

NOISE

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BULLETIN

NUISANCE

Surprise as LA_{eq} judged best

Experts reacted with surprise to news that the absolute LA_{eq} metric has proved the best measure for judging one-off entertainment noise disturbance.

Delegates at the Institute of Acoustics research update meeting held in Birmingham last month heard how a single number (34LA_{eq}) could prove to be a reliable measure for pubs and clubs nuisance.

Last year the Noise Act was amended to allow councils to impose fixed penalty notices on pubs and clubs for excess noise but this was held up while a suitable enforcement metric

could be found. Consultants were asked to come up with a 'single metric' – something of a holy grail in acoustics.

Capita Symonds' report, launched at the conference, surprised delegates with news of research that very clearly suggested that the LA_{eq} metric was best – and that 34LA_{eq} was the best value to represent the onset of disturbance for one-off events. The current Noise Act metric LA_{eq}-LA_{99.8} did not do that well.

Nor did C-weighting, which is pushed as better than A-weighting (the 'A' in LA_{eq}). C

weighting is supposed to cope better with strong base beats – but not in this report.

The research was based on participants' reactions to various types of entertainment noise sampled in realistic conditions in two BRE test houses.

Because of the problem that background noise may reach 34 LA_{eq}, researchers suggest detail of the music should be audible. Incorporating this leaves the report recommending a range of 34-37db LA_{eq}. Defra must now decide where to pitch the action level for serving of notices.

● See feature, page 4

IN BRIEF

No funds for noise consultation

A planned consultation meeting on the noise strategy is being postponed due to lack of funds.

Although Defra runs open strategy stakeholder meetings for other policy areas such as air quality, the noise team says it cannot afford to hold a conference to discuss its strategy.

Earlier this year Defra confirmed it was joining up its neighbourhood and environmental noise strategies which are due to be published in draft form by November (NB May p1).

Footpath closures avoid horn nuisance?

Railway infrastructure owner Network Rail has been served a second nuisance notice because of train horn noise at Ardleigh in Essex.

Last month Tendring Council served a section 80 noise abatement notice on the firm for excess noise near a resident's house. Since then, the resident has himself served his own section 82 notice demanding Network Rail consider noise mitigation measures.

Private (section 82) notices are relatively rare but are being encouraged by independent environmental health officers Sanctum Consulting, who are supporting the applicant.

Train operators claim it is very difficult to silence the horns, and prototype horn silencers have proved unreliable and were removed. Network Rail is being encouraged to remove 'whistle boards' that instruct drivers to sound their horns where they are located near houses. Whistle boards are located at crossings used by the public.

Network Rail is seeking powers to close the crossings so the whistle boards can be removed.

PUBLICITY CAMPAIGNS

Neighbour noise advert campaign nears

Encams is to launch a new publicity campaign on neighbourhood noise next month. Faced with complaints from existing noise pressure groups, it has agreed to fund extra telephone support at the Noise Abatement Society.

Encams (the Tidy Britain Group) carries out a lot of attitude surveys and public noise awareness work for Defra. Based on the attitude surveys, Encams claims there are distinct types of noise sufferers and noise makers some of whom can be easily influenced, others who cannot.

For the forthcoming July campaign, because of limited funds, it is tackling what it sees as those most easily influenced – those labelled as 'don't want a drama' noise sufferers.

Encams says: "These people have got a noise problem but choose not to do anything about it, we want to get at those people and show them that we understand their problem, that there are others out there like them, and there is information available. They are very amenable to dialogue, we want them to tackle problems before they escalate into a more

intractable problem."

Encams is to set up a website to support the campaign, which will be based on bus shelter and phone box adverts, and some radio ads. The website will forward sufferers to other sources of information – such as NSCA, UK Noise Association and the Noise Abatement Society.

These groups had complained that they will be inundated with calls for help but had no extra funding to meet the demand – now Encams as agreed to pay the Noise Abatement Society to take extra phone calls.

PEOPLE

Griffiths splits from Capita

Five consultants have split from Capita Symonds to set up Vanguardia Consulting.

Jim Griffiths and John Staunton were respectively acoustics director and technical director of Capita Symonds (formerly Symonds and Travers Morgan). Already the team has won 18 high profile commissions to manage noise at headline pop concerts.

Both Griffiths and Staunton have built on their roots in environmental noise to gain

extensive experience in the acoustic design of venues from both an architectural and sound system perspective. They have been involved in high profile concerts such as Live Aid at venues such as Wembley and the Millennium Dome.

Griffiths explains: "We recognised a gap in the market for a consultancy which could offer true depth of technical expertise across a diverse range of acoustic services, combined with applied business acumen



Griffiths at recent London gig

and powerful industry contacts."

