

Rob Wilson joins in the criticism against Reading Borough Council



Neighbours slam council over train noise investigations

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THE council has been slammed for taking more than nine months to publish its investigation into late night rail works waking up neighbours in West Reading.

Officers revealed they visited Cardiff Road in March last year after residents complained Great Western Rail workers were making noise through the night, including "thuds as loud as a jackhammer".

However, a report which confirmed there were at times noise levels similar to the backstage area of a music festival, was not made public until last week.

Campaigners from the Bell Tower Community Association say they were pleased the council had taken action, but questioned the delay.

Jonathan Dart, campaign leader, said: "Why has it taken nine months to release this information and why, even under the caveat of it having been corrupted, has the council not released the data? Why has the council not taken any further measurements given its legal duty to take action on statutory nuisance and that the data on the night concerned was corrupted and its latest expression of 'keenness' to do so?"

The report, which was given to the Chronicle, reads: "The low frequency was more evident when laying down than standing up this is due to reflections from the hard surfaces to include the floor/walls.

"When the window was opened as would be in the summer months you could clearly hear train horns intermittently, brakes hissing/ whistling and revving of engines.

"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 Reading Festival."

But despite the noises, the officer concluded his findings by saying the noise was "low and at times barely perceptible". They claimed the weather conditions were "not ideal" for taking accurate noise measurements.

Reading East MP Rob Wilson joined neighbours in criticising the council, adding: "Aside from what appear to be quite puzzling inconsistencies between the extent of the noise nuisance and pollution experienced and the final summary of the officer assessment, it is particularly concerning that despite acknowledging that the recorded data for noise was 'corrupted' by weather conditions, the Council does not deem it necessary to repeat the monitoring process to obtain more accurate results."



Secretary of State for Transport Patrick McLoughlin MP at Reading Station to open the new train depot - Paul Johns - 18/7/13

Neighbours in the area were sent a letter by Great Western Rail earlier this month saying the firm has done everything it can to reduce late night noise.

The letter reads: "There are now no further measures that can be taken until approximately two thirds of the diesel fleet maintained at the depot are replaced by quieter electric trains. This is expected to start later this year and will reduce the number of diesel trains at the depot from the current number of 157 vehicles by March 2019."

Cllr Tony Page, lead member for transport, said it is irresponsible of MP Wilson to suggest the council has powers it "simply does not have".

He also said residents had been told the results of the investigation were inconclusive, and were waiting for a response from Great Western Rail before they published the report, but the letter didn't arrive until earlier this month.

He said the corrupt evidence would not be admissible if the council were to put up a legal challenge against the noise coming from the depot, adding: "Railway legislation derives from Victorian times and gives rail firms huge powers when it comes to constructing and operating.

"The council has never been reluctant to help residents, far from it. We understand there are problems but our powers are much more severely constrained with railways than with any other environmental issue.

"Rob Wilson will always criticise the council whatever we do."

Cllr Page has arranged a meeting with residents later this month to discuss further noise monitoring, which he hopes will begin "as soon as possible".

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