

Electrification delay angers residents

THE DELAY of a government project to electrify the railway has been blamed for blighting residents in Reading with diesel fumes and late-night train noises.

Residents surrounding Cardiff Road have endured sleep-deprived nights and a pungent smell of diesel fumes since the town's new train depot opened in 2013.

A community association group slammed Reading Borough Council over the nuisance noises, and council officers vowed to tackle the issues by installing a noise barrier.

The authority declared the site a statutory nuisance, warning neighbours' health may be impacted.

However, Tony Page, RBC's lead member for environment and transport, said residents are likely to suffer from the same problems until the rail network is electrified.

Cllr Page told the *Chronicle*: "If

the electrification programme had remained as originally programmed the impact on local residents would have been much-improved air quality and much-reduced noise levels."

The plan, already delayed, was to fully electrify the route from Cardiff to London by 2018, in order to eradicate diesel-powered trains and create faster, more reliable journeys.

A probe into the project, led by Sir Peter Hendy, chairman of Network Rail, led to a review of the works and government chiefs have now decided to defer parts of the project to free up between £146m and £165m.

The National Audit Office (NAO) said the estimated cost of the project since 2013 has shot up by £2.1bn to £5.6bn.

Rail Minister Paul Maynard MP, added: "We have been clear there have been difficulties."