● Jim Griffiths, Vanguardia Consulting Tel: 01883 718690 website www.vanguardiaconsulting.co.uk

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guest Opinion

Currently Section 82 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 allows any individual aggrieved by a statutory noise nuisance to apply to a Magistrate's Court, for a summons within three days of notifying the noise maker.

This fundamental right needs to be preserved and not diluted as mooted in current deregulation plans and in the light of the deferment of duty to serve S80 notices by local authorities under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

The Section 82 process can be quicker than any other legal avenue available to private individuals. And importantly does not involve exorbitant legal costs associated with seeking injunctions or other civil remedies. The early stages of a Section 82 action can be remarkably informal with a Magistrate and Clerk of the Court the only Court members present apart from the applicant.

The current criminal system allows a relatively swift resolution without need for protracted arguments. The use of Civil Procedure Rules would involve each side employing experts resulting in long delays before the case comes to Court, adding considerably to legal costs.

Additionally, civil cases apply the evidential criteria of 'balance of probability' permitting hearsay evidence which would add to the evidence burden. For noise complaints involving commercial, industrial or business premises, resolving noise cases through civil action could have significant implications.

Rather than spending scarce resources creating specialist environmental courts, extra funds should be targeted towards providing thorough training for magistrates. And perhaps, there is an argument for not allowing lay magistrates to sit on noise cases.

It is worth questioning why detailed sentencing guidance issued to the Magistrates Association in the document *Costing the Earth* (2003) is currently not consistently applied by the Courts.

Nargis Kayani
Sanctum Consultants
 www.sanctumconsultants.co.uk

NEWS FROM THE IOA RESEARCH CONFERENCE HELD IN BIRMINGHAM

BRE lists hotspot benefits

The Highways Agency 'hotspots' programme is having some success at reducing noise. However the programme is much reduced in scope compared to recent years (*NB May p2*).

BRE's Chris Skinner told delegates at the recent IoA research conference about results from the Agency noise mitigation programme aimed at treating existing noise hotspots and concrete road surfaces.

BRE was commissioned to investigate the effectiveness of the mitigation methods looking at 13 sites including two particular examples – the M1 at Pinxton and the A46 at Warwick. These sites have close receptors, a dominance of road traffic noise and suitably programmed mitigation work. Site treatment included noise barriers, quiet asphalt, and the

barriers and asphalt combined.

Noise measurements and social surveys of residents were taken before and after mitigation work. Measurements included four to six week measurements of noise at first floor level, with short term 15 minute readings used to estimate levels at all interview dwellings. 'After' measurements showed improvements between 2 and 7dba as a result of the mitigation measures, with greater improvements at night.

Interviewees were asked about their feelings about living in the area, their attitudes to noise generally and road noise specifically, and other road traffic nuisance.

At the barrier sites, all but one initiative led to an improvement in subjective ratings. The exception was

where new barriers were insubstantial compared to those on the other side of the motorway. For the overlay sites, all showed an improvement in subjective ratings.

Results from the more detailed M1 questionnaire suggested improvements in:

- The level of traffic noise, dust and vibration indoors at home;
- The ability to open doors and windows;
- Sensitivity to noise in general;
- Whether traffic noise startled people, interfered with sleep concentration, or stopped people using the garden as they would like.

Skinner added: "Before noise mitigation, 54% said that traffic noise was the thing they liked least about the area. Afterwards, 27% liked traffic noise least."

Rail roughness to be added to CRN method

IoA delegates heard that rail roughness factors must be used to make the standard Calculation of Rail Noise (CRN) methodology more accurate.

CRN is widely used to assess whether compensation is needed for homes near new or upgraded railways under noise insulation regulations for railway, explained AEA Technology's Rick Jones. Jones is charged with improving CRN so it can be used for noise

mapping of railway lines for the European noise directive. The directive requires member states to map noise levels.

Jones told the IoA noise research conference that CRN assumes the rail is in good condition – whereas in fact corrugations form in rail surfaces that create a 'roaring' noise that can be as much as 20dba above CRN predictions.

"We have developed an acoustic track quality (ATQ)

measure (CRN measurement less actual noise measurement) of the rail network and there is little at or below the CRN, suggesting that CRN is not accurate. As CRN is to be used for rail mapping in 2007, ATQ can be used as a post-CRN correction factor to allow improved prediction of global rail noise exposure within the mapping process, and extended to allow analysis of the number of people exposed."

Insulation probe call

Leading noise medic Stephen Stansfeld says research into sound insulation in schools is urgently needed.

Following introduction of new sound insulation regulations in BB93, he is recommending setting up of a study comparing treated classrooms against non-treated classrooms. The University of London's Stansfeld adds: "We need to research and compare levels of reading delay in insulated and non insulated schools taking advantage of new sound insulation schemes that can yield a sound reduction of 10dba."

Halving noise 'on the cards'

Mike Swanyck of aircraft engine maker Rolls Royce has said that halving of aircraft noise is now 'really on the cards'.

