**Minutes of the Maiden Erlegh Residents’ Association Executive Committee held at 8pm on Thursday 9 February 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) | Constantina Ainsworth (Area 7) |
| Anne Booth (Area 9) | Judy Clark (Area 5) |
| Rosemary Cook (Area 11) | Pamela Roberts (Area 10) |
| Celia Smith (Area 6) | Siyu and Tim Smith (Area 2) |

**In the Chair: Colin Mair**

**Apologies received**

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| Chris Haines (Area 12) | Barbara Stansfield (Area 8) |
| Tim Marsh (ACER) | Cllr Tahir Maher (Wokingham BC) |

**MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023 were signed as a correct record.

**MATTERS ARISING**

**Announcement (Don Box)**

The Chairman confirmed that he had sent a bereavement card to Vera Box expressing MERA’s condolences on the passing of her husband, Don Box, who was MERA’s auditor for many years. The Secretary had prepared an article for the MERA Magazine which contained some memories from former Area Representative Shelagh Quick, who was friends with the family and worked with Vera Box very closely, sharing a round together as Area Representatives.

**Protective stones on grass verges**

The Secretary reported he had received a response from Cllr Fishwick in respect of the disappearance from the Borough Council’s website of the policy relating to placing of stones on grass verges. The council’s view was that this practice was unlawful under section 142 of the Highways Act, which permitted the planting of trees, bushes, flowers, etc on grass verges, but not the placing of stones.

The councillor had explained that although the council had permitted this practice for a short time previously, it had been removed having regard to the provisions of the legislation. The Secretary stated that having looked at the legislation, he agreed that the response of Cllr Fishwick was correct.

There appeared to be an implication that all residents who had previously received approval for this practice no longer had the support of the council, and that any stones placed on the verge in line with the policy in force at the time should be removed to avoid any legal consequences, including that of vehicles damaged by the stones, which could result in claims for compensation being made against the property owners. The Committee was advised that the forthcoming legislation relating to parking on pavements would assist the council in clamping down on roadside verge parking if this was included within the new nationwide law.

**Tesco cycle racks**

The Secretary advised that as he had not received a reply to his email to Tesco regarding the cycle rack, he delivered a letter to the Branch by hand. He confirmed that if no response was received, the Secretary would contact the council about the breach of the planning consent.

**Levelling Up Bill (Housing)**

The Chairman confirmed that the Secretary had circulated the pdf document containing Sir John Redwood’s responses relating to housing targets, as promised.

**Parking problem at Silverdale Road residence**

The Secretary advised that he had sent to the police a photograph of the car that was obscuring the view of the road from the driveway next door. The photograph clearly showed the vehicle parked on the pavement, obscuring the view of the road when the neighbour pulled out of her drive. The Neighbourhood Policing Team advised that if the parked car had not left sufficient room to safely pass by on the pavement with a pushchair or mobility scooter, the it would be considered to be an obstruction and this could be reported on the police website or by telephoning 101. It was confirmed that if the car remained there during the restrictions dictated by the yellow lines on the road, Wokingham Borough Council’s Parking Services department should be notified.

John Saunders was asked to advise the complainant of this response so that the matter could be taken forward as necessary.

**Preparations for AGM**

The amended report on the proposed expansion of MERA’s catchment area was circulated to members of the Committee. The Secretary advised that if agreed, any decisions on the actual areas to be invited to join MERA would be made by the Executive Committee, and only on condition that an Area Representative had been identified to cover the area. It was important that the additional areas included in the report were dealt with in a way that did not disrupt normal business activities.

The point was made that if a number of extra Area Representatives were appointed to cover additional areas, the Day Centre would no longer be able to cope with the increase in numbers at Executive Committee meetings. The Secretary responded that there was sufficient capacity within the Day Centre if the additional chairs stored in the building were utilised and set out in rows, which is the way in which past AGMs coped with the greater numbers attending on those occasions.

The proposed draft agenda and flyer were approved.

An Action List had been prepared to keep track of progress in organising the AGM to be held in May 2023. It was reported that a notification had been received that Barbara Stansfield had decided to stand down as Area Representative for Area 8 from May 2023, which meant that volunteers would be invited to cover this role to enable an election to be held at the next AGM. The Secretary stated that should anyone in the nearby locality wish to expand their area, this would be considered at the next meeting. Such inquiries should be made by the week ending 18 February 2023 at the latest. If there was no interest registered, then a trawl of members would be undertaken to see whether a replacement could be found.

The meeting was also informed that Jane Shen was unavailable to carry out an audit for MERA on this occasion, but that Siyu Smith was an AAT qualified accountant and was happy to carry this out for the 2022/23 audit. Siyu was thanked for volunteering to do this and the Treasurer would arrange for the necessary paperwork to be forwarded to her towards the end of March 2023 or early April, in time for this information to be added to the next agenda.

