

Neighbourhood News



from the Bell Tower Community Association

Issue 22 - December 2010

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Empowerment award for Bell Tower

Readers will be pleased to hear that the Bell Tower Community Association has won third place in the 2010 Reading Borough Council Community Empowerment Awards at its first attempt. We received praise from the organisers and our local councillors. This new award is made to community groups who either undertake a specific project or provide general support for local residents to make the quality of life better for all in the area. The key focus was to demonstrate that the applicant has improved ways of influencing decisions about their community or the services received. We were up against stiff competition among the 14 applicants; first prize

went to the university area Neighbourhood Action Group, followed by a project to reduce knife crime in Reading.

Bell Tower has been running since October 2005 with interests in a wide range of activities, representing the community on behalf of residents to exert a positive influence in planning applications that may have an effect on the quality of life in our area. We have also pursued a number of improvements in the local environment. Here are a few examples of how we have aimed to help in our area:

On environmental issues - we have held several highly popular Big Skip Days which have attracted many residents to keep the neighbourhood tidy; we have undertaken other clean-up activities including removal of graffiti with Bell Tower's 'G-Team'; at present we are

engaging with the Environment Agency to develop a flood response plan for the Bell Tower area.

We have held a number of social events such as the Big Lunch 2010, which we hope to expand next year.

On community issues - we have successfully campaigned against a casino development in the area and are currently supporting Cardiff Road residents during a dialogue with Network Rail, to negotiate the most favourable conditions for them in the development of sidings and new track as part of the Reading Station redevelopment.

We look forward to continue supporting residents in all manner of community activities and enquiries on your behalf and we welcome your support and ideas for future endeavours as we go from strength to strength.

Rod Plinston

'Fantastic' community groups recognised at awards

ORGANISATIONS working in Reading to better the community were honoured at the South East Community Empowerment Awards on Tuesday.

The awards are aimed at projects set up by community groups working alongside the council, police or local health authority.

Jeanette Skeats, lead councillor for the voluntary sector, community and enterprise, gave out the accolades during the Reading 2020 Partnership meeting.

First place was awarded to the Redlands and University Area Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG).

Town centre-based Black and Asian Service in Alcohol and Narcotics (BASIAN) was awarded second place for its project tackling knife crime and serious youth violence.

Third place was given to Bell Tower Community Association. Peter Kayes, the chair of



AWARDS: Shahid Farid and Urfan Azad of BASIAN, Peter Kayes and Ann Westgarth of Redlands NAG, Cllr Jeanette Skeats, Barbara Kendall and Rod Plinston of Bell Tower, and Cllr Andrew Cumpsty Picture: STEVE SMYTH (Ref 102314)

Redlands and University Area NAG, said: "We are delighted to have won this award. However, the prospect of cuts in the budgets of the police and council departments, such as

Streetcare, seriously threaten our ability to continue having the same impact.

"We urge the authorities to protect the services on which we and the local communities

depend so our areas stay safe and pleasant places to live."

Urfan Azad from BASIAN said: "I was not expecting that at all. It is really rewarding to receive it and we are in a strong position to carry out some work now."

Bell Tower's chair Barbara Kendall said: "We were delighted to receive the award and it's evidence that what we are trying to do in the community is in the right direction."

Cllr Skeats said: "Reading has some fantastic community groups working hard on projects to bring improvements to their neighbourhoods.

"These dedicated people deserve to be recognised and I'm very pleased these Empowerment Awards are doing just that and rewarding the really outstanding groups."

The winners scooped the £1,000 and will automatically be entered into the regional final that has a £5,000 top prize.

WHAT THE PAPERS SAY: Barbara Kendall and Rod Plinston of Bell Tower at the awards ceremony (courtesy of the Reading Post)

Visit www.bell-tower.org.uk or email us at info@bell-tower.org.uk

Residents concerned about railway development

Cardiff Road and Barry Place residents are fighting Network Rail plans for late-night train cleaning facilities at the back of their houses.

The project is part of the development scheme for Reading Station, and involves creating several sidings with cleaning facilities for over 150 train carriages. The hours of operation of these sidings are planned to be between 8.30pm and 5.30am, and this is likely to result in train engines running for up to 30 minutes during the night time alongside a quiet residential area. There will also be floodlights to allow cleaning to take place.

Local resident Rachel Trett, who has lived on Cardiff Road for six years, said: 'Local people do not wish to have their sleep disturbed by noise or light.'

Network Rail has submitted a report with current decibel levels in the area, but locals using their own decibel meter have found significantly lower readings. The online plans show that a new noise barrier will counteract the rise in noise, but do not take into account the removal of buildings from the embankment that already reduce the noise level for residents.



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Locals have additional concerns about the disturbance from lighting at night of this new facility, loss of sunlight in their gardens from the new barrier, drainage, flood risk, and the environmental impact of changing the current verge.

Residents have been supported by Bell Tower and local councillor Tony Page, and Network Rail has agreed to produce packs to help the residents understand the implications of the plans. But it is unclear whether these packs will be ready before the relevant planning meeting.

Residents have set up a campaign group named 'We are the Odds', so called because the development affects houses on the odd side of the street. The group can be found online at www.wearetheodds.co.uk.

Winter bird life in our area

This is a time when we are seeing some colourful winter visitors to our back gardens, which are havens for bird life and provide shelter and food sources.

Just now in the Bell Tower area you can see flocks of ten to 20 Long-tailed Tits perched on higher bushes and bare trees - these are black and white with a fluffy white head and conspicuous long tail, and make a piping call as they fly. Also look out for the Redwing, a small chestnut thrush from Scandinavia with bright orange flanks and a white eye-stripe. They perch on bare branches, and can be seen puffed up against the cold in lines on fence tops - especially on the coldest days when they come into towns from the countryside.

Another visitor is the Blackcap - a warbler migrating mostly from Germany that is pale grey with a black top of the head (male) or brown (female). Blackcaps tend to be seen around garden bushes or bird tables.

Help feed these winter birds if you can with mixed nuts, raisins and dried fruit for energy, and fresh water.

Rod Plinston

News in brief

- Bell Tower representatives recently attended an Environment Agency workshop session for self-help flood groups. Topics such as river flow measurement and legal and planning issues for flood groups were covered, and there were several presentations from groups who had put in place their own flood alleviation measures. The next stage for us is preparation of a draft flood action plan, and we have started working on this with the Environment Agency and other groups in the Reading area.

- There have been more burglaries reported in the area, some of these through the front door. This time of year often sees an increase in burglaries because of the shorter days and likelihood of finding Christmas presents, so as always be particularly alert. Be careful to deadlock all external doors and keep keys out of reach - pay particular attention to UPVC doors since burglars often open these by reaching through the letterbox.

- New Hope's annual carol singing tour of the area will be on Monday 20 December this year - meet at the New Hope Centre at 6.30pm. There will also be a 'Christingle' service for all ages at the centre on Christmas Eve at 4pm.

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