Speaking to the IoA research meeting in Birmingham last month, he outlined the latest research and technology aimed at reducing engine noise from aircraft. One particularly promising idea is the use of wavy engine cowlings to break up dominant tones from engine noise. The serrated edges are retracted at cruise altitude to maximise engine efficiency and fuel consumption when noise is

less important.

Much work is being done to reduce the supersonic chopping noise of turbine blade tips. Extra streamlining can be added to the blade tip, and larger blades can allow slower fan speeds bringing the blade tip below supersonic speed, dramatically reducing noise.

Acoustic mats are being placed within the fan cowls of engines, and a 'lip' liner can redirect noise from the fan. Swanyck concluded: "These developments mean that halving of aircraft noise is really on the cards."

SUSTAINABLE BUILDINGS

Domestic turbines pushed

Scotland is providing advice and funding to boost uptake of 'micro' energy generation – small scale electricity generation such as domestic wind turbines.

The Energy Savings Trust has allocated £3m for grants and has told planners that they should encourage micro-generation despite noise fears.

Although relatively small and quiet, fears were expressed by local authorities at the recent IoA noise research conference in Birmingham at the lack of advice on micro generation. Vale of White Horse's Alick Nutton said he was receiving increasing concern on potential noise nuisance from domestic turbines. Defra research manager Richard Perkins said internal discussions were taking place but no advice is planned.

By contrast the Scottish Executive has offered advice in a newly released Planning Advice Note PAN45. It says: "New designs of micro-wind systems have greatly reduced noise levels due to improved blade design and reduced mechanical noise. Noise stemming from micro-wind turbines will generally be of an acceptable level.

"However, to protect nearby residents from any potential noise, a condition can be attached to any consent controlling the level of noise. A detailed noise assessment should not be required. Where

turbines are fixed to a building, there may be a risk of noise disturbance from vibration to the building itself or neighbouring buildings."

The Scottish Community and Householder Renewables Initiative (SCHRI) has been awarded an extra £3 million to help support small-scale clean energy developments such as solar panels and roof-top wind turbines.

South of the border, Westminster also wants to cut planning restrictions on small-scale turbines and a review has been set up. Planning minister Yvette Cooper said: "It is patently absurd that you should be able to put a satellite dish up on your house but should have to wrestle with the planning

process for small scale microgeneration which is no more obtrusive. We want far more microgeneration to be treated as permitted development."

Wind turbine specialist Geoff Leventhall told *Noise Bulletin*: "Manufacturers claim that their micro-turbines are 'silent', by which they mean about 45dBA. Some householders may have enough land for a small turbine on a mast. However most will have to attach them to their house, these are very small capacity, generally less than a kilowatt. There is more likely to be a vibration problem from the fixing than a noise problem."

● PAN45 can be viewed on the planning section of www.scotland.gov.uk

Green scoring omits noise

Campaigners have criticised the government's announcement to grade homes for energy efficiency, saying it is a missed opportunity to include sound insulation.

The Government has said that Homebuyers packs will in future need to include gradings for energy efficiency. Val Weedon of the UK Noise Association said: "Although having a rating system for energy efficiency is a move in the right direction, there is no reason why sound insulation could not have been included.

"This is the second time government has missed the opportunity to improve sound insulation standards. They also excluded it from their Decent Homes Standards, which was developed to raise standards for social housing. The government's ODPM Select Committee last year supported campaigners criticism that sound insulation should be included and the Select Committee went on to recommend it be included in a Decent Homes Standards Plus in the future."

AVIATION

Partial victory for night flight disturbance

The long running consultation on night flights at London airports as drawn to a close with some concessions to both the airline industry and airport protesters.

At the heart of the changes is introduction of a revised quota count (QC) system to reward quieter aircraft by allowing more of them. This caused much controversy, and ministers last month preempted the latest announcement by saying there would be no increase in night movements at Heathrow, however quiet the aircraft.

Other conclusions of the announcement include:

- That the QC system be retained in its entirety with the introduction of a new band of QC/0.25 and the removal of the weight limit;
- That the minus 9 EPNdB adjustment for arrivals be retained;
- That a ban on the scheduling (but not operation) of aircraft classified as QC/4 be introduced during the night quota period but not the shoulder periods;
- To retain the existing departure noise limits;

- That the environmental and noise abatement objectives be adopted as set out in the RIA;
- That the existing definition for the night period (2300-0700) and night quota period (2330-0600) be retained
- At Heathrow – to maintain the existing movements limits and gradually decrease the noise quota over the course of the regime and two new noise monitors be introduced to improve noise monitoring.

More details on www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_aviation/documents/page/dft_aviation_611809.hcsp

IN BRIEF

Hinton in waiting

Institute of Acoustics president Colin English has announced that Birmingham City Council's John Hinton is joining the IoA council as president elect.

