

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Noise 'burden' to be resisted

A taskforce has warned against adoption of noise performance indicators.

It says that councils have too many burdens already and that introducing new indicators should be resisted. Observers says this drives a "coach and horses" through plans for a national noise strategy which would rely on such indicators to improve noise.

The *Lifting the burdens task force* has studied Defra's brief and identified initiatives to be resisted – including indicators on noise and air quality. The task force findings will feed into current Government efforts to reduce the number of indicators and targets in central and local government. Recently the Rogers Review said noise was 'not a national priority' (NB April p2).

The task force is an independent practitioner body

set up to review the bureaucratic and performance management burdens that exist between central and local government. "The task force will identify which requirements cause the most difficulty on the ground and which add the least value and agree packages of burden reduction with Government."

The report adds: "A worryingly common reluctance in both central and local government staff to let go of performance indicators has been brought to our attention. Over the years, performance indicators have assumed a badge of honour-like symbolism to say 'this service is important and taken seriously' and used to protect the service from any potential cuts or changes.

"In discussing performance indicators with local authorities,

some tension has emerged between the rationale of removing performance indicators which do not meet the criteria and retaining the measure as a means of securing funding for an area of work which would not be considered a local priority. The task force is unanimous in the view that the national indicator should not exist to provide undue leverage to resource areas of work considered low priority at a local level."

Turning to noise, the report says: "We were concerned that as we were discussing performance indicators for removal and review, we were made aware of scoping work Defra was carrying out into the feasibility of introducing new indicators that might be used nationally in the control

● continued on page three

PARLIAMENT

New minister 'chooses' noise

Tony Blair's departure as Prime Minister has seen incoming PM Gordon Brown shake up ministerial positions. The expected merger of Defra and energy side of the DTi failed to materialise.

Environment secretary David Miliband has been replaced by (Mr) Hilary Benn. Noise minister Ben Bradshaw has been replaced by Jonathan Shaw, MP for Chatham and Aylesford. This is Val Weedon's constituency – Weedon is the UK's leading campaigner on noise and was delighted with the news: "I have been involved with Shaw for the last eight

years and he has been extremely supportive of our noise campaigning. At one point he chaired the all party Parliamentary group on noise.

"We understand that he personally chose the noise brief so the signs are good. I am excited that this could be a turning point, at last we have a minister that is interested in his portfolio."

● **Editors comment:** *Recent noise ministers have been lacklustre and were rarely seen practising their role. Ben Bradshaw, Alun Michael and Lord Whitty were all entirely forgettable – one has to go back*

to Michael Meacher to find a minister that was able to talk confidently about noise issues.

We hope that Shaw's enthusiasm will equip him well for the inevitable stonewalling that he will meet from 'noisy' aviation and road interests. He will have a battle on his hands to try and salvage the noise strategy given recent attempts to forestall any setting of noise targets (see news, above).



Shaw: noise man

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SOUND BITES

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New name, new mission?

The National Society for Clean Air (NSCA) is close to deciding on whether to change its name and adopt a new strategic plan.

Its *Future Focus* plan has been prepared with the help of regional roadshows in a bid to move the group forward. NSCA has had to rethink budgets following overspends in recent years, and has suffered a number of high profile staff departures including boss Martin Joseph, former head of noise at Defra.

Of key interest will be NSCA's planned name change. Phil Mulligan, last month confirmed as the society's chief executive, believed the NSCA name failed to reflect the group's role in noise and contaminated land. The term 'society' was not modern looking.

A large number of name selections were whittled down to four. NSCA members are being asked to vote firstly on whether to change the NSCA name at all, and secondly what name they would choose.

The results will be announced at the group's extraordinary general meeting in London on 19th July.

Mulligan said that members identified the following as being important for a new name: memorable; unique; simple; acronym friendly (short and sensible); appropriate – has an obvious connection with our work (descriptive); inspiring, conveying our history and international appeal.

The four shortlisted choices are:

- Environmental Protection UK (EPUK);
 - Environment UK (EUK);
 - UK Association for Environmental Protection (UKAEP);
 - UK Environmental Protection Association (UKEPA).
- More details of voting issues on www.nasca.org.uk

IN BRIEF

Quest for peace and quiet images

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets' environmental health team is running a *Peace and tranquillity* photograph competition aimed at raising awareness of noise issues in the borough.

Environmental health officers say: "As a busy urban environment, noise within Tower Hamlets can often seem to be unavoidable. However, people living and working within Tower Hamlets are also entitled to a degree of peace and quiet and the noise service deals with over 6,000 calls every year from residents reporting a noise disturbance.

"At the same time, many places within the borough are often overlooked as offering a peaceful respite from the hustle and bustle of city life. People may find tranquillity' in a local park or next to a canal."

The council added: "To highlight these peaceful places, we are holding the first 'Peace and tranquillity' photographic competition seeking a photograph that represents the public's favourite place of peace or sums up the idea of tranquillity in Tower Hamlets."

● Details of the competition can be found on www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/templates/news/detail.cfm?newsid=7750

Noise Update 2007

NSCA is finalising its line up for the Noise Update one day conference to be held on 10th October at Birmingham Botanical Gardens.

Topics to be covered include:

- Noise action planning – where are we now?;
- Reducing traffic noise in cities – European NGO perspective;
- Licensed premises noise – practical guidance;
- Defining anti social behaviour – a legal perspective;
- Defra update on emerging policies.
- Online booking www.nasca.org.uk/pages/events_and_training/index.cfm

MICROGENERATION

Home turbine revamp fears

NSCA has roundly criticised plans to deregulate installation of domestic wind turbines. DCLG earlier this year launched a consultation suggesting that turbines need not require planning permission if they met certain noise limits (*NB April p1*).

It says: "Currently, as the technology is relatively new there is not enough knowledge on potential impacts for an impact approach to be applied.

"There is a real risk that allowing installation of microgenerators and heat pumps now could lead to nuisance impacts, creating a burden for enforcement agencies and undermining the credibility of the technology.

"To inform the development of a soundly based impact approach for permitted development, we would recommend the following:

- Pilot studies to assess impacts in a variety of situations (could be carried out where turbines have been

installed);

- Development of a toolkit to enable an assessment to be made of a turbine model's suitability for the site under the proposed rules;
- A phased approach, allowing experience to inform future permissions – for example allowing detached homes first.

The consultation suggested adoption of specific noise restrictions based on set dB levels at neighbouring properties. NSCA responded that once again, it felt that there was insufficient information on noise performance of turbines to be able to set levels.

On vibration: "Where the property to which a turbine is to be attached adjoins another, there is a concern that vibration transmission into the adjoining property may, as well as direct vibration impacts, cause re-radiated noise in the adjoining property. There is no simple way to determine this in advance. It depends partly on the turbine mounting and

structural characteristics of both properties, so may not come to light until the turbine is in use. If planning permission were still to be required, a standard condition could be imposed placing the onus on the owner to ensure that re-radiated noise does not cause problems and to rectify subsequent problems.

