**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee held at 8pm on Thursday 14 December 2023 at the Earley Day Centre, Kenton Road, Earley**

**Present**

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| Colin Mair (Chairman/Area 3) | Steve Feltham (Secretary) |
| John Saunders (Area 13/Treasurer) | Jonathan Brown (Magazine Editor) |
| Patricia Brown (Editorial Team) | Anne Booth (Area 9) |
| Patsy Collis (Area 8) | Rosemary Cook (Area 11) |
| Chris Haines (Area 12) | Pamela Roberts (Area 10) |
| Siyu Smith (Area 2) | Tim Smith (Area 2) |
| Cllr Stephen Newton (Wokingham BC) |  |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**Apologies received**

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| Peter Woodward (Vice Chairman/Area 1) | Viv Canning (Area 14) |
| Judy Clark (Area 5) | Bob Collins (Area 14) |
| Celia Smith (Area 6) | Elaine Spratling (Area 4) |
| Tim Marsh (ACER) | Cllr Norman Jorgensen (Wokingham BC) |

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

The Chairman thanked Siyu and Tim Smith for their kind donation of the nibbles for the festive meeting. The Secretary thanked the Chairman for providing the liquid refreshments.

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 were signed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Grass cutting: roundabout sponsorships**

Cllr Stephen Newton advised the Committee that following conversations with a council officer and having sought advice from Cllr Fishwick, he raised a question at full council on this initiative, which would seek to beautify the area and also reduce the burden on the council while being a focus for community adhesion. A positive response had been received from the Executive Member, who agreed to work constructively with him and seek to overcome any particular issues arising. However, he confirmed that there would be a requirement to have £5m liability insurance for such projects.

The Treasurer advised that he had made an inquiry to an insurance company, who had appeared not to have received such a request in the past. It was agreed that the Treasurer and Cllr Newton would work together in an effort to resolve any remaining issues.

The Chairman stated that given the £5m insurance cover would cost approximately £150 per annum, this policy could be used for other similar projects in other parts of Maiden Erlegh. The Committee therefore

**AGREED: That subject to the agreement of the Chairman and the Treasurer, an insurance policy be taken out to cover the Kenton Road roundabout and other similar projects within Maiden Erlegh that may be agreed at a cost of approximately £150 per annum.**

**Geese**

The Chairman advised the Committee that the Secretary had written to the British Trust for Ornithology as suggested at the last meeting. There had been no response to date apart from an acknowledgment, but it was hoped that an update could be given at the next meeting.

**Royal Mail**

The Secretary reported that the issue of delayed mail deliveries in the area had been raised in Parliament, and it was speculated that we could expect some action to be taken on this problem in the near future. Royal Mail was reported to have been recruiting extra staff to enable the service to cope with the Christmas deliveries.

**School streets and speed restrictions**

The Secretary reported that no reactions had been received from MERA members to date on the issue of speed limits or the idea of school streets. However, as there was likely to be consultation on this matter shortly, there was a need for the Committee to take a view on this to enable a considered response to be made to the forthcoming consultation on these matters.

The Committee accepted that 20mph speed limits were best imposed on targeted busy areas, such as outside schools or in busy shopping centres, for example. A blanket speed limit on all residential roads would not be sensible because it was such a slow speed, which would frustrate motorists and could well lead to dangerous risks being taken such as overtaking cars in areas where this was more likely to cause accidents to other motorists, pedestrians and cyclists. Such draconian restrictions over residential highways would be largely ignored anyway without enforcement and could well lead to less respect towards other speed limit signage. The point was made that a blanket 20mph limit in Wales was proving unpopular and had caused unforeseen problems, such as a need to reduce bus service frequency as journeys were taking longer and timetables had to be re-worked.

Cllr Newton stated that no new speed humps were likely to be agreed to reduce speed, but chicanes could play a part in tackling this problem. It was important for communities to work with the police to improve enforcement generally.

On the issue of school streets, it was accepted that although there was no objection to this idea in principle where correctly applied, such a proposal in Maiden Erlegh would not be acceptable if it meant temporary closures of Silverdale Road because this was the main feeder road through the estate.

**Earley Town Plan**

The Secretary had circulated MERA’s proposed amendments to the Town Plan, which were approved. Discussion ensued on the benefits of drafting a local plan (a neighbourhood plan) for Earley, which would enable Earley Town Council to receive a larger share of the Community Infrastructure Levy that could be used and also enhance the enforcement of detailed planning initiatives designed to improve the appearance of housing estates such as soft planting where new driveways were put in place.

The Secretary stated that designing such a plan and ensuring that government requirements were met took a long time to produce and have put in place, but Cllr Newton considered that with other local examples of such plans available, such as Twyford and Shinfield, these could be used as templates for an Earley Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr Newton stated that he would look at this further and report back at a later date.

**Buses**

The Chairman raised the lack of signage relating to the Park and Ride Scheme at Thames Valley Business Park. The Secretary stated that a similar problem existed at the Park and Ride at Winnersh. Although there were signs on surrounding roads and motorways, there was no sign to indicate the entrance to the Park and Ride at all, and this lead to underusage of this new facility. This matter would be raised with the Borough Council.