Hinton, given a medal for his pioneering work on noise mapping and European committees, will follow English after his two year stint. Meanwhile English paid homage to former president Geoff Kerry who steps down after 20 years on council. English said: "Few have served the Institute for so long and I thank him for the tremendous contribution he has made over the years."

● www.ioa.org.uk

Half a million move

Around half a million people have moved home in the last year because of noise, according to a new Ipsos MORI survey carried out for NSCA as part of Noise Action Week.

It also found that for one in ten, noise affects quality of life, with Londoners and those renting council properties suffering most.

Meanwhile new research by Halifax Estate Agents reveals that, overall, the most common reason for a dispute with neighbours is noise, with well over half of (64%) stating it as a reason to fall out with neighbours. Men are more likely to get into an argument with the neighbours over noise with 72% having experienced this sort of dispute.

The UK Noise Association marked Noise Action Week by announcing the winner of its competition to find the best short story on noise. The £200 cash prize winner was Mary Whitsell from Moffat with an entry simply called *Noise*. (www.ukna.org.uk)

● Noise Action Week round up: see feature page 6

Mapping omits noise

The Department for Communities and Local Government has commissioned research on mapping of green spaces. No mention is made of noise or tranquillity.

● website link www.dclg.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1500480

Search is over for disturbance value

Success in identifying the exact level at which entertainment noise starts to annoy neighbours will aid the introduction of fines for noisy pubs and clubs, says Lisa Russell.

Now that pubs and clubs are staying open later, their entertainment goes on well past most people's bedtimes. Noises that might provoke mild irritation at 7pm can cause real disturbance in the small hours.

In recognition of this, licensed premises will, from October this year, face the prospect of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) if they are too noisy after 11pm. They will come under the scope of the Noise Act 1996 following amendments made under section 84 and schedule 1 of the Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act 2005.

The Noise Act's fixed penalty notices currently apply only to domestic situations. Extending the scope to include licensed premises is seen as providing a relatively straightforward means of dealing with a complaint on the night of the problem.

It would avoid the need to enter into the longer processes inherent in reviewing licences under the Licensing Act 2003 or using abatement notices. Another possible solution to noise – the use of anti-social behaviour legislation to impose a short term closure of the premises – tends to be seen as overly harsh for this kind of situation.

Local authorities will be able to serve warning notices in situations where they suspect that the noise exceeds permitted levels. If the noise continues after a short warning period, then the council will have the choice of prosecution in the Magistrates' Court – where fines can be up to £5000 – or serving a £500 fixed penalty notice. This revenue will be retained by the local authority itself.

But first, Defra must decide what level of noise should merit a fine and how to measure it. This is a notoriously difficult issue, and the lack of a suitable methodology has previously held back the application of the Noise Act to pubs and clubs.

This decision has now become easier with the publication last month of the final report *Noise from pubs and clubs (phase II)* from a research project carried out for Defra by a team from BRE and Capita Symonds. The report gives a recommended methodology for the assessment of night-time entertainment noise from pubs and clubs for the purposes of the Noise Act. Crucially, the researchers have also discovered at what level the noise starts to become annoying.

A striking conclusion is that people are, by and large, prepared to tolerate a modest

degree of intrusive audible entertainment noise in their home late at night during a 'one off' – as opposed to regular – event. Significantly, the onset of audibility did not equate to a threshold of acceptability.

Jim Griffiths wrote the report while at Capita Symonds (he's moved – see news, page one). Speaking personally and not on behalf of Defra, he said: "A lot of local authorities have always preferred inaudibility after 11pm, but I have always thought that was over-harsh."

Griffiths' report now allows Defra to consult on draft guidance and directions for the amended Noise Act 1996 pub guidelines over the summer, with commencement due in October.

“ There was surprise that the LA_{eq} index gave the best overall correlation ”
Dani Fiumicelli

The researchers have recommended the use of an absolute LA_{eq,5min} value in the range which proved to be "just unacceptable" in testing. "We're saying that between 34dB and 37dB is the range of "just unacceptable",” says Griffiths.

The research charted the subjective responses of a cross section of the public and compared these to the results from a range of measurement methodologies and criteria to see which gave the best correlation. However, field trials demonstrated that the best performing methods from the laboratory testing all had some disadvantages under "real world" conditions.

"The project team always suspected that no single method or criteria was going to be best suited to assessment of the wide range of noise types and the circumstances in which noise from licensed premises may cause problems, and this turned out to be the outcome of this project," says Faber Maunsell noise chief Dani Fiumicelli, who worked on the project when he was with Capita Symonds.

Although the absolute LA_{eq} proved to be the noise metric giving the best overall

prediction of the subjective ratings, it wasn't perfect: "The disadvantage is that you need to have some other measure – like a subjective response – if the background level is at or above the music level that you are trying to measure," says Griffiths.

