

## **Great Western tells neighbours to expect three more years of depot misery**

– Dismay at minister's Green Park Station remarks

Great Western has written to residents of Cardiff Road in central Reading saying it can do no more to mitigate the noise and pollution nuisance from its Reading Train Care Depot until electrification reduces the number of diesel units based there by two thirds and that this may not happen until March 2019.

This means that if this schedule is kept to, and recent history teaches us there is no guarantee of that, residents will have had to put up with nearly six years of night-time/early-morning noise from trains' arrival, idling at and departure from the depot since its opening in July 2013.

The letter from Business Assurance Director Joe Graham reflected the Great Western ethos; it was promised in October, arrived in January, contained unclear or misleading information but did have a re-branded letterhead.

Bell Tower has written to Mr. Graham seeking clarification on the following points:

- Are you saying that at the two-thirds point the company will take further action? If so, what measures will it put in place?
- Is the full electrification target of March 2019 the point at which only one third of the units at the depot will be diesel?
- If not, when do you expect this figure to be reached and what will the total reduction be by March 2019? In 2014, Network Rail said it was assuming a reduction of 85% by the time of full electrification. Has this changed and if so, why?

The letter makes repeated references to “independent” data showing Great Western is complying with pollution and noise regulations. However, Bell Tower is very sceptical of this kind of data because it is usually commissioned from consultants paid for by those causing the nuisance.

This approach is also at the root of the problem because at the planning stage Network Rail presented models from its consultants which chronically underestimated the noise impact and provided no evidence that the original acoustic barrier would be a sufficient mitigation method. Even the replacement of this barrier by a highway specification one -- after an abatement order not as a good-neighbourly act -- has not cut noise to an acceptable level. Bell Tower has therefore asked Great Western to provide it with a copy of its data so that it can be scrutinized.

The only truly independent noise data Bell Tower is aware of are measurements taken on the night of March 30-31, 2015 by Reading Borough Council in a house in Cardiff Road. To date the council has refused point-blank to release this data either to the householder or Bell Tower despite its legal obligation to do so.

## Green Park Station lobby adds to woes

The lack of pro-active support for local residents by the council contrasts with it falling over itself to have trains stop at the new Green Park Station. The open letter from one of the residents' ward councillors, Tony Page, to Secretary of State for Transport Patrick McLoughlin on the subject urges the Department for Transport and Network Rail to ensure that "the necessary rolling stock resource is both made available and fully funded to allow the station to open in December 2018 with a diesel operation until electrification on the line." Mr. Page is well aware of the depot issue. Not wanting Labour to have the monopoly on piling misery onto Cardiff Road residents Conservative Rail Minister Claire Perry joined in by proposing in talks with Reading West MP Alok Sharm an extra diesel train for the Reading-Basingstoke line. Bell Tower has written to Reading East MP Rob Wilson urging him to use his influence with central government to ensure that any solution to the Green Park Station problem does not involve basing more diesel units at the depot. In addition, Bell Tower suggested making any release of central government funds to Network Rail and Great Western in connection with delays to electrification in the Reading area conditional on finding a solution to the depot problem. Mr. Wilson has replied that he has raised these concerns with the minister and is seeking clarification on the issues raised.

"The Bell Tower Community Association will continue to fight for residents' right not to be exposed to this level of nuisance, particularly at night. At the moment we are pursuing a promising-looking avenue for reducing the noise nuisance. In addition, we will continue to hold local and national politicians as well as Network Rail and Great Western to account over the depot and any undertakings made on it. This role is essential when it seems that so many of our politicians of all hues regard the voters' health and well-being as collateral damage in pursuit of their prestige projects," Bell Tower Chairman Jonathan Dart said.

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### About the Bell Tower Community Association

- The Association was founded in October 2005.
- It represents 600 homes and businesses in the area bounded by Caversham Road, Northfield Road, Barry Place, the residential end of Cardiff Road, Addison Road, Denbeigh Place and Randolph Road.
- It represents the local community, organises events, publishes a quarterly newsletter and operates a members' discount scheme with local businesses.
- It won a Pride of Reading Award in 2007 in the Environmental Projects category for its graffiti clean-up campaign and won third place in the 2010 Reading area of the South East Community Empowerment Awards.
- The neighbourhood has no historic name so the association took on the name of a local landmark, the bell tower on E P Collier Primary School in Swansea Road. The tower can be seen from all over the area.

Further information on the Bell Tower Community Association can be found at [www.bell-tower.org.uk](http://www.bell-tower.org.uk)

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