

Electrification delay would prolong train depot noise hell

The Bell Tower Community Association is very concerned about reports of potential delays to the Great Western electrification project because of the noise and pollution nuisance endured by residents of Cardiff Road since the relocation of Reading Train Care Depot to directly behind a residential street.

There has been much talk of the economic cost of the delay to the project, but for our area there is a very human one.

Residents have had to suffer from noise behind their houses, which is at times almost as loud as a jack hammer, from diesel multiple units entering the depot late at night for cleaning, servicing and refuelling then leaving again very early in the morning to form the first services not only from Reading but also from Basingstoke, London Paddington and on the Thames Valley branch lines. The turbo trains based at Reading also need to run for between 20 minutes in summer and 40 minutes in winter to warm up before they can move off, adding to the noise and vibrations. The large diesel engines also belch out a considerable amount of fumes, creating a pollution nuisance.

Cardiff Road residents and Bell Tower have lobbied the depot's operator, Great Western, Network Rail, which built it and is responsible for the relevant tracks and signals, as well as Reading Borough Council whose duty it is to take action against nuisance from noise and pollution. None of this has achieved adequate mitigation of the problem. To add insult to injury after a series of meetings with these parties at which evidence of noise nuisance was produced by Network Rail, local residents assumed the problem had been recognised and was being addressed. They therefore stopped complaining on a regular basis, only for this to be turned against them by arguing the problem had been solved because people had stopped complaining.

The only crumb of comfort that has been offered those whose lives have been blighted by the development was that things would improve after electrification -- even then Great Western refused to give a commitment that any remaining diesel units would be stabled away from the residential part of Cardiff Road. However, if the electrification project is delayed that chink of light at the end of the tunnel will recede into the distance.

"The residents of Cardiff Road have been let down badly by all concerned. Whilst anyone who travels by rail regularly would expect nothing other than contempt for the public from Great Western and Network Rail, the council's inaction -- despite officials having taken noise readings and agreeing there is a problem -- has been truly appalling. When the depot was being planned residents were assured there would only be a one decibel increase in noise and that after two years that would fall because of electrification. Measures need to be taken now either to end or reduce to an acceptable level the noise and pollution from the depot. This becomes even more pressing if electrification is delayed," Bell Tower Chairman Jonathan Dart said.

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.

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Further information on the Bell Tower Community Association can be found at www.bell-tower.org.uk

For information on the event and the Bell Tower Community Association please contact Jonathan Dart: info@bell-tower.org.uk or 07982 130 360