The researchers tackle this by coupling the recommended action level absolute LA_{eq} in the 34dB to 37dB range with a subjective test. The entertainment noise must also be clearly audible to an otologically normal listener (ie not deaf or oversensitive) – words can be made out, or the tune is recognisable. This criteria and noise index correlated well with the subjective response of the test subjects as being "just unacceptable and proved relatively easy to use in real world conditions".

The second best approach was LA₉₀ – LA₉₀ (no music) using 5 minute readings. However, this metric could prove unusable in practice, the research found. It requires measurement of the background level without the noise – which might not be possible on the night of the complaint.

An approach that performed less well, but avoided practical disadvantages, was to use either LA_{eq} – LA_{99,95} or the existing Noise Act methodology (LA_{eq} – LA_{99,8}). These effectively use the lulls in the music to assess the background, instead of requiring a reading with the noise turned off.

The tests were undertaken in houses at BRE, which created a realistic environment as well as enabling testing of noise sources from within the building and from outside. A total of 60 people took part, selected from a cross section of the public. They listened to four different sources typifying the sound from pubs and clubs – guitar-orientated rock, modern dance music, a televised football match and karaoke. Each was presented at five different levels for five minutes, from inaudible to a level that an average listener might describe as loud.

There was surprise that the LA_{eq} index gave the best overall correlation with the test subjects' response. "The LA_{eq} index has come in for a degree of criticism over the last decade, particularly for noise with strong low frequency components and impulsive characteristics," says Fiumicelli. At least two of the four entertainment noise source types fell into this classification – the rock and dance samples. However, the LA_{eq} index provided good correlation with the subjective response for all four noise types.

Griffiths explains that the research was

carried out on the basis that the entertainment would *not* be happening every night. The rationale behind the focus on one-off events was based on a perceived gap in the existing legislation such as statutory nuisance, licence reviews and premises closure powers, says Fiumicelli.

Independent acoustics consultant John Grant was concerned at the emphasis on one-off events could lead to areas of greyness. "It would be a lot easier for the environmental health regime to have something that applies in the same vein as you would use it for domestic purposes and not just targeted at one-offs," he says. He points out that the UK Noise Council's code of practice on concerts has a tabulated approach relating to the frequency of the event and the type of area.

Although researched with "one-off" events in minds, the researchers however see the work as equally applicable to first-time offences for more regular situations. "We understand that the amended enforcement protocol will not restrict the use of the new powers to 'one-off' events and that councils will be free to use it whenever the permitted noise level is being breached in the appropriate circumstances," says Fiumicelli.

"A pub or club might run quite happily, but maybe on a Saturday or Sunday have a live band and it's a lot noisier," points out Griffiths, "Someone could then come along, show that they are above the limit and fine them. What that would do is deter people. It's like a speeding fine – it stops you from doing it again."

Acoustics & Noise Partnership senior partner Paul Trew would welcome a clear test of what levels are acceptable. "What everybody is waiting for is the yardstick of when something is a nuisance and when it is not. Nobody to date has come up with anything very successful. A lot of authors use the word inaudibility – that leads to grief because what I can hear is not what someone else can hear," he says.

Not every local authority will be rushing fixed penalty notices, particularly if its staff members are put into confrontational situations late at night. Wyre Forest District Council principal pollution control officer Richard Williams does see the fixed penalty notices arising from the Noise Act as a good idea, but feels they will not be a great help for him.

"There is no available resource to implement the changes," he says. Night-time cover is provided on Friday, Saturday

and Sunday nights, but the scope of activity has been changed following an assault on a member of staff. "Staff members now gather evidence at night but do not actively engage with the subjects," he says.

If Wyre Forest's staff were going out at night issuing fixed penalties "they would be beaten up within a week" he believes. "If the police had more staff they could quite easily issue fixed penalty notices after attending a noise competency course," he says. "People are less likely to have a stand-off or confrontation with a police officer."

"We're dealing with some very difficult people," says City & County of Swansea pollution control officer Huw Morgan. In pubs and clubs, trouble tends to come more primarily from drunken customers, aggrieved at the prospect of their entertainment being curtailed. "It's just not sensible to say to well-trained, good out-of-hours staff that we want them to go sorting this out at 2am."

“Everybody is waiting for the yardstick of when something is a nuisance and when it is not” Paul Trew

Morgan is not keen on using fixed penalty notices for noise. "Noise is usually an ongoing problem. I don't have a problem with the nuisance principals – I think they are very flexible." There isn't a huge administrative burden, he says. Most people are offered a simple caution on their first breach. "Amazingly, most – and I'm talking of over 90% – don't reoffend. I thought I'd be lucky to get 50%."

"There will be three sets of legislation for landlords to trip over – the Licensing Act, statutory nuisance and now the Noise Act. It's almost like triple jeopardy," says South Northamptonshire Council environmental protection officer John Penny. Added to this will be the forthcoming application of the Health & Safety at Work Act, which will have the biggest impact of all, he believes. "It will reduce levels within the building to something tolerable to the human ear."