Other points include:

- There are issues of equity in only allowing protection for 50% of outdoor space for neighbouring gardens, as it takes no account of amenity;
- Further research is needed on noise and vibration outputs of domestic wind turbines;
- An accreditation scheme for supply and installation would contribute to managing impact;
- An obligation for maintenance of turbines would help to reduce risk of increased impact with wear;
- Kitchens should be included in the definition of habitable rooms, as for many this is a primary living space.
- www.nasca.org.uk

URBAN NOISE

Tough New York noise code enters law

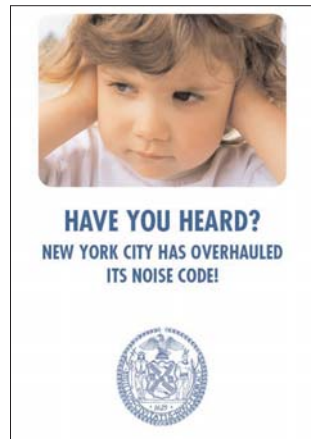
New York's new noise code came into force on July 1st.

The code was approved in December 2005 but not enacted until now. The city says: "The new regulations try to balance the important reputation of New York as a vibrant, world class "city that never sleeps" with the needs of those who live in, work in or visit the City. The code was enacted in December 2005, and takes effect in July 2007. This is the first comprehensive overhaul to the City's code in 30 years."

The city says the previous code was outdated and did not reflect the changing city landscape or advances in acoustic technology.

Rules include:

- Construction may only occur between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 pm on weekdays;
- Alterations or repairs to existing one- or two-family, owner occupied dwellings, or convents or rectories may only be performed on Saturdays and Sundays between the hours of 10am and 4pm;



- Enforcement will take place if dog barking is unreasonable and plainly audible from within nearby residential property:
 - after 7am and before 10pm for a continuous period of 10 minutes or more; or
 - after 10pm and before 7am. for a continuous period of 5 minutes or more;
- Ice cream chimes may only be played when vehicles are in motion, travelling through neighbourhoods;

- Sound levels from bars and restaurants:
 - may not exceed 42dB as measured from within nearby residences; or
 - may not exceed 7dB (yes, this is as written in the code), as measured on a street or public right of way 15 feet or more from the source, between 10pm and 7am
- The new noise code restricts noises coming from vehicles, including motorcycles, and prohibits excessive sound from the muffler or exhaust of motor vehicles operating on a public right-of-way where the speed limit is 35mph or less.

Excessive sound is defined as sound that is:

- Plainly audible at a distance of 150 feet or more from light vehicles;
- Plainly audible at a distance of 200 feet from a heavier vehicle;
- Plainly audible at a distance of 200 feet from a motorcycle.
- The code can be viewed on http://home2.nyc.gov/html/dep/pdf/noise_code.pdf

MALADMINISTRATION

Merton rap for stair nuisance

The London Borough of Merton has been criticised by the Local Authority Ombudsman for noise nuisance from a metal staircase on a new block of flats.

A block of flats was built above a pub without the correct planning permission. Merton planners were criticised for the way they handed the resulting enforcement. Noise featured highly in the Ombudsman's judgement.

Access to the flats was via a metal staircase overlooking the complainants house. The metal staircase proved noisy in use.

Environmental health officers visited and considered the nuisance 'severe' and served an abatement notice. "The council also thought that prosecution may be necessary as it would be so difficult to abate the nuisance because of the way the staircase had been constructed."

At present, carpet has been laid on the treads which neighbours say has not abated the nuisance.

The Ombudsman considered it maladministration that planning officers failed to pass on noise nuisance complaints

about the staircase to environmental health officers.

He added: "The new staircase was not suitably constructed to provide reasonable resistance to sound, and caused a statutory nuisance in the adjoining building. The failure to identify that resistance to sound applied to adjoining buildings, as well as to other flats within the building, was maladministration."

The council was told to make payments totalling £2,500 to complainants.

● www.lgo.org.uk

NUISANCE

Smoking ban prompts warning

England has joined Wales and Scotland with a ban on smoking in the workplace. NSCA has warned that the ban might lead to extra noise for pub neighbours.

It said: "While welcoming the move to clean indoor air, we want to ensure this is not at the expense of noisier streets. Experience in Scotland has shown that outdoor smoking can increase noise in streets and gardens around licensed, and

other, premises.

"We are concerned that, while outdoor smoking shelters may keep smokers dry, they offer no insulation against noise."

Licensees, smokers and their friends should be beware of potentially increasing noise disturbance to neighbours – particularly in the summer, when many have their windows open, and want to enjoy the peace and quiet of their own gardens.



Leeds' new smoking poster

PUBLICITY

Industry awards to reward noise

The inaugural Rushlight Awards have been launched to promote and celebrate the achievements of the leading UK and Irish environmental technology and innovation.

Award categories include noise and air quality. Organisers say the awards will highlight the technology and innovation that is shaping the energy, transport, environment and industry sectors in the future.

They add: "With corporate partners BT, Black & Veatch and Carron Energy, assistance from the environmental unit of

DTI/DEFRA, Scottish Enterprise, Welsh Assembly, Action Renewables of Northern Ireland and over 20 trade associations, institutes and agencies, the awards are the leading awards in the environment, energy and waste field."

The noise award will go to "the most significant development in noise abatement technology". This category is designed to include any type of technology, innovation and procedure that either prevents or reduces noise.

The key criteria that the

judges will be focusing on are:

- The importance of the advancement in addressing a specific technical or process issue;
- The evaluation of the solution or the change: the bigger the problem that has been solved the better;
- How the new advancement or process is being or will be used or commercialised;
- Its holistic impact.
- To find out more and to enter the awards (closing date 31 October 2007) visit www.rushlightawards.co.uk

BUSINESS

Green expenditure revealed by Defra

Defra has released its 2005 environmental protection expenditure survey.

Compiled by consultant URS, the ninth survey in the series reveals many points including:

- Gross spending on

environmental protection in 2005 by UK industry amounted to an estimated £3.4 billion;

- 40% of the total expenditure was spent on wastewater, with a further 28% spent on solid waste, 17% on air, 9% on other

and the remaining 6% on soil/groundwater and noise pollution.

● *Environmental protection expenditure survey by industry 2005* can be viewed on www.defra.gov.uk

Burdens (from p1)

of noise.

"These would be used to inform the effectiveness of the national *Noise Strategy*, which will cover both neighbourhood and environmental noise. Noise is not a Rogers national policy priority. The Task Force is of the view that all future indicators need to be part of the nationally agreed suite within the performance framework and these need to reflect both Rogers and Defra's policy priorities.

"We therefore recommend that Defra does not add any additional national performance indicators unless they form part of the national performance framework."

● The *Lifting the burdens task force review of Defra* can be viewed on www.lga.gov.uk/download.asp?path=/Documents/Publication/LBTF_DEFRA.pdf

Footnote: In March, DCLG released a report *Local Environment Quality: A new view on measurement* which proposed a series of 12 Positive Local Environmental Qualities (PLEQs). One of these – the 'unpolluted' 'quality' – includes air quality, traffic noise, late night noise, noise pollution, recycling facilities, smells, water/soil pollution, light pollution and energy efficiency.

● **Editor's comment:** *This is a significant development. If noise indicators are seen as red tape and resisted, this totally undermines the planned noise strategy being prepared by Defra.*

Defra had employed its own consultants to look at possible indicators for noise, and between this, and the DCLG's plans for local environment indicators, it looks as though it has been left in the lurch.

The national noise strategy can only improve the noise environment if it measures what's there in the first place – just as happened with air quality, and is required under the European Environmental Noise Directive. It is difficult to see how Defra can be expected to produce a meaningful noise strategy if the thinking in this report is accepted.

IN BRIEF

EU programme omission

European pressure group EEB is highlighting the omission of noise from core European policy.

It says: "One of the key documents defining EU environmental policy is the 6th Environment Action Programme on the environment. The Commission has recently published a review of this programme, which is still running until 2012. Noise is covered in the sixth programme, but it is not referred to in the Commission's mid-term review.

