

Neighbourhood News

from the Bell Tower Community Association

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Season's greetings to all our readers

A new build frenzy?

It seems that we are constantly seeing proposals for another large-scale development around our area. There are currently at least six of these in progress, with more certain to follow in the next few months.

First, a development that is about to be built. The former Cox & Wyman printworks in Cardiff Road is being redeveloped by Bellway Homes into 48 houses, many of these terraces,

flats, which we believe is far too tall for the area. Supported by Reading Civic Society and the Conservation Areas Advisory Committee, we have submitted an application for local listing; if this is granted, the developer will face more pressure to reflect the character of the site, even if the main building is still lost.

The Thames riverside is due to get a major facelift, with a proposal for the

loss of the Aldi supermarket and lack of provision of other facilities for such a huge development. The site is split between two owners, and another of our concerns is that they are not yet collaborating so their designs do not fit together well.

We also have a planning application for a 132-room budget hotel next to the Crowne Plaza. In our view this would be excessively large in the context of Richfield Avenue and the Rivermead, and we have additional concerns about flood risk in the area and inadequate parking provision.

No doubt there will be plenty more to read about local developments in future editions – we expect to hear more about the former Manrose and Ayres site and possibly others soon.

For links to planning sites and to make comments on proposals please visit www.bell-tower.org.uk/developments.

David Neale



GOING UP? (clockwise from top left) How Caversham Road might look, the retail park development, the former SSE site, and the Cox & Wyman development

plus two blocks of flats. The Bell Tower Community Association would ideally have liked more attention paid to the area's Victorian architecture, but on the whole has no major objections. Demolition is imminent, and the whole build is due for completion by the end of 2020.

Also within our area is the former Drews site. The developer proposes to keep the smaller office building and completely redevelop the rest of the site with a seven-storey warehouse-style block of around 44

former SSE site in Vastern Road. This will include about 200 flats and will provide a new link from Christchurch Bridge to the station.

We now come to the big one – the post office site and the retail park. In total there could be around 1,500 flats and a handful of townhouses, along with offices by the northern station entrance. Our major concerns are the height of the tallest block – this could reach 25 storeys – the overbearing effect on Caversham Road and the effects on infrastructure, particularly

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News in brief

• We had a lively and fun quiz night in October at Richfields. The quiz was chaired by Bell Tower secretary David Neale and we had a packed house with over 30 participants again. Many thanks to everyone that took part, to Richard for arranging the event and to Dan and Suzy at Richfields for their warm welcome and excellent buffet. We hope to hold another quiz early next year.

• Ward boundaries and councillor allocations are under review in Reading. Since the town's population has been increasing faster than the national average, it has been proposed that the town will have two extra councillors, bring the total to 48; to accommodate the new council seats and even out ward populations the ward map will have to be redrawn. Abbey ward, in particular, is projected to grow to over 50% more than Reading's average ward population by 2025 because of the proliferation of new developments

Our area could end up in a new Thames ward (unrelated to the existing ward with the same name); most of this ward would be the area between the main railway line and the Thames, with a small part of Lower Caversham and the area around Kenavon Drive. Consultations will take place in early 2020.

• Cardiff Road residents recently met with the council's lawyer for an update on the case against the railway companies. The main hearing is due to take place in August 2020.

• Residents of the streets and blocks of flats near the Thames are considering forming a new association. Their proposed area is between Caversham Road, Vastern Road and the Thames and from Reading Bridge to the Thames Lido. The new association hopes to have an inaugural meeting early next year and will be a valuable partner in our campaigns.

Exploring our heritage



Our local history walks as part of the national Heritage Open Days in September were popular and fully booked, and we held an additional walk in November for those that were unable to attend. The history of several of the area's landmarks was covered, including the Moderation, EP Collier School, the Drews buildings and St Paul's church, formerly on the site now occupied by New Hope. We hope to repeat the walks next year.



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• This year's carol singing tour around the local streets will be on Wednesday 18 December. Meet at New Hope Community Centre at 6.00pm. Mince pies and hot drinks will be offered afterwards, from 7.00pm at New Hope.

Electric car charging has arrived



READY TO GO: a new charging point in Caversham Road

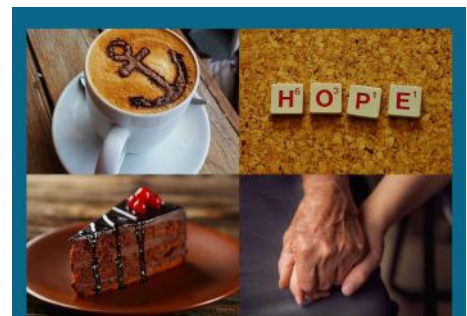
Reading Borough Council has installed fifteen electric vehicle (EV) charging points on lamp posts on public roads in Reading. As part of this scheme two new charging points have been installed on lamp posts in Caversham Road.



GO ELECTRIC READING
Take Charge of Your Environment

The lamp posts were selected after the council's Go Electric public consultation in 2018, when the council asked EV owners or potential purchasers in Reading if they would like a charging point on their street.

The new EV chargers use the lamp post's own electrical supply and are expected to cost 30p per kilowatt-hour to use.



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