He adds that breweries have told him that

they would consider challenging any measurements if they get fixed penalty notices, on the grounds of whether the measurement had been taken correctly. "I'm always a bit sceptical about measuring noise in terms of offences, simply because of the uncertainties than can arise in environmental noise measurement."

The Licensing Act balances the interests of the community at large with the interests of people living nearby, believes Penny, "whereas the Noise Act is for an individual and has no regard to the wider community".

Following the Licensing Act changes, authorities have been observing a shift in the time of noise complaints. "They are now rolling out of pubs at 1 o'clock or 3 o'clock in the morning," says Williams. Disruption is much greater as neighbours are sound asleep.

Existing approaches to setting noise limits as conditions of the Licensing Act vary. Penny carried out a survey last year in response to debate within South Northamptonshire. He contacted other local authorities to find out what positions they had taken and the responses showed a mixture of methods. These included setting "inaudibility points" at public places such as bus stops where the noise from the venue must be inaudible without straining to hear; and saying that regular entertainment noise should not be audible inside a noise-sensitive property at any time.

The variety of rules makes it very difficult for consultants who advise nightclub owners, says Trew. He hopes that the current research will solve the problem. "What we need is to know what we should measure, and where, when and how, and then what do we do with the results when we've got them." It can be very frustrating for the owners, he adds. "It's within the keep of the local EHO whether he or she can hear anything or not and, if they can, whether they think it's a statutory nuisance."

"We want to take the research further and we are suggesting to Defra that we do try to look at it more in relation to regular events where people are exposed all the time," says Griffiths. Fiumicelli adds: "It would also be useful if further research was carried out into assessment methodologies and criteria for noise from customers coming and going from licensed premises as this is a common source of concern."

● The entertainment noise report can be viewed on www.defra.gov.uk/environment/noise/research/

Who did what for Noise Action Week

The usual and not-so-usual stunts were pulled for this year's Noise Action Week, finds Lis Stedman

A gigantic pile of confiscated sound systems, the noise-busting fairy (not to mention Tinky Winky), and drives for quieter parties, students and deliveries were all key initiatives in the NSCA's recent Noise Action Week.

The event managed to produce a wide, some might say extraordinary, range of eye-grabbing activities despite a number of councils still finding it hard to work up the time or inclination to take part. It also grabbed national headlines this year due to an NSCA-commissioned Ipsos MORI survey that found, shockingly, that around half a million people had moved home in the last year because of noise.

The survey also found that for one in ten, noise affects their quality of life – Londoners and those in rented council properties suffering the most. One in ten is kept awake by noise and the usual age/social class divisions in terms of who is exposed to most noise (the young and the poor) pertain. The survey also found that people are becoming more reluctant to complain directly to neighbours, opting (presumably due to a lack of awareness) to call the police rather than the local authority EHOs whose responsibility such noise is.

Parliament got involved too, with MP Bob Russell (who chairs the all-party parliamentary group for noise reduction) tabling an early day motion drafted by Val Weedon, urging government to promote quiet times for young people.

Many of the London boroughs worked together to create one of the biggest responses to the week as Wandsworth's Jill

Phillips – who coordinated the events – testifies: "It seemed to me that London has the potential, if we work together, to have more impact," she said. All the boroughs are extremely busy, so the idea was to look for high impact, low activity events.

The exercise took a great deal of planning and coordination, with a number of meetings to refine the themes and activities. "I am a great believer in cooperation," Phillips notes. "There were difficulties, because all of the boroughs provide a different noise service – what they cover, the hours they work, the things they do – so to get everyone to work together was quite a challenge."

In all, 23 of the boroughs took part, starting with a consensus on a theme for each day. Each borough then worked individually on events within the theme to suit their own systems and capabilities. The week's highlight was a high-profile event on the Thursday, aimed at fostering TV coverage – the creation of a vast pile of equipment seized from noisy neighbours supplied by a number of boroughs, going onward for recycling.

The week began with the theme of noise from construction sites – flyers were delivered to all the sites within the boroughs' boundaries, highlighting the issues and raising awareness of the legal hours of work.

Tuesday's theme was the problematic issue of alarms – another major cause of annoyance in big cities and a timely examination because of the changes to the law within the Clean Neighbourhood and

Environment Act (which allows local authorities to set up keyholder registration schemes and silence nuisance alarms). Phillips says that meetings with the boroughs have made it clear that the provisions are unlikely to be adopted officially, though some will take them on board on a voluntary basis.

In Wandsworth and other boroughs, forms were distributed to premises with alarms, so that they could fill in keyholder details. The situation is improving, Phillips notes, probably because many modern alarms have a 20-minute switch off. "In Wandsworth we feel the number of complaints is going down," she adds. "But we do give it priority, though other boroughs may not if it is not a big issue – it varies from borough to borough."