"In response to that review we are demanding the Commission to come up with further noise reductions at source. In particular we would like more attention to noise pollution, particularly from vehicles. There is an urgent need for an ambitious proposal to reduce noise from tyres.

"As part of the Environmental Noise Directive, the first environmental noise maps are due to be submitted to the Commission and EEA this year, and to be followed up by noise action plans in 2008. It is very important that enforcement of this Directive is enforced, particularly to provide residents with information on noise exposure levels and to enable the effective future development of European noise policy supported by the data collected."

● *EEB response to the mid-term review of the sixth Community Environment Action Programme*, www.eeb.org/publication/EEB-response-to-the-Mid-Term-Review-of-6EAP-130607.pdf

Acoustic firms highlighted

A building website is listing firms specialising in acoustics.

Acoustic consultants are listed by county on The Construction Centre website. Over 200 firms are listed.

● www.theconstructioncentre.co.uk

NEIGHBOUR NUISANCE

Mediation review released

A review of mediation services has been released by Defra.

The report, completed seven months ago but only released now, was carried out by Stuart Dryden of consultant Rupert Taylor. *The review of use of mediation services by local authorities and housing associations* looked at the types of services available, who provides them, and their effectiveness in terms of results and costs compared to other methods available to landlords for controlling noise from tenants.

The review, previewed at the NSCA spring workshop (*Noise Bulletin April p4*) concluded: "The study found wide variation in the experience of users as to the benefits of mediation in the context of neighbour noise disputes. Concerns were expressed in relation to the cost, and outcomes, and the lack of engagement by the mediators to the referring body.

"However, other users reported up to a 100% 'success rate' and wished to extend the

availability of the provision of mediation services. There was also evidence that some mediation providers provided regular updates to referrers on the progress and outcome of cases while not compromising client confidentiality."

It continued: "Proposals for improving the take up of mediation and improving its overall effectiveness included awareness campaigns to explain both the benefits and purpose of mediation. In particular, disputants need reassurance that the process does not necessarily require them to meet the other party face-to-face.

"The assessment of costs and hence cost-effectiveness was hampered by the lack of data from many of the bodies consulted, but from the limited data available the average cost per case of mediation was £334 (users' data) and £488 (providers' data). Information on the cost of other measures was also limited but the average cost of informal methods was £224 per case.

The report recommends that

the following actions would improve the take up and effectiveness of mediation:

- Spread good practice amongst mediation service providers;
- Improve (cost) data recording amongst referring bodies;
- Increase the awareness and understanding of mediation among referring bodies and the public;
- Ensure that referring bodies are trained to assess the suitability of cases for mediation;
- Promote the early referral of (suitable) cases for mediation;
- Ensure that the referring body introduces the topic of mediation in an appropriate manner;
- In addition, methods of providing more stable funding to service providers should be explored.
- The report *Review of use of mediation services by local authorities and housing associations Defra Contract NANR 197* can be viewed on www.defra.gov.uk/environment/noise/research/index.htm

NUISANCE ABATEMENT

Tube announcements considered too loud

Noise campaigners are seeking to quieten London tube announcements following the serving of an abatement notice on London Underground.

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea served the notice because of excess noise at Earl's Court station.

It said: "Residents have been complaining about the noise of the public address system for over six years. As a result of pressure from council officers, the system was changed in August 2004. But the announcements were louder than ever because London Underground proved incapable of setting up the system properly."

In a situation that mirrors complaints about overground train horns, the council said: "It is staggering to think that this problem has been going on for so long. Even after the Council intervened, London Underground failed to take the

correct action needed to make the PA system more bearable for local residents. Both the volume and frequency of announcements were unnecessarily high, causing constant irritation to local residents.

"I hope that serving the abatement notice will prompt London Underground to have the decency to be a good neighbour – and will ensure the PA system is adjusted properly so that residents can at last get some peace."

The abatement notice sets down a series of tasks the council believe are necessary to prevent further nuisance to residents. London Underground has 21 days to appeal the notice, but must comply with the notice in 60 days of its service. If London Underground fails to comply with the notice, the council can prosecute them."

Meanwhile Val Weedon of

the UK Noise Association has launched a survey to find London's noisiest Underground Station. She said:

"Underground passengers have contacted UKNA complaining about the constant loud tannoy announcements made at stations and whilst travelling on the trains. Some feel the constant reminders to "stand behind the yellow line" and the onboard announcement for every station being approached, is unnecessary, often too loud, and extremely annoying making travelling on the Tube very unpleasant."

Interim findings from UKNA suggest that announcements can reach 110dB, 4dB over background noise on the trains. At stations, for instance Bank's Central Line platform, announcements were measured at 101dB. Many are 15-20dB above measured background levels.

● www.ukna.org.uk

AVIATION

Coventry expansion rejected

Expansion of Coventry Airport has been rejected on noise grounds.

Coventry Airport failed to win planning permission for expansion, lost an appeal against that decision and has now lost its appeal to the Secretaries of State. They told the airport: "Partly due to the type of aircraft used, the proposed development would cause disturbance and annoyance and general loss of amenity through noise, and that this is the virtually inevitable effect of any airport development."

The decision letter continues: "The Secretaries of State acknowledge that aircraft noise is already a significant feature of the local noise environment in the vicinity of Coventry Airport, and has been so for many years. They have had regard to the Inspector's view that he has found the noise generated by the Thomsonfly aircraft to have the greatest impact, by reason of the loudness of the engine noise and its distinctive sound, and that the appellant's acknowledge that the impact of

noise cannot be avoided.

"The Secretaries of State agree with the Inspector that a substantial number of residential properties will be affected by aircraft noise at levels likely to cause disturbance. Despite the mitigation/compensation package offered, there would still remain a significant loss of local residential amenity. This loss of amenity would be in addition to the loss already experienced as a result of the interim passenger terminal facility.

"Overall, for the reasons given above, the Secretaries of State agree with the Inspector that, notwithstanding the significant benefits of the mitigation/compensation package offered, and the new noise preferential routes proposed, the proposed development would add significantly to the loss of amenity local residents already experience, particularly at unsocial hours, from the noise of Thomsonfly passenger aircraft.

"In this particular case, having weighed up the

arguments for and against the proposal, the Secretaries of State have concluded that the harmful impact caused by the proposal and the conflict with sustainability objectives, is not outweighed by the socio-economic and other benefits."

● www.communities.gov.uk/pub/382/coventryairportsiskinparkwaywestcoventry_id1511382.pdf

Editor's comment: *We report the above in full rather than abbreviating it as it provides an interesting contrast with what is happening at Heathrow and to a lesser extent Stansted.*

At these airports, claimed economic benefits are being seen to outweigh increased noise. Mind you, at Heathrow, with the noise contour cap, the aviation industry and Government would argue there is no increased noise. Objectors say that this position disregards the huge increase in flight numbers causing increased noise just below the level captured by official contours.

In short, this decision appears to stand uneasily alongside the expected go ahead for expansion at Heathrow and Stansted.

IN BRIEF

Further delays to powers

Parliament has been told that there will be further delays to implementation of Noise Act powers to licensed premises.

The powers were mooted last year and met with surprise that a 'single number' could be used to decide whether noise from pubs and clubs constituted a nuisance (*Noise Bulletin July 2006 p1*). Under the Clean Neighbourhoods Act, regulations were drafted to allow local authorities to fine a pub up to £5000 if they exceeded 35dBa between 11am and 7pm.

