

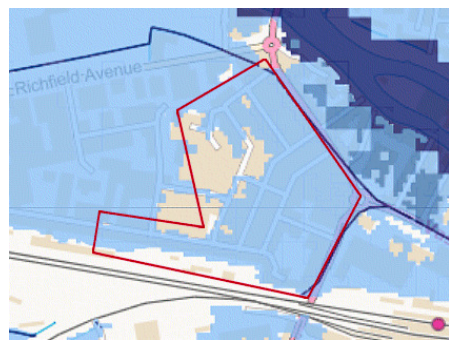
Neighbourhood News

from the Bell Tower Community Association

Issue 35 - March 2014



WILL THIS AREA FLOOD?



UNDER WATER: The current Environment Agency flood map with our area outlined in red, and the towpath at the end of Thames Avenue in January 2014.

The area around the Thames in Reading has escaped serious flooding this winter, but the news has been full of stories of flooded communities around the country. Reading has not escaped entirely - the army has been called out to repair river banks in Southcote, and several houses have been flooded there.

River levels in our area have been at their highest since 2003, when a handful of properties in Caversham flooded, but fortunately we have suffered no serious property inundation, with only fields and tow paths under water.

However, the situation has been worse in the past. Older residents will remember the floods of March 1947, when over 1000 houses were flooded in Lower Caversham; at that time water was seen coming up through drains in some of the streets in our area and many gardens were flooded.

To get an idea of how deep the river was in 1947, go to Caversham Lock and look closely at the lock keeper's hut, where there is a marker on the left hand side. Just past Reading Bridge on the Caversham side, opposite the flow monitoring station, there is also a black marker post in the river with a small yellow arrow showing the 1947 peak.

What does this mean for us? The floods of 1947 were estimated as a 1 in 60 year event, so worse is possible - for example, there is a well-known picture showing floods in Caversham Road in 1894, and there are accounts of a flood in 1852 that was probably worse than that. So even though we have been unaffected by flooding in recent years we should still be prepared.

The current Environment Agency flood map shows our area to be outside the area that floods on average once in 100 years but mostly inside the area that would be affected in an extreme flood. Even if the area itself escapes serious flooding there is a chance of being cut off from the rest of Reading because parts of Caversham Road, particularly under the railway bridge, are lower.

We have been preparing an emergency plan for our area, and hope to publish it soon - what we are trying to provide is a simple guide to what we can expect to happen in an emergency so we can all be better prepared. There is plenty you can do to help us. In particular we are looking for contact details for volunteers to help in the event of a real crisis by checking on neighbours. Please contact me on 07890 118167 or email david@bell-tower.org.uk if you can help.

David Neale

News in brief

● By popular demand we will have another quiz evening on Friday 16 May, 7.30 pm, at the Crowne Plaza hotel, Caversham Bridge, so get your grey cells in training and join us for another fun evening with friends and neighbours. There will be a cash bar available as before. Tickets £5 including coffee, tea and sandwiches, available from Barbara at 77 Addison Road.

● We are looking into organising regular health walks around the area and the river. This will be an opportunity for a gentle walk with friends and neighbours and will help keep us fit and healthy. We are also in conversation with Priory Avenue Surgery, who support the idea and hope to have a doctor available to go as well. Please let Barbara know if you are interested.

● We have invited two winners from last year's garden competition to help design and plant front gardens, window boxes and hanging baskets. The event will take place on Saturday 5 April at the New Hope Community Centre from 10.00 to 11.30am. Please let us know in advance if you are coming so we can provide sufficient free seeds and plants!

● Unfortunately we have had to say goodbye to Owen, the street cleaner who worked so hard to keep our pavements and gutters clean. We now have two mechanical road sweepers travelling in tandem, and these cannot reach the pavements and gutters where cars are parked. If you are not happy with the street cleaning service please let us know or contact the council direct.

● Want to know more? Please contact Barbara at 77 Addison Road, telephone 0118 950 7685, or talk to us at our AGM on Wednesday 26 March, 7.30pm at New Hope.



Meet the new vicar



A warm welcome to Rev. Joy Atkins, who has been vicar of New Hope for a few months now. *Neighbourhood News* caught up with Joy recently...

Where are you from? I grew up and worked in West London. Initially I was working as a secondary school teacher and part-time church youth worker, eventually working full time with a church in London.

What brought you to Reading? I did a year of school chaplaincy and developed a passion for community and youth projects. New Hope is a church with a great emphasis on these, so it's a perfect fit for me.

What's different here? In London I was working largely on council estates - activities included painting and gardening. This part of Reading has different challenges - for example, there is plenty of beautiful countryside around but little outdoor communal space.

How do you see things going forward? For me, living 'in the thick of it' feels good. I'd like to see New Hope's community focus grow - helping and supporting people, living in the community and feeling part of it.

Join us now!

Membership renewals are due in March, and you can still get great discounts from local businesses!

You can join us for £1 - at any of our events or by leaving a membership form with Jonathan Dart at 68 Addison Road. Forms can be downloaded from our web site at www.bell-tower.org.uk.

Have you seen the new viaduct?

Readers may have noticed that there is a huge civil engineering project going on nearby. The old train depot between the Cow Lane bridges has now been demolished, and the new viaduct is under construction. This will go over the top of the existing tracks and will carry the main lines to Oxford, Swindon and beyond.



BIG PROJECT: The new viaduct will dwarf Cow Lane bridges

Construction of the viaduct should be finished towards the end of 2014, after which a new larger northern Cow Lane bridge will be opened next to the existing one, which will then be reserved for pedestrians and cyclists. Richfield Avenue and Cow Lane will become the A329.

A new main road next to our area will have implications on local traffic, and is likely to make our streets busier. We expect to have Network Rail representatives at our AGM and to hold a future public meeting on traffic management.

If you have any suggestions on traffic management in our area please see us at the AGM or email info@bell-tower.org.uk.

In the meantime, Cardiff Road residents are still being disturbed by movements in the new train depot in Cow Lane. Network Rail has constructed a higher acoustic fence on the embankment, but there is still a lot of train idling noise from the sidings, and it is believed that residents on the other side of the railway are also affected. Residents are discussing options with First Great Western, the depot operators - in particular it is hoped that trains can be parked nearer the Cow Lane end of the depot.

Forthcoming events

Wednesday 26 March, 7.30pm, New Hope Centre - Public meeting & Bell Tower AGM.

All welcome to attend. We hope to have Representatives from Network Rail there to give us an update on the railway project.

Saturday 5 April, 10.00-11.30am, New Hope Centre - Meet our local gardening experts.

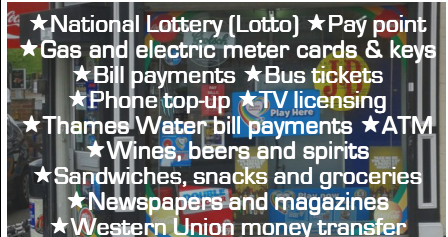
Some of the winners of last year's gardening competition will give their hints and suggestions. Free entry, and plants and seeds will be given away!

Friday 16 May, 7.30pm, Crowne Plaza Hotel Caversham Bridge - Quiz evening.

Entry £5 per person, including refreshments and sandwiches. Tickets from Barbara at 77 Addison Road.

We have a provisional date of Saturday 31 May for a street party, and hope to bring the Big Skip back later this year. If you have any suggestions for a street party or comments on the idea please contact David on 07890 118167 or by email at david@bell-tower.org.uk.

FIVE STAR WINES



**133 Caversham Road
Reading**

Tel: 0118 961 2110

Ask in our shop about the Caversham Lodge Guest House upstairs.