Wednesday had a DIY theme – for instance, reminding people who are thinking about installing laminate floors also to install some sound insulation. This is a tricky subject as Defra's draft guidance has not yet progressed to something concrete, but Wandsworth took it as a basis and produced a leaflet, though major DIY stores such as B&Q proved uninterested in helping to distribute it, Phillips notes.

Thursday was the day of the "big pile" – described as "amazing" by Southwark noise stalwart Alan Blissett – which saw 11 boroughs providing forfeited equipment for a photocall at the Western Riverside Transfer Station.

Friday focused on commercial entertainment, with the various boroughs trying to highlight the problems in their own ways. Choosing the themes for the days was very much an evolutionary process, Phillips notes, and not necessarily reflective of the top priorities in each borough, since it's hard to obtain consensus among such a widely varied group.

One of the key positive messages from London was that there were a lot of people that cared deeply about the subject, and the week's events, and there was a lot of goodwill, with many people wanting to join in.

Around the rest of the country there was a varied response, with some councils opting to do little or nothing and others putting on high-profile and well-planned events. Parties caught the imagination of Northampton Borough Council, which decided to use the week to ask young people to party peacefully, having had 612 complaints in the previous year about loud



Sanctum Consultants toured London in a double decker to promote its Noisedirect service

music and parties. Coordinator Clare Smith said: "We are an urban area – the largest town in Britain – and most of our problems with noise relate to music, mostly students and younger people. We didn't want to target them too specifically so we put up a poster ahead of the week on JC Decaux sites and sent another to landlords and colleges on how to have a great party without annoying the neighbours."

The actions attracted a two-page spread in the local paper and Smith feels that the week was very successful. "We have had a reduction in noise complaints since last year, and we like to think it's because of our campaign then – we hope the same will happen this year."

Luton held a fun event on the Saturday before Noise Action Week, with six EHO's masquerading as a naughty/noisy schoolboy, a noise-busting fairy, a parrot, Tinky Winky (a TellyTubby, or large fuzzy thing, to anyone without young children), Bob the Builder and Scooby Doo.

A special noise-tailored Punch and Judy show was set up in a cordoned-off area in the city's Arndale Centre, with seven shows and magic tricks between performances. Jo Nelson from the environmental protection team says the day was "great fun", attracting considerable interest from some 2000 people over the course of the day. The EHOs gave out balloons, bugs and NSCA windmills with the message "say no to noise", and set up eye-catching display boards with advice on various hot topics including barking dogs, alarms, laminate floors and parties.

Nelson says: "We handed out the balloons, bugs and windmills to the children and were talking to their parents explaining what we were doing, and handed out our leaflet explaining how to be a quiet and considerate neighbour." She adds: "We appreciate it's a very serious subject, but if you stand with a clipboard you will not attract people. We decided to have a bit of fun and get our message across at the same time."

In Nottinghamshire, Gedling BC's Peter Snowdon says the authority focused on the new Licensing Act and the changes to the opening hours, which means those frequenting pubs and night clubs are now leaving at different times. "We are making them aware they must not cause problems for the neighbourhood, because the neighbours now have the power to get the licence reviewed," he notes.

Gedling, with the support of the local police, put together a colourful poster that they took round to premises in areas where they considered there might be a problem and asked the landlords to display it. "We tied it in with the World Cup – we don't want to be killjoys or spoilsports, but to say that no matter how happy or upset you are

when you leave the pub, please consider the neighbours." The poster, which has the council and police logos on it, gives a semi-official stamp to the plea and has gone down "reasonably well", he says.

Gedling has always been 'very proactive' in its Noise Action Day efforts, having previously tackled barking dogs and DIY. "We try to do something different every year – a couple of years ago we had a dog trainer in to teach people how to get their dogs to bark less," Snowdon notes.

York City Council did something rather different – its employee newsletter ran a feature on 'a day in the life of an environmental protection officer' – an interesting, gritty account written by Craig Delorenzo, a member of the council's new noise patrol team.

The council's environmental protection manager Mike Southcombe says the council was mulling a number of different possible contributions for Noise Action Week but "it's a case of always knowing when the week is due, but the potential activities aren't always compatible with the timescale".

The idea of the feature was to raise the profile of the department, particularly as the impression given on TV programmes is often that all environmental health personnel do is visit dirty restaurants and chase rats. Southcombe says: "We wanted to put the other side across – that ours is a very technical and demanding job, that some of the people we are dealing with are not very nice and we have to go into some situations with the police. But at the end of the day, I enjoy my job and so does everyone else in the team, because we are helping people and making a big difference to their quality of life. Some of them suffer for years before they come to us, and hopefully we can sort out their problems. That's one of the bonuses."