But subsequently it emerged that Defra needed to obtain European approval to ensure the measurement process did not break competition rules. That approval led to an expected three month delay (*NB November 2006 p3*) however Defra still can't say when the notification process will be completed.

● www.defra.gov.uk/environment/noise/noiseact.htm

European annoyance

43% of people living in the UK reported substantial noise annoyance at home.

This was an early conclusion of a pan-European online survey on noise annoyance and noise. 61% of all participants felt substantially annoyed by noise, so far more than 2140 persons from 14 European countries took part in this survey, part of the SILENCE initiative.

The SILENCE research network, co-funded by the European Commission, aims to develop recommendations and rules for noise abatement.

Noise annoyance was significantly influenced by individual noise sensitivity, with 'habitation' and 'sleep' proving to be the most significant predictors for annoyance. The most annoying noise source is road traffic. In the UK 28% felt substantially annoyed by road traffic noise, and 9% by railway noise.

● The questionnaire is available on the website www.ifado.de/silence.

AVIATION

Agency wades into Heathrow growth debate

The Environment Agency has tabled its reservations about further expansion at Heathrow Airport.

In its response to consultation on alterations to the London Plan, it says: "We support the Aviation White paper's conclusion that any proposal for extra runway capacity at Heathrow Airport should not progress unless the adverse impacts on air quality and noise are sufficiently mitigated and public transport access improved.

"We feel the alterations as presented in the London Plan are not entirely consistent with the White Paper and Progress Statement of December 2006. The White Paper makes the assessment that 'there is a substantially better chance that the limits (ie specifically the currently exceeded limits for nitrogen dioxide) could be met in the 2015-2020 period'.

"The London Plan Alterations state that on present evidence, Heathrow cannot adequately mitigate noise, air quality and climate change impacts, and oppose an additional runway at Heathrow on these grounds. On current evidence we agree with the plan."

Concerning the excess emissions from the airport, the Agency says: "An

environmentally robust surface access strategy would assist in reducing emissions. However, at present we feel there isn't much evidence to show that this and other measures can make a significant enough contribution to mitigation and to meeting the nitrogen dioxide standards within the 2015-2020 timescale required of expansion plans at Heathrow."

Airports get advance warning from PSDH?

The 2M grouping of London authorities opposed to Heathrow expansion are complaining that airport operator BAA has been given advance access to data on noise.

BAA has confirmed that it will seek expansion at the airport as it believes environmental limits will be met. The 2M group are objecting to BAA being given

early access to information from the Sustainable Development of Heathrow (PSDH) study.

The Government is expected to publish a consultation document later this year that will state that a third runway would, subject to certain conditions, pass pollution and noise tests.

● The 2M website can be found at 2MGroup.org.uk

IN BRIEF

Glastonbury over

This year's Glastonbury festival has passed with few complaints from neighbours but reports that bands were too quiet.

Mendip Council said complaints from the villagers of Pilton were at low levels, with 54 calls in total to the village office – many of these being general enquiries.

Organiser Michael Eavis noted that questions were asked about reports of the crowds calling for *The Killers* to be turned up on Saturday night, and he apologised for sound levels of the PA. Unfortunately, he said, levels had to be lowered, due to meteorological conditions to comply with the licence agreement set down by Mendip Council.

Update for pop code?

Experts are being asked for comments on an update of the *Code of practice on environmental noise control at concerts*.

The code was published by the Noise Council in 1995 and is relied on at many outdoor events.

CIEH is considering updating it into the current regulatory context and to re-badge it (the Noise Council being no more). It said: "We need to know if there are any particular parts of it which are unclear or are ambiguous or which would benefit from expansion or more explanation.

"At the same time, the code needs to continue to meet modern expectations and we would also be glad for views on whether, in principle, it needs any substantive revision in addition.

"Comments might like to consider, for example, whether the code covers all the various kinds of events it ought to and whether the distinctions between the different types of locations and the differences in the guidelines according to the frequency of events are justified and correct. Are the music noise levels (MNLs) suggested about right, too high or too low? Is the code inadequate or inappropriate in any other respect?"

PUBS AND CLUBS

More guidance for licensing

New 2003 Licensing Act guidance has been released.

The revamp has been long promised to plug a number of gaps and uncertainties in the original guidance. However there remain many loose ends on noise issues.

Amendments include:

- Further clarification on the responsibility of licensees to take reasonable steps to prevent crime and disorder and public nuisance immediately outside their premises (where this is within their control) and local authority powers to impose relevant licence conditions where necessary;

- An expanded section on incidental music, to help local authorities determine whether music falls into this category and is therefore not licensable.

One expert in noise and licensing told *Noise Bulletin* that it was a lost opportunity to clarify interpretation of public nuisance and the position on controlling outdoor smokers

and resulting nuisance through licensing.

There is much clarification on police closure powers. Police can close licensed premises that are causing disorder or noise nuisance. The power is extended to the 'vicinity of the premises' for disorder – but not for noise: "It should also be noted that the interpretation of "in the vicinity" does not arise in the context of "nuisance caused by noise coming from premises" because section 161 of the 2003 Act requires that the noise is emanating from the premises rather than any other source."

Many EHO's had been hoping for a definition of 'public nuisance' in terms of noise. The guidance says: "The 2003 Act does not define the term 'public nuisance'.

Parliament has decided not to constrain the interpretation of the term by providing a more restrictive definition. Whether or not there is public nuisance

will depend upon the circumstances of the particular case. Ultimately any questions of interpretation will be decided by the courts.

"It is important to note that the "noise" in question must be emitted from the licensed premises as defined, ie any area designated as such on the plan of the premises. This may include, in some (but not all) cases, a beer garden, courtyard or street terrace.

"Noise nuisance arising solely from people in the street outside the perimeter of the licensed premises would not be sufficient to justify the use of these powers, even if those making the noise occasionally enter the licensed premises to purchase alcohol, etc."

- *Revised Guidance issued under section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003 – June 07* can be viewed on www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/Alcohol_entertainment/licensing_act_2003_explained/

Licensing and noise as it affects environmental health

The guidance explains: "Powers include the capacity to close licensed premises to prevent nuisance to the public which is the result of noise coming from the premises. The 2003 Act does not define what constitutes nuisance and it will bear its common law meaning. Ultimately, nuisance will be a matter of fact to be decided by the courts in any case. However, senior police officers will need to use their own experience and common sense to decide when noise levels reaching outside the premises have become unacceptable.

"The enforcement of the law relating to statutory noise nuisance legislation is primarily a matter for local authority officers, sometimes working in tandem with police officers. Their powers to take quick action to resolve noise nuisance are however limited, particularly where the noise from commercial premises is caused by people rather than amplified electronic equipment. The powers in the 2003 Act offer a means of resolving noise nuisance problems from licensed premises quickly.

"The 2003 Act anticipates that any noise coming from the premises should be disturbing members of public, for example, in the street or residing locally – otherwise it could not constitute a nuisance. In practice therefore, it is likely to be that the police will usually take action under their powers following complaints made by the general public. Such complaints may, in certain circumstances, be channelled to the police by local authority officers who may initially be the

natural point of contact for a complainant. However, the decision as to whether the noise constitutes a nuisance for the purposes of the exercise of the powers in the 2003 Act is a matter for the senior police officer to decide, and no formal complaint from any individual is necessary before the powers may be exercised.

