

Neighbourhood News



from the Bell Tower Community Association

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TURNING UP THE VOLUME ON TRAIN NOISE

You may have noticed that Bell Tower and Cardiff Road residents have been appearing regularly in the local media campaigning against the noise and pollution from the Reading Traincare Depot. The immediate question that springs to mind is: why now when the depot has been there since July 2013?

The main reason is that Bell Tower has only become more involved relatively recently – about a year ago – after those affected came to us for support. Our first approach was quiet diplomacy involving joint meetings with the three protagonists in this: Network Rail, who built the depot and supplied flawed projections on noise and pollution at the planning stage; Reading Borough Council, which is the body with the legal obligation to deal with nuisance caused by noise and pollution and which approved the plans for the depot; and Great Western (GWR), which operates it.

One of the results of this was that the council agreed to monitor noise in the early hours of 31 March 2015 after the data gathered by Network Rail showed noise peaks of up to 85 decibels – 88dB is as loud as a jack hammer. However, the council's measurements have become a bone of contention because of the strong winds that night. The council said this rendered the data unusable in any legal proceedings but has so far refused to release that data even under that caveat.

Then late last year we were told by the council that GWR was about to send a letter to Cardiff Road residents saying it could do no more to mitigate the nuisance until March 2019; quiet diplomacy was getting us nowhere. This coupled with the announcement of delays to the electrification caused by Network Rail's lack of planning brought us to the conclusion that the only way to make any progress on the issue was to start a media campaign. We campaigned for the release of its



RIGHT BEHIND CARDIFF ROAD: a train at the new depot (Photo: Geof Sheppard)

officer's subjective report from March 2015, although the council would still not release the raw data. The report contains this damning quote on the early morning noise levels: "At 3.29 officers attended Cardiff Mews communal space and rear garden...Upon opening the door to the garden the low frequency hit you like walking into a wall. There was a strong throb. I would describe this as similar to the feeling you would get back stage [at the] Reading Festival." The report also notes that "the nature of the noise and time it is occurring could mean that there is a statutory nuisance."

We have also managed to obtain a response from GWR explaining how they arrived at the March 2019 date. They say a reduction in diesel units from 157 to 51 as a result of electrification (although this would be 54 if our local politicians get their way and put extra trains on the Basingstoke line to serve Green Park) would mitigate the nuisance enough without them having to change working practices. Electric units will slowly start to use the depot from May this year, with the bulk of electrification taking place over 2017 and 2018, but GWR refuses to look into ways of changing depot operating practices as the fleet of electric units there grows.

Having partially released the results of last year's noise monitoring, the

council said at a meeting with residents and Bell Tower committee members on 17 February that it wanted to carry out a week of noise monitoring later in the year. The council had no new proposals on pollution monitoring, merely saying it would look into it after residents pressed them on this at the meeting. Residents told the meeting of nuisance from the smell of diesel and having to keep windows shut at night because of the fumes. Explaining why it only carried out one night of noise testing in March 2015, the council said this was because it was awaiting a response from GWR but failed to say why it did not continue noise monitoring in the meantime.

Bell Tower will continue to press the council on the issue of pollution and be as vocal as possible in its pressure on Network Rail and local and national politicians as well as Great Western, for whom the health and well-being of local residents seem to be a price worth paying for their prestige projects. To watch a video of our own early-morning noise measurements in Cardiff Road, go to <https://youtu.be/AxFVpeCdS00>.

Jonathan Dart

FIVE STAR WINES

- ★ National Lottery (Lotto) ★ Pay point
- ★ Gas and electric meter cards & keys
- ★ Bill payments ★ Bus tickets
- ★ Phone top-up ★ TV licensing
- ★ Thames Water bill payments ★ ATM
- ★ Wines, beers and spirits
- ★ Sandwiches, snacks and groceries
- ★ Newspapers and magazines
- ★ Western Union money transfer

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

Are you a musician
(or a budding
musician)?
Here's an exciting
new project!



Calling all musicians - whatever you play and at whatever level. It doesn't matter if you're a beginner wanting to have a go at playing in a band for the first time or a professional willing to give us some support - we want to hear from you!

Bell Tower is teaming up with the Readipop studios in Milford Road to bring you the Let's Play project. We hope to organise a series of rehearsal sessions with a Readipop facilitator coaching us, to form one or two (or even more) bands - and eventually put on some gigs in our area, such as at our street party in the summer.

We are applying for grant funding for the project, and if we get this we'll be able to make these sessions completely free! The project may even eventually include a broader range of sessions, such as for families.

Are you interested? Please fill in the online contact form at www.bell-tower.org.uk/letsplay or contact David on 07890 118167.

All about Reading Abbey (and its future)

We are delighted to welcome John Painter from the Friends of Reading Abbey to talk to us about the abbey's history and plans for regeneration of Reading's Abbey Quarter.

Date: Wednesday 23 March

Time: 7.30pm

Venue: New Hope Centre

All welcome - the talk will be followed by the Bell Tower Community Association's Annual General Meeting.



OPENING AGAIN: Reading Abbey ruins

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 Steve Bale at 79 York Road. Forms can be downloaded from our web site at www.bell-tower.org.uk.

News in brief



● We are hoping to hold our street party again this year. We are waiting for the council to confirm whether there will be the offer of a free road closure again as in previous years and confirmation of the dates for this. At the moment we think the most likely date will be Saturday 4 June, the weekend of the Big Lunch - and we hope to hold it in Newport Road again if residents agree.

If you would like to help or have any suggestions please contact David on 07890 118167 or by email at david@bell-tower.org.uk.

● On Wednesday 20 January we held a cheese and wine evening at E P Collier School for our helpers - we usually hold this every two years or so. This recognises the help given by those who have volunteered for us, including newsletter deliverers and helpers at events.

We are always looking for more volunteers - to write articles for our newsletter, for our events, whether it's to load the skip, serve food for our barbecue, make the tea...

Whatever you can help us with, just contact Jonathan at 68 Addison Road, phone 07982 130360, or email info@bell-tower.org.uk

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