**Bins**

The Secretary reported that following the council’s decision to scrap the original proposal to reduce the number of bins around the Borough, it had now been agreed that the Task and Finish Group would look at whether the bins could be ‘streamlined’ and whether companies would be able to sponsor the bins, which was MERA’s favoured solution. Cllr Newton advised the Committee that he was serving on the Task and Finish Group and hoped to ensure that more acceptable proposals were forthcoming that residents could accept.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman attended the NAG meeting on 13 November and he reported that most of the anti-social behaviour related to scooters and electric bikes. This had become a national problem and the police were discussing how to treat offenders while watching for possible changes in the law. Apart from that, there had been two residential burglaries and seven thefts of bicycles, three of which were in Woodley.

The Chairman had advised the NAG meeting of MERA’s strong views about parking and described the plans put in place to tackle the issue of motorists parking too close to junctions. No-one had any additional information on the new parking law that was eagerly awaited to be put forward for Royal Assent.

There was frustration expressed at the meeting regarding the lack of volunteers for Speedwatch.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer advised that all but two advertisers had paid for the advertisements appearing in the last magazine. The total amount outstanding was £110.00. It was confirmed that the printers had been paid.

In line with the discussions at the last meeting, funds had been moved from the current account to the deposit account to increase the amount of interest that could be earned. The Treasurer stated that the bank balances currently stood at £1,412.36 in the current account and £2,001.05 in the deposit account, which included £1.05 interest received.

The Treasurer added that he had looked into other possible investment accounts. Our current earnings amounted to 1.45% on the instant access Deposit Account, which was a variable rate. NatWest also offered two other alternatives available to MERA as follows:

3.20% variable rate (with no minimum amount to be deposited). 35 days’ notice would be required to withdraw from this account.

4.17% variable rate (with no minimum amount to be deposited). 95 days’ notice would be required to withdraw from this account.

The Treasurer advised that he would investigate options further before making any further recommendations.

**Editorial Report**

The Chairman thanked the Editorial Team for producing another very interesting read for members with the publication of the latest magazine. This was the first magazine that had been produced in collaboration with ACER, and appeared to have been received very well indeed. The MERA Magazine Sub Committee would meet again on 22 January 2024 to discuss ACER’S views on the magazine and to agree any further changes that may be necessary.

The Editor reported that there were not many magazines left over from the latest edition of the magazine. The Secretary stated that he would update the membership figures before the next magazine was printed so that an appropriate number of copies could be requested.

**CONSULTATIONS & PETITIONS**

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

**Licensing policy consultation** – closing date 8 January 2024.

**A329 Reading Road (phase II)**  – closing date 21 December 2023.

**SEND parent survey** – no closing date stated.

**Petitions**

The Chairman stated that a petition had been submitted in relation to the future of St Crispins leisure centre. The petitioner was concerned with the transparency of the decision-making and transparency process and the lack of information that was forthcoming from the council. The petition was available to be signed until 4 February 2024.

Since the petition was lodged, it was reported that the council had decided to repurpose the centre for extra school places while continuing to offer important amenities for residents and community groups.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**Speeding**

The Secretary advised the Committee that a request had been received on behalf of Meadow Road residents who were concerned about the volume and speeds of traffic along Meadow Road, which was said to have become a rat run for vehicles. The Secretary had responded, and the email was read out at the meeting.

**NEW ITEMS**

*(There were no new items on this occasion).*

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

**Gas works in Earley**

The Secretary reported that there would be major traffic disruption over the coming months in Earley due to a programme of extensive gas repairs. The works would be carried out by SGN in various locations over a six-month period.

The Committee was informed that work had already commenced in Aldbourne Road and Ramsbury Drive, and this was due to last until 29 February 2024. Other dates included Betchworth Avenue and Silverdale Road (which would need to be temporarily closed) from 4 March to 15 May; and Wilderness Road from 15 April to 21 May.

**Playing pitch strategy**

The Secretary reported that the Operations Manager of Wokingham Borough Council’s Sport and Leisure Department, Glenn Goudie, had confirmed that a Playing Pitch Strategy had now been completed by external consultants and would be considered by the Executive in the New Year.

**NAG meetings**

The Chairman stated that the programme of NAG meetings had been announced for 2024. The dates were 15 January, 11 March, 13 May, 9 July, 9 September and 18 November.

**Housing development in Wokingham**

The Secretary stated that Sir John Redwood had forwarded a link to a blog which outlined the progress he had made in lobbying the government on the issue of housing targets. Committee members were advised that the link would be sent to them with the minutes.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Road works - Highfields**

Rosemary Cook drew attention to road works in Highfields that would be carried out on behalf of BT from 7 January 2024.

**Local plan**

Rosemary Cook advised the Committee that the new local plan would be published after May 2024, and the council was looking to have existing overdevelopment counted in the number of homes the authority was obliged to have built under government quotas.

**Parking legislation**

Chris Haines raised the issue of the anticipated parking legislation and asked when this was likely to be implemented. The Secretary stated that the government had still not put the legislation forward for Royal Assent, but that it was hoped this would happen early in the New Year.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

11 January 2024 at Kenton Road Day Centre.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.30pm.