"Given their experience of noise problems, the officer may find it helpful to consult local authority enforcement officers, if available, before making a decision about the level of noise involved. In addition, under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authority enforcement officers have powers to confiscate, for example, noisy equipment which may be causing the problem and avoid the need to close the premises. On occasions, such consultation in respect of an incident which is ongoing may prove impossible without an unacceptable delay.

"There is therefore some advantage in police forces discussing these matters generally with the local authority to draw on their experience and establish guidelines for officers about noise issues.

"Chief officers of police may find it valuable and helpful to agree a protocol with the local authority for the handling of noise nuisance issues associated with premises licensed under the 2003 Act or in respect of premises operating under temporary event notices. This would enable a consistent approach to be taken by the police and other local authority enforcement officers."

Action week: who did what

Local authorities around the country used the annual Noise Action Week to educate, advise and even have a bit of fun. Lisa Russell reports.

Songs, cartoons and appropriately-decorated biscuits were among the light-hearted devices employed during Noise Action Week to help local authorities and others make very serious points to the public about the problems and remedies stemming from inconsiderate noise-making.

NSCA's Noise Action Week (NAW) coordinates organisations across the UK in raising awareness of noise nuisance and promoting practical solutions. The sheer range of activities emphasises the diversity of issues, with each area able to tailor its initiatives to local concerns.

An urban area's concerns about smokers chatting loudly outside newly smoke-free pubs are mirrored elsewhere in complaints about raucous garden barbecues lasting late into the night – assuming of course that the rain holds off long enough. One council's problems from loud stereos are balanced by another's issues with quad bikes or construction noise.

"We've had the debate over the years about there not being a unifying theme," says NSCA's Mary Stevens. It is recognised

that the lack of a nationwide central issue can undermine the potential for a national news splash. "But on the other hand it demonstrates that noise is such a disparate and to a large extent local problem. For example, burglar alarms are a really big issue in suburban and urban whereas for the more rural authorities barking dogs is the big one."

She is encouraged that this year's NAW proved a success, despite having to be run without central funding following the loss of government sponsorship. "Last year's sponsorship was about £120,000 – we were down to just £2,000 this year," she says. "Luckily, we could do it because we had materials in stock left over from previous years, but they've gone now." This year's only funding came from the Noise Abatement Society. "We're looking at ideas for funding in the future."

She hopes to secure commercial funding, particularly as the event runs UK-wide which makes for complex liaison with the four administrations. Ideas include approaching music-free brewery chains,

DIY stores and manufacturers of quiet headphones. Different sponsors could fund specific angles.

"We didn't have funding to produce the resources that we've produced before – but that didn't seem to detract too much from the level of activity," she says. Councils tend to be resourceful and innovative, she finds. Some have a budget and can produce their own support materials. Others appreciate the provision of promotional items such as pens and bookmarks. "People have asked for those fluffy bugs, but it's better to provide something that will last and keep it in people's minds," she believes. Indeed, a bookmark design competition proved a resounding success for **West Dunbartonshire** (see box p8).

Even councils without prizes to offer could encourage their visitors to enter NSCA's online competition to win an appropriate prize – a quiet dishwasher.

Many councils are old hands at NAW, fine tuning their plans every year and adding in new initiatives. Putting on events such as town centre displays, competitions and school-based activities does however take time to arrange. Planning has to start early, advises **Leeds City Council's** Richard Bilsborough, who led a busy programme of events. "I formed a NAW group, mainly of environmental health staff drawn from across the department," he explains. The group first met in March. "We did quite a lot for NAW last year and realised then that we needed to start a bit earlier this year." Weekly meetings helped formulate the activities, starting with a brain storming session that led to many ideas which were then whittled down. "We did a lot this year and it all worked well," he says. "It didn't cost a lot – apart from officer time of course."

A poster was designed to tie in with the smoking ban. This has been circulated to suburban pubs that are surrounded by housing. "We think there is potential for a huge increase in noise complaints if people go outside for a smoke," says Bilsborough. The poster asks smokers to respect neighbours. It was deliberately designed to show sophisticated-looking smokers. "Smokers already feel alienated and we didn't want to antagonise them."

The Leeds team also designed an advice leaflet for people buying electrical items. This was handed out to customers in Currys and Comet. It offers advice such as using headphones and avoiding putting speakers on party walls. "That was a big success – it was well worth doing," says Bilsborough.

A number of authorities took the opportunity to try to reduce the number of complaints about noise from burglar alarms that cannot be switched off. **Leeds** had no

Using the press to spread the word

Benefits come not only from the event itself, but also from the publicity it secures. Indeed, some councils bypass events completely, simply putting out a press release supporting NAW or seeking an interview on local radio. But others find the route to prime coverage in the local press involves running something innovative and photogenic that catches the attention of a jaded news editor.

Torbay District Council senior environmental protection officer Peter Walsh is not convinced that a lasting impression is made on people during the activities themselves – the benefits come from the coverage they secure, he believes. "The most efficient way to get the message across is through the media, having a presence in the local newspaper and radio – which we did," he says. The activities only hit a few hundred people, he says, whereas the printed and radio media reach thousands. "People are in an information mode when they are watching TV or listening to the radio. But you do need to run a cohesive campaign which can then be reported."

May's press coverage for NAW around the country was valued at more than £80,000 by NSCA's cuttings service. Getting NAW into the national news also helps build the momentum and NSCA had intended creating a big splash with its Mori survey results, but it lost out to

other news.

Interesting press coverage need not relate to events. NSCA's Mary Stevens commended an article about **Cardiff** in the form of an interview with an EHO, which she praised for being "light hearted without undermining the seriousness of it". The article from the South Wales Echo revealed that "Ducking televisions, quietening cockerels and telling people to hush their bedroom activities" are all part of a day's work for the officers.

Coverage on the radio and TV is widely regarded as greatly beneficial. "We get a huge amount of requests for radio interviews," says Stevens. Interviews always get the phones buzzing, she finds. "We had some great feedback from South Oxfordshire – they got TV coverage for their education work," she adds.



Shoutabout: South Oxfordshire shouting secured it valuable coverage

difficulty in persuading local travel agents to send out keyholder notification forms with travel tickets. **Bury Council** was also one which tackled this issue, emphasising that residents could be charged £250 if their alarms have to be turned off by officials.

A popular approach is to take the local messages out to key spots in the district, but finding the right format and location is tricky and many councils are still experimenting to find what works best for them. **Torbay** had in the past run stationary information points in the town centre for one or two days. "The feeling was that this was fine and was getting the message across to the shoppers, but it wasn't really taking it out into the community," says Torbay's Peter Walsh. Campaigns had also been run in schools. "But school children aren't really the issue – if they are being noisy it's because of how they are being controlled. Children may be a vehicle in which you get a message across but they are not necessarily who you are trying to hit," he says.

The council has a campaign bus and this was used for the latest initiative, visiting three areas and getting as close as possible to residents. However the campaign bus will probably not be used next year. "The idea of hitting areas with a high footfall is good, but going out to residential communities is difficult during the day." An idea for next year is to seek collaboration with busy shops to reach more people.

A stand in a busy town centre location has been chosen by many councils as the best route to reach people, with a range of approaches adopted to entice visitors to stop and talk. Some officers dress up – anything from a burglar to a fluffy animal – but **Stockton-on-Tees Council** environmental protection officer Cirous Asadi is convinced he has the secret. "If you give free things to people, they will always come up to you," he advises. In Stockton's case it was free hot dogs, from a stand designed to replicate an outdoor barbecue, to encourage people to consider the noise such parties can make.

