the station platforms, including advice on ticket purchasing. This arrangement would be replicated at stations throughout England. The closing date for comments was 26 July 2023.

**Petitions**

There were no current e-petitions.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**Query from Ian Jobson**

The Secretary stated that a query had been received from Ian Jobson through the ‘askmera’ email box in which he asked whether he could now apply to become a MERA member following the recent catchment area changes. The Secretary had advised him that although Mr Jobson resided within the Maiden Erlegh Ward, MERA was able to serve only the historical parts of Earley in line with the decision of the recent AGM. However, Mr Jobson was advised that MERA was happy to work with him to try and resolve conflicts between the football club’s aspirations and the needs of the residents, and his attention was drawn to the assistance given by the MERA Secretary at the recent webinar as an example of this.

A question was raised about a possible inclusion of Finch Road within the new catchment area as there appeared to be interested residents in that road. The Secretary advised that he would look into this further and advise on the way forward, as this was not one of the roads specifically approved by the AGM.

**Parking too close to junctions**

The Chairman reported that NORA had responded to MERA’s request to establish whether there was support from other residents’ associations for a national campaign to extend existing parking restrictions close to junctions as set out in the Highway Code. Only six responses had been received, and the reaction was mixed, with none totally in favour for various reasons.

The NORA Chairman suggested that an alternative course of action would be to simply ask local authorities to have the double yellow lines painted beyond the distance contained in the Highway Code, with increased traffic enforcement, which of course cannot be achieved without traffic regulation orders.

In the light of this disappointing response from other associations, the Secretary advised that dealing with these matters on a case by case basis might be the best option for the time being. This was accepted, and the Secretary stated that he would bring to a subsequent meeting a list of Maiden Erlegh roads where parking too close to junctions appeared to be causing problems.

**NEW ITEMS**

*There were no new items.*

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

**Local Government Boundary Commission**

The Secretary explained the recommendations being put forward to Government by the Local Government Boundary Commission. If accepted, Earley, Woodley, Shinfield, Whitley, Church and Sonning would be combined to form a new Earley and Woodley constituency.

The Borough’s Ward boundaries would also be changed, with a new Ward of Maiden Erlegh and Whitegates. Residents living in the Radstock area on the western side of Beech Lane would remain within the Hillside Ward.

**Wokingham Borough Council budget**

The Secretary stated that the Borough Council’s budget was coming under greater pressure, and that both the current and previous administrations of the Borough had pointed out on a number of occasions that Wokingham was now the most poorly funded in the country. Further cutbacks were now planned for grass cutting and bin collections. After a brief discussion, it was

**AGREED: That the Secretary be requested to write to the constituency MP to request that the government grant to the Borough Council be increased to ensure that services could be retained to the reasonable standard that the population was demanding from the council.**

**DIY waste charges**

The Chairman reported that the government had taken the decision to scrap the DIY waste charges imposed by some councils. It remained to be seen whether re3 would take early action on this or whether it would wait until the legislation was introduced.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**‘askmera’ email address**

The Secretary advised that following recent disruption to the Virgin Media email service, its decision to stop providing new email addresses and the possibility that the service may be withdrawn altogether in the foreseeable future, he had established a new email address for the Association’s members to use, which would appear in the next edition of the MERA Magazine in place of the current one. The new address was askmera.earley@gmail.com, and it was available with immediate effect.

The current Virgin Media address would continue to be operational for the time being.

**Maiden Erlegh Preschool event**

Pamela Roberts informed the Committee that she had attended the Maiden Erlegh Preschool event to celebrate the first anniversary of their occupation of new premises at Our Lady of Peace, having moved from the Silverdale Centre in 2022. It was a low key affair which was also attended by Father Stan of the church, local councillors, press and the committee and staff representatives. Pamela stated that she would write an article on the event for the next MERA Magazine.

**New canvassing letter**

The Vice Chairman stated that he thought the new canvassing letter sent to Area Representatives was very good, and he asked for 50 copies of the letter that he could distribute to some of the non-members in his area. The Secretary agreed to supply the printed letters as soon as possible.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

10 August 2023 at Kenton Road Day Centre.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9pm.