Committee members were requested to submit any further proposed rule changes to the Secretary by no later than 3 April 2023 to enable the Executive Committee’s views to be obtained before being submitted formally to the AGM. Although the Constitution permitted such proposals to be submitted to the Secretary up to 14 days before the AGM, this would then require the support of at least 5 members, and there would be no guarantee that the Executive Committee would be able to support the proposal.

A further update would be provided to the next meeting.

**Electoral registration: voter ID**

The Chairman confirmed that an article on the requirement to produce ID at polling stations in future had been uploaded to the website and had been submitted to the editor to appear in the next edition of the MERA magazine.

**Closure of main Post Office at Chalfont**

The Chairman confirmed that the ASDA manager had been sent a request to find additional space to accommodate the main Post Office for Earley following the closure of the facility that was part of the McColls accommodation. Morrison’s had now taken over the premises but had decided to close down their operation at the Asda arcade.

**Proposed changes in The Parade**

The Secretary stated that he had circulated the response he had made to the highway proposals in respect of the traffic management arrangements at Silverdale Road and The Parade. The main proposals were to put in place a one-way system around the car park in front of the shops from Yan Yan to Coral’s; to reserve space for a loading bay, which appeared to reduce significantly the room available for parking to 5 spaces when in excess of 20 cars were often parked there at various times during the day; to establish two 20mph roundels in Silverdale Road and move the Reading bound bus stop further along Silverdale Road.

After a considerable amount of correspondence, the Secretary attended the Town Council’s Planning Committee meeting on 7 February, where it was made clear that the Borough Council’s members attending the meeting were fully in support of the proposals. Rosemary Cook pointed out that the proposals for roundels would not make any practical difference to the speed of the traffic along Silverdale Road, but this did not appear to influence the views expressed by the Borough Councillors at the meeting.

it was later accepted by the Borough Council’s officer dealing with the matter that the one-way proposal for the car park could be put in place only with the agreement of the owner of the property.

It was established ultimately that the owner was happy for the car park to be converted to allow a one way only traffic flow, and that the car park could be marked out with the parking spaces to ensure that the entrance at the Yan Yan end was not blocked. The owners agreed with MERA that this car park should not accommodate a parking bay because delivery vehicles should be directed to unload to the rear of the shops. They also agreed that there should not be a significant loss of car parking spaces to ensure that the present footfall levels were maintained.

Although the Borough Council was not in favour of moving the bus shelter due to the low number of passengers who used the bus stop, the Town Council was looking at Silverdale Road for possible locations for bus shelters in the future. The Secretary observed that given the council’s climate policy and the need to attract more people to use the buses, together with the emphasis given to the need for a pleasant environment for passengers at bus stops in the Bus Service Improvement Plan, the views expressed by the officer and the Borough councillors appeared to run counter to the council’s own objectives.

The Secretary had also drawn the council’s attention to the fact that a one-way system for the car park would do little to address the safety fears for children walking to and from school because the accidents that had occurred recently did not happen in the car park but in the driveway into the school. For this reason the concerns of the schools would be better served if the railings to the side of Corals were extended to the dropped kerb and a crossing painted onto the driveway, thereby changing the present situation in which pedestrians had to give way to vehicles.

After some discussion, the Committee

**AGREED:** **That –**

1. **The establishment of a one-way system in the car park in front of the shops be established, provided that as many car parking spaces as possible were preserved;**
2. **The parking bays should be properly marked out with white lines to ensure unobstructed access to the car park from the new entry point;**
3. **The loading area should be at the back of the shops rather than the front;**
4. **A 2-hour parking limit with cameras should be imposed if possible to prevent motorists from leaving their cars there all day;**
5. **The existing railings by the side of the Coral betting shop building should be extended to the crossing area and a pedestrian crossing be painted onto the road to prioritise pedestrians over vehicles;**
6. **The bus shelter is either moved or a new one put in place at the new location for the bus stop, liaising with the Town Council as appropriate;**
7. **The remainder of the proposals be agreed.**

**King’s Coronation celebrations**

The Secretary advised that there was a section on the Wokingham Council website on how to organise a street party, but there was no information specific to the King’s Coronation celebrations, although the gov.uk website specifically referred to this event.

**‘Have Your Say’ at The Parade**

It was established that no members of the Executive Committee had attended this event.

**REPORTS**

**Chairman’s Report**

The Chairman reported that he had attended the NAG meeting on 16 January and he provided a summary of the matters discussed. This included the Speedwatch scheme, and a link was provided by the Chairman of NAG that provided information on this initiative.

Members were advised that the MERA Chairman spoke with a representative of the Aldbourne and Ramsbury residents, and she was grateful to be copied into the minutes of our Executive Committee meetings. They were very hopeful that the AGM would approve the enlargement of the MERA catchment area to enable them to apply to join the Association.