The "cost" of the hot dog was that they had to fill in a survey, which provided the council with useful information. "We asked



Stockton-on-Tees drew in passers-by with the offer of hot dogs then got them to fill in a survey

Bookmarks highlight noise issues

Asking pupils to design a bookmark proved a great success for **West Dunbartonshire Council**, with 300 entries received and two winners picked, both from Clydemuir Primary.

The competition was combined with talks on noise issues. "We were really pleased with how it went," says Caroline McMenemy, who is health promotion officer in the environmental health section. The Noise Action Week activities asked primary school pupils to think about how they are affected by noise and how the noise they make may affect other people. Pupils were invited to design a bookmark that highlighted neighbour noise problems and practical solutions.

As well as distributing copies of the

winning designs, some of the images may be used in the council's next noise leaflet, as has been done previously with a winning poster. The original idea this year had been for postcards but the idea of bookmarks seemed to be a more popular in schools, with greater longevity, as well as the association with quietness. Furthermore, they are cheap to produce and easy to handle.

"We do quite a lot of poster competitions for various topics, but there are practical issues in having so many posters delivered – 300 bookmarks make a nice wee pile on your desk and don't require an entire filing cabinet," she observes. "It went well this year, and we're always trying to think of good ideas for the following year."



Gary Barlow from Clydemuir Primary was joint winner with his bookmark

people about the types of noises they have suffered from in the last 12 months and who they contacted for help," says Asadi. Fifty people completed the survey; 19 had suffered from the noise of dogs barking, followed by 15 each for amplified music and raised voices. He was interested to discover that many had put up with a problem or approached the wrong people for help. Although the most common response was to talk to the neighbour (20 people), 14 took no action. Seven reported it to environmental health – but four had gone to another council department, four to a councillor and five to the police.

Advance planning and co-operation with other bodies can save costs. Stockton teamed up with four neighbouring Tees Valley authorities to share the hire costs of a trailer. Each took turns to use it for a day during the week.

Leeds City Council is in the enviable position of having its own market stall, used all year round for promotional activities, including two

days of NAW. The stall has a kitchen area, enabling biscuits to be made that mimic the mute button on a remote control. The ginger biscuits were iced with a speaker with a red cross through it.

Huntingdonshire operated a roadshow under the slogan "One person's sound is another person's headache!". Like many authorities, it taps the imagination of its residents – the slogan was the winning entry in a competition run last year.

Scottish Borders activities were organised by anti-social behaviour/community wardens coordinator Colin Bain and the community wardens. Display space was secured in a major Tesco on two afternoons. An assembly presentation and other school activities went well and an associated competition brought in many entries. Further coverage came from a press release and a radio interview. "We're hoping to get registered social landlords involved next year as well so that they can get the message out to their tenants," says Bain.

Some organisations choose to target a range of issues, but others have a prime focus. Take **Fenland District Council** in Cambridgeshire. "Dogs and Fenland go hand in hand," says dog warden services supervisor Dawn Sadler. The area has one of the highest rates of dog ownership in the country, and received 250 dog barking complaints last year. Tackling the problem is a perennial challenge: the council was one of the first to use the Anti-Social Behaviour Act to address a particularly serious case, which involved 35 dogs.

Fenland is keen to put across the message that problems can be resolved without the need for action against the owner. The council has done dog-related activities in past NAWs and this year opted for an innovative scheme to tackle problems directly. "We targeted owners of dogs who had previously been subjects of excessive barking complaints," she explains. Fenland is in the fortunate position of having a trained dog psychologist as its animal welfare officer. Six owners brought their dogs forward for "psycho-analysis", and the initiative has paid dividends, as no further complaints about them have since been received. Owners were first asked to answer 40 or so questions, ranging from "what made you choose this particular dog?" to "what does the dog have to occupy him while he is alone? Intensive discussions and advice followed. "The response was really positive," adds Sadler. "Two even said that it really had changed the way their dog behaved in all areas – not just barking."

Officers enjoy having the excuse to do work that they wouldn't normally get the opportunity to do, such as educational work, finds NSCA's Stevens. "Instead of being reactive and dealing with complaints, NAW gives them the opportunity to go out and do some proactive work."

"We try to use Noise Action Week to target particular problems that the borough has at the time," says **Dudley** senior EHO Lynda Fawthrop. "This year we chose to produce a leaflet which was sent to all licensed premises recommending that thought is given to the location of smoking shelters/areas with regard to noise to ensure that the smoke-free legislation does not create noise problems for residents living in the vicinity of pubs and clubs," she says.

The week also gives the opportunity to get the message across about issues that

may sometimes be neglected. "Things like noisy children running up stairs and laminated floors fall outside our legislation – we can't take any action," says **Torbay's** Walsh.

The week does of course give an ideal opportunity for catching the attention of children and teenagers. Torbay ran a "shout for silence" competition for teens. "It was a bit of fun," says Walsh. With the aid of a sound level meter, pupils were recruited after school and given the opportunity to shout as loudly as possible. A boy called Samuel was the loudest at 115dB. "This lad – who had a particularly high-pitched voice – was something like eight times louder than a typical night club floor," he recalls.

"We work quite a lot with schools on various issues," says **Bournemouth Borough Council's** Neil Short. "Kids of any age group are interested in these messages – it's just a matter of presenting them in the right way. Our hope is always that by reaching the younger age groups they then will take the information into their lives now and into later life."

"In previous years we have pushed the message of 'please don't disturb the neighbours', but we decided to have a change and promote the sensible and safe use of personal hi-fi. We said that we wanted something that could then be used to promote the issue back to young people." The school students could for instance produce a poster, leaflet, video clip or radio advert. The winner's school will receive a



Leeds created an advice leaflet for distribution through retailers

huge TV together with a DVD player – items that the council had confiscated.

Public response to competitions can be unpredictable. **East Staffordshire Borough Council** ran one that could reasonably have been expected to attract a lot of entries. It had a lively theme, was well publicised in the press and the council's bulletin, and offered attractive prizes in the form of an iPod and £20 high street shopping vouchers. "We haven't got as good a response as we'd hoped," says complaints officer Emily Ulyett. Only six under-16s had come up with designs for a cartoon superhero by the closing date a month later. Previous competitions such as crosswords with a tie-breaking sentence had attracted more entries.

Plans sometimes need to adapt in the light of public response. **Huntingdonshire District Council** had planned a demonstration of the benefits of broadband reversing beepers, with one as a prize, but not enough people were interested in attending. "There was a Plan B luckily," says Aaron Morley. The competition was run and succeeded in increased awareness. "We've had people ring up and say that they've bought one," says Morley. Another of Huntingdonshire's activities was to run a song lyric competition (see box, left).

NAW is also a good time to launch appropriate services and initiatives. Just beforehand, **Newcastle City Council** announced the expansion of its Night Watch noise service and the week's activities gave the opportunity to spread the word. Newcastle also took the opportunity to highlight the area's tranquil places, to counter the image portrayed by a well-publicised but flawed survey earlier this year which had branded it as the UK's noisiest city. Newcastle's Ed Foster criticised the methodology of the report and wanted to use NAW to look at a more positive aspect of noise than the more usual anti-social behaviour. As in previous years, the council had a city-centre display. "We also ran a competition for people to nominate their favourite quiet area in Newcastle," says Foster. "The public was really responsive and enjoyed thinking about their favourite spots in the centre. It turned things around and was a good way of engaging people."

Huntingdonshire does it with lyrics

The Environmental Protection Team at **Huntingdonshire District Council**, working in partnership with Luminus Group, ran a competition to write the words to 'Noise gets in your ears' – sung, naturally, to the tune of 'Smoke gets in your eyes'. The public voted for the best lyrics, and winning entry, by a slim

margin, was Terry Schooling from Chatteris, with:

*Is the story really true
Of harm that noise will do?
Decibels are a curse;
It is surely so,
There are few things worse.*

*Once, with joy we'd always hear
Nature's music clear.
So much noise abounds,
Today we drown in sound
Noise gets in your ears.*

*Everyone, carelessly goes their way,
Oblivious of the harm.
Until too late
they realise their fate,
Their hearing's gone for good.*

*Now, when friends around them
speak,
Their hearing is too weak.
They suddenly understand,
Their eyes are filled with tears,
For all those careless years
When noise got in their ears.*



Huntingdonshire was active during the week

Learning affected by flights

One woman in West London is pushing the dangers of aviation noise making playgrounds no-go teaching areas. Lis Stedman spoke to her

The effects of aircraft noise, particularly on those living in close proximity to and under the flight paths of major airports such as Heathrow, are well documented (as are the rows with local residents).

The effects on children have also been assessed – there have been landmark studies such as the well-known RANCH project and other inter-university/NHS research from Dr Mary Haines, Professor Stephen Stansfeld et al on the effects of chronic aircraft noise exposure on child stress responses and cognition. These have found links with poorer reading and maths response and “higher levels of annoyance and perceived stress, poorer reading comprehension and sustained attention”.

One study published in *The Lancet* revealed that each 5dB hike in noise levels was linked to children being up to two months behind in their reading age, even after socio-economic differences were taken into account. Much of this research has focused on children living around Heathrow and other busy airports around the world. None have conclusively linked aircraft noise to threats to child health, but certainly suggest quality of life, learning and behavioural issues.

One local campaigner near Heathrow – Julia Welchman, a supply teacher who works in schools in the Heathrow area as well as at Kew Gardens (also overflown by Heathrow planes) – has been taking a hands-on, pragmatic approach. She says the direct evidence she has collated from years of hands-on teaching and feedback from schools provides alarming additional evidence of serious effects on children. She also tries to get stakeholders to come and see the problem for themselves, though this hasn’t always proved easy.

She says that when she started supply teaching “my first question to unknown teachers was “do you use the school grounds?”. Their reply was ‘you must be joking! No-one in their right mind would do it.’”

Welchman provided her anecdotal research to the Heathrow Terminal Five inquiry and has also written an MSc thesis looking at this same question, use of school grounds in schools on the Heathrow flight paths. Her research took in six schools and two outdoor educational learning centres – Kew Gardens and a city farm.

“The reason I was looking at outdoors was that I taught primary to nursery age, where the doors are wide open to fit in with the DFES initiative on outdoor education, the Growing Schools project,” she says.

This project, she notes, has highlighted (and created) some “stunning” outdoors

efforts. Looking at the initiative brochure, she says: “There was a list of reasons why you might not use the grounds – some were logistical like having too much to do, and a number of environmental issues such as rain, but it doesn’t mention planes.”

Perhaps it should have – Welchman says that during her research when she asked questions “some teachers burst into tears”. She observed whole days in the schools, so was observing both good and bad periods in terms of overflights, as well as the everyday actions and reactions of the children.

Three of the schools in her study were close to Heathrow, and the other three were further away, but she found all had had to rearrange activities because of the planes. “One school was in Chelsea – it had huge doors and fabulous gardens, but had decided it could no longer have stories outside because you couldn’t rely on the human voice being heard.”

Other schools’ responses were slightly misleading, she notes – some said that yes, their pupils were in and out of the grounds but in reality, it would be a case of working inside and going out when the work was completed. This is because, she says, being outside “is not very nice. To age eight, children have vulnerable ears”.

She says, logically, if adults don’t like the noise then children must like it even less, although “children often don’t identify the source of discomfort”. However, she has observed “bizarre running about” in playgrounds – plane chasing – and notes that children “can’t be heard crying, can’t hold skipping ropes or dolls because they are under eight and it hurts [so they hold their ears].”

This is a normal reaction, she insists. Living under the Heathrow flight path herself, she has seen the same response in her own grandchildren.

It can’t be said Welchman hasn’t tried to raise awareness – she’s taken Rolls Royce engines’ environmental strategy manager among others to some of her schools. She’s also tried hard to talk to other key people, with mixed results.

She is passionate about

getting schools to use their outdoor spaces, and clearly feels there’s at least a moral case for doing so.

She notes that schools under the flight paths have “lost the habit of going outside” and is angry that there’s no legal protection for the over-flown, just those on flights. She asks, have children got the right to use the outdoor spaces, whether there is (or should be) a legally-enshrined right to go out. “Fifty percent of the National Curriculum could be taught outside,” she notes.

Like many ardent anti-aircraft noise protestors, she phrases her approach almost in terms of a war being waged. She speaks of “non-audiological impacts on cardiovascular systems, smaller foetuses, learning behaviours” and argues that tackling the epidemic of obesity in children should involve moving about, that is, exercising outside. “If they are stuck to their chairs, we will see the consequences,” she warns.

Welchman has also seen teachers making special efforts – miming outside so that words aren’t needed, for instance. She feels the ratio of adults to children should be increased so there’s more chance of catching what children say.

Perhaps small, sticking-plaster steps are all that can be taken, given that cheap flights and the increase in airport traffic don’t look set to end anytime soon. Welchman’s is a disturbing vision of a real-life situation, but one wonders whether raising awareness, however dire the effects reported, can create change.

● Barts and London’s Department of Psychiatry three-year Road Traffic and Aircraft Noise Exposure and Children’s Cognition and Health (RANCH) project, which began in 2001 www.wolfson.qmul.ac.uk/RANCH_Project/



Too loud and too low: arriving planes can affect learning

Hinton and his BUMP

Noise mapping expert John Hinton has completed the Birmingham Updated noise Mapping Project (BUMP). Lis Stedman finds out more

Birmingham City Council's trailblazing BUMP – the Birmingham updated noise mapping project – has finally reached a conclusion with the production of updated noise maps for Birmingham and Solihull.

Birmingham's 2000 noise maps were the first in the country, and BUMP project manager John Hinton says of them: "They were used to a certain extent – the fact that we were able to produce noise maps in a reasonable period of time helped the EC in its efforts to produce the Environmental Noise Directive, which was published in 2002 and required member states to produce noise maps by the end of last month [June]. I think to a certain extent we were instrumental – we demonstrated that local authorities like Birmingham could start from nothing and produce a noise map in a reasonable time."

It was a successful trial, the noise map seemed reasonably accurate and had always been intended as a strategic tool, Hinton adds. Ultimately the END regulations made mapping compulsory, so Birmingham decided to launch the BUMP project. "We had better quality data, both noise source and geographical. This time we concentrated just on transportation – previously there was some industrial noise but we didn't include it this time because it can be dealt with by other means. The Directive leaves it fairly open as to what industry to include so we decided in Birmingham to concentrate on road, rail, tramway and aircraft noise."

BUMP was very much helped by the openness of the decision-making process – before it was set up a steering group was created, which had representatives from Defra and DfT as well as all the key council departments, which were asked what they would like to get out of the project. The result, Hinton says, was a wish-list which was very enlightening. "There were lots of potential uses. It got their buy-in at a very early stage."