The Chairman updated the Committee on the proposal that an article be written for the MERA magazine on the benefits of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme, and the suggestion that the organiser of The Crescent scheme be approached with a view to logging her experience of establishing the scheme in that area. John Saunders had spoken to the organiser and she duly provided an account of what was involved, which was used in conjunction with the Secretary’s item encouraging members to set up schemes in their areas. This would appear in the next magazine, subject to there being sufficient space for the article in the Spring edition.

**Treasurer’s Report**

The Treasurer reported that access to the NatWest bank online service was now complete, and all officers involved were now ‘live’. The Secretary stated that he had not been issued with a card reader, but the Treasurer stated that he had one that he could provide.

The Treasurer was now transferring addresses for statements, etc to his own home address. He also intended to talk to the bank regarding the absence of any recognition of the UK on the system. He stated that a small amount of the final submission of subscriptions monies still remained to be collected.

The balance in the current account currently stood at £2,470.90 and the reserve account balance remained at £838.38 with 59p interest included for the end of January 2023.

**Editorial Report**

The Editor reminded the meeting that the copy date for the next magazine was 20 February 2023.

**CONSULTATIONS & PETITIONS**

The Chairman advised of the following ongoing consultations and petitions:

**Local Transport Plan for Wokingham Borough** – The Council was carrying out a survey as part of their updating of the Local Transport Plan, which would guide future work on improvements to footways, cycle lanes, roads and other transport networks. Closing date – 12 March 2023.

**Gypsy and traveller pitches –** As part of the Local Plan, the council would like to hear of any potential land that could be suitable as gypsy and traveller pitches. Closing date: 17 February 2023.

**Taxi services: new licensing policy** – The Borough Council had drawn up some improvements on how taxi licences were awarded and they were requesting views on this. Closing date: 5 March 2023.

**Local Government Boundary Commission** – The Commission was consulting on its latest recommendations for new Ward boundaries across Wokingham. Closing date: 10 April 2023.

**Petitions**

There were 2 petitions appearing on the Borough Council’s website. These related to the removal of the one-way system at Evendons, and the removal of bollards on the A327 at Arborfield.

**CORRESPONDENCE**

**NORA**

The Secretary reported that there had been two further newsletters from NORA since the last meeting and these would be circulated with the minutes. There was particular interest expressed over the item relating to illegal tree felling that the Secretary had highlighted.

**NEW ITEMS**

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

The Secretary reported that at its meeting on 26 January 2023, the Borough Council’s Executive Committee agreed to cease any further work in relation to the proposed 3G football pitch at Maiden Erlegh School. The report acknowledged that consultation had identified several difficulties with the site. Additionally, costs had escalated while the council’s financial position had worsened.

The Avalon Road and Sevenoaks Road residents affected were reportedly extremely pleased and relieved at the decision, but members were advised that the proposals that would emanate from the strategic review of playing pitches might still identify either Maiden Erlegh School or Laurel Park as possible sites. The Secretary would be alert to this when the strategy was published, which was likely to be during the summer of 2023.

**Bus Service Improvement Plan**

The Secretary drew attention to the updated Bus Service Improvement Plan, which was approved by the Executive meeting of the Borough Council on 26 January 2023. It was reassuring that the plan included a review of the patterns of services and an increase to frequencies of the Claret 21 and Little Oranges 19a/b/c services, subject to funding. However, the Secretary expressed his concerns that government funding may not be forthcoming, which in his view would put Maiden Erlegh’s existing services in jeopardy.

The meeting was advised that passenger numbers had increased from 75% to 81% of pre-Covid levels and the Leader of the council was attempting to persuade the government to extend its Bus Recovery Grant beyond March 2023. In the meantime, tender bids for the 19a/b/c and other subsidised routes had not been encouraging, with no successful tender bids having been received. As the Wokingham to Toutley route was one of these unsuccessful bids, the Secretary had written again to Cllr Fishwick in the hope that he could persuade him as Lead Member to the view that a link from Silverdale Road to the Toutley route would be worthy of consideration at this point. Disappointingly, his response was that such a plan would involve extra buses, and therefore the proposal was untenable at this time.

Meanwhile, a new tendering process has commenced, but the good news was that the existing funding would be continue and protected until September 2026. Accordingly, if approved, Maiden Erlegh residents should at least have guaranteed funding for three years more than was originally thought possible. The retendering process would determine the services to be provided after September 2023.

**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Green corridor**

Rosemary Cook drew attention to an Earley Environmental Group report and maps explaining the green corridor that ran through Earley. An event had been planned for 7.30pm at the Function Room at the Maiden Place Community Centre, and residents would be encouraged to monitor the animals using the corridor. Additionally, Charlotte Allchin would be giving a talk on the value of the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

9 March 2023 at Kenton Road Day Centre.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 9.20pm.