Now that the work is done, the final teething problems are in the process of being polished away. Birmingham's experience underlines the need for validation – when the maps were produced earlier this year, checks threw up discrepancies – high levels of predicted noise in certain areas were not matched in reality. It was found that while the motorways had been modelled at the correct height in the first run, for some reason the

geographic data had been lost on the second run so they were not as elevated as they should have been.

"Over the past few weeks we have corrected this and we've been re-running for the last week or so, so it is virtually completed," Hinton adds. He calls it an "interesting blip" and adds "It's easy to overlook – it only becomes obvious if you have a reference to check it against."

Birmingham has now set up a noise Action Plan Development Group (APDG) to move to the next stage in the process, creating the action plans required under the directive. Hinton explains: "What we are trying to come up with is a local action plan to deal with the most severe noise problems. We hope that what we do

complements Defra's national action plan."

The plan's aim is to do something for those people that are most exposed to noise. The Environmental Protection Unit, which is BUMP's parent department, has been talking to other departments, Defra and DfT (which are in the APDG steering group) about a proposal to deal with the top 1% of affected households.

This equates to around 10,000 people in the Birmingham area, or 4,000 properties. The plan is to use the noise map and associated exposure data to identify the location of all the properties affected by road traffic noise, which creates the worst problems.

The plan is to begin work between July and September, once accurate data is available to locate this top 1% of properties, going out and doing some low key, external survey work to see if there are possible solutions such as installing low-noise road surfaces, reducing speed limits or erecting barriers.

He says: "The bottom line is that if there's nothing we can do, we will think about providing sound insulation if the houses have not got that already. A lot won't have, because they are close to roads that have not been altered in recent years but traffic flows have increased, and they have had no recompense at all."

There is still the issue of what the council wants to do as a policy over the long term. "We have got an agreement to identify the problems and do something to help. BUMP is virtually finished but it is a very powerful tool that we would like to develop. It is something that can be used proactively for



Man with a map: Hinton has steered through BUMP

planning applications for developments – other departments in the council are very interested in the results." The existence of BUMP has also raised awareness of noise issues, and many departments are keen to use it as a tool for their own strategic planning purposes.

Certainly, there are obvious uses such as for transportation planning, as BUMP will enable a holistic approach to development of new roads whereby the noise impact both from new routes and nearby roads affected by the increased flows can be gauged.

In future, Hinton says, planning applications submitted electronically could be imported into the noise map and the impact could be readily assessed. Building structures alter the propagation of noise, but the impact may not be what is expected – a new commercial development could actually screen domestic dwellings from a traffic noise source, for instance. Birmingham is also looking in tandem at the effects of air pollution – all part of a "joined-up thinking" approach.

The BUMP players are now part of the APDG, which is seen as a natural progression. This has had one meeting to explain the proposals, though things are at a very early stage as yet. The next meeting will be after the summer survey work, so it will be possible to report back thoughts about what can be done and at that point some kind of political agreement and approval will be needed to move forward.

So farewell BUMP, hello APDG. It doesn't roll quite so easily off the tongue, but is bound to create as much interest as its predecessor.

SOUND BITES

So the Tories are planning a moratorium on new airport runways.

This would be good news for those that get fed up with increasing noise nuisance from the likes of Heathrow and Stansted. However there is a terrible feeling of déjà vu with such a policy.

Step back to when the Tories were in power and building roads like no-one's business. Swampy and his mates created a sizeable anti roads backlash (just like the current backlash against aviation growth) and Labour jumped on the bandwagon, declaring a road building moratorium and fuel tax escalator to raise the cost of motoring.

Once Labour got into power, it quickly jettisoned these policies by restarting the roads programme, and junking the fuel tax escalator.

So while we welcome the Tories apparent green credentials, we suspect that even if they could get themselves re-elected, it would not be a policy that survives the reality of being in power.

NSCA is rather sensitive about its name, changing it has been on the wishlist of incoming boss Phil Mulligan since his arrival at the group last year.

NSCA is as much noise, contaminated land and climate change as it is air so it

certainly makes a lot of sense to ditch the *National Society for Clean Air* name.

But we are rather underwhelmed at the alternatives to be voted on at next week's special general meeting. There is:

- Environment UK (EUK);
- Environmental Protection UK (EPUK);
- UK Association for Environmental Protection (UKAEP);
- UK Environmental Protection Association (UKEPA).

Name changes, such as Consignia, Accenture and Monday (PriceWaterhouse Coopers) are invariably met with derision and hot collars. Critics of name changes are all too easily dismissed as negative, awkward and fearful of change, allowing silly names to survive a reality check.

So having nailed our colours to the mast as name-change cynics, what do we think of EUK? Yuk - non starter. UKAEP and UKEPA sound a bit too close to the UKIP (UK Independence Party) and the massive USEPA (US Environmental Protection Agency) (UKEPA is also used by the UK Extreme Puzzling Association and the UK Egg Producers Association).

We could live with EPUK not least because it can be spoken (Eeeeeepuck). But we suspect this preponderance of UK-oriented titles will drive voters to tick the 'no change' box and we'll be back

where we started (especially as in NSCA's survey only 47% think it was "important or very important" to change the current name".

A safe bet would have been to include NSCE (National Society for a Clean Environment) as a low risk, moderate gain option. Expect some heated reactions either way!

You don't have to be mad to work here but it helps, so goes that old cliché.

Given the fun and games at the NSCA, that could well be true down in Brighton. So we are amused to hear that NSCA's Mary A. Wise has got married to Mr Devlin - congratulations!

But now she is MAD.

The BBC reports that a noisy cockerel has narrowly avoided being made the subject of an asbo.

Scottish Borders Council wanted to slap an interim asbo on the owner. The cock was measured at 44-48dB very early in the morning.

This was compared by opponents as higher than World Health Organisation night time levels, and proponents as 'not as noisy as a lorry on the road'.

Neither comparisons are particularly helpful. How about too noisy, too early!

NOISE EVENTS 2007

July 11th

It's PRACTICALLY A QUALITY MEASUREMENT!

Are your acoustic measurements fit for purpose? Organised by the IOA's Measurement and Instrumentation Group contact Linda Canty, Institute of Acoustics, 01727 848195

July 25th

AN UPDATE ON DEFRA NOISE RESEARCH

IoA Midlands region meeting to be held in Nottingham with Richard Perkins, PB Ltd & consultant noise research manager for Defra, contact donna.dooley@scottwilson.com

August 28-31

INTERNOISE 2007

The 2007 international congress and exposition on noise control engineering to be held in Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail: contact@internoise2007.org.tr or www.internoise2007.org.tr

September 20-22nd

WIND TURBINE NOISE 2007

Second international Wind Turbine Noise conference organised by: INCE/Europe to be held in Lyon, France website: www.windturbinenoise2007.org/

September 25th

PERCEPTION, CONSIDERATION AND CLOSURE -

a better way of dealing with noise from aircraft to be held at the Arden Hotel, Birmingham. Organised by the IOA's Measurement and Instrumentation Group contact Linda Canty, Institute of Acoustics, 01727 848195

October 10th

NOISE UPDATE

NSCA's noise update conference to be held in Birmingham contact Lucy Salter 01273 878770

October 22-24

NOISE-CON 07,

The 2007 National Conference on noise control engineering to be held in Nevada USA, www.inceusa.org

2008:

21-25 July 2008

NOISE EFFECTS 2008

The International congress on noise as a public health problem, five yearly conference to be held in Mashantucket, Connecticut. http://www.icben.org/

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