The UK Noise Association's doyenne, Val Weedon, says that the organisation marked the week by announcing the winner of its competition to write a short story on noise – Mary Whitsell from the Scottish town of Moffat, with an amusing and pertinent look at one household's take on noise and its consequences.

UKNA also produced a leaflet promoting the "good neighbour" Community Code, sponsored by social housing group Moat House and designed as guidance that local authorities could adopt. "People need to know what's acceptable and what's not," Weedon says. "Defra has done a lot of work on what people should do if there is a noise nuisance, but not on this middle ground."

Looking back at the week, Weedon feels it was a success. "It does seem that people have got more involved this year and are making more effort. There are still some local authorities that didn't do anything of substance – it's partly about resources and partly about how enthusiastic they are. It's down to individuals in councils and how important noise is to them. Some still don't see it as being as important as other environmental issues."

There was, of course, a multitude of other events around the country including Teesside's 'quieter deliveries' promotion; Hounslow's survey of annoying noises (airplane noise came top, perhaps unsurprisingly given the location); Southwark's schools poster competition; southern Northern Ireland authorities' promotion of leaflets in minority languages and a much-lauded dog-training session in Peterborough.

Most consider the week a success – although more support is always welcome. It's tough driving noise up the agenda but slowly, slowly, the message seems to be getting through.

● www.noiseactionweek.org.uk



Luton's EHOs in drag (Luton boss Donald 'naughty schoolboy' Bowler, left. Jo 'Scooby' Nelson said: "If you just stand with a clipboard, you won't attract people")

Last month we moaned about the trend for deliberately fitting of exhausts to puny small engine insurance-friendly cars to make them sound powerful.

Chavs appear to be able to make as much noise as they like in the UK without fear of prosecution. In the US, they take the issue more seriously – the penalty for loud music from a vehicle or a loud ‘muffler’ is a fine from \$100 to \$500 for each offence and/or 10 days in jail.

Indeed in the UK we hear others are annoyed – a pressure group has been set up to fight the menace, called CANE – Campaign Against Noisy Exhausts. Good luck to them!

Acousti-medic Stephen Stansfeld has a number of suggestions at the IoA research conference for helping reduce the impact of classroom noise on kids. This included the usual call for better education and consciousness raising among kids of the adverse impact of too much noise (as if they hadn’t already been told).

Stansfeld was however realistic about the chances of success, after all, its not as though parents don’t tell their offspring to turn the volume down – they

simply won’t be told.

Stansfeld muttered to IoA delegates: “I suspect the scope for noise education is limited. Based on my own experience, I have tried to tell the kids they cannot possibly revise while listening to their iPods – with very little success.”

Birmingham’s John Hinton also voiced the concerns of a battle-worn parent: “As a household with four children in it, our problem is more about noise emissions than noise disturbing us from outside.”

Paul Shields of Scott Wilson also had a fascinating insight into industrial noise mapping for IoA delegates, not least the over-optimism of a developer who considered his site would not be a noise problem.

The large planned ‘tin shed’ factory building was promised to have an ‘unbroken façade’ with no external sound sources, reports Shields. The reality was rather different. 25 items of external plant, 24 air handling units, 18 summer cooling vents, over 50 high level discharges, over 30 dust extractors – in all more than 150 noise sources.

Unbroken façade? No external noise sources? Who are they kidding!

We’ve reported on Mosquito before – it’s a device for deterring teenage yobs from hanging around street corners through use of an annoying noise that only teenagers can hear.

Rather curiously for a firm appearing to be on the side of the nuisance sufferer, the Mosquito-makers are also marketing Mosquito ringtones to young people (see ad below). These are popular with kids for use in the classroom – so the teacher can’t hear them!

The Mosquito advert – misused by teens?

NOISE EVENTS 2006

June 21st

REDUCING RAILWAY NOISE IN URBAN AREAS

SILENCE network conference to be held in Brussels, website www.silence-ip.org

July 3rd-7th

ICSV13

13th International Congress on sound and vibration to be held in Vienna, <http://info.tuwien.ac.at/icsv13>

July 13th

INQUIRY INTO THE ISSUE OF LONDON HELICOPTER NOISE

London Assembly Environment Committee inquiry into helicopter noise in the Capital to be held at City Hall, The Queen’s Walk, London SE1 2AA

September 18-20th

LOW FREQUENCY 2006

to be held in Bristol UK, www.lowfrequency2006.org

September 18-20th

ISMA2006

The 2006 International Conference on Noise and Vibration Engineering will be held in Leuven, Belgium, website www.isma-isaac.be/conf/

September 22nd

SOUND INSULATION IN HOMES

UK Noise Association conference to be held in Edinburgh, Val Weedon, UKNA tel 01634 316542

October 16-17th

INSTITUTE OF ACOUSTICS AUTUMN CONFERENCE

organised by the Environmental Noise Group to be held in Oxford. Linda Canty, Institute of Acoustics, 01727 848195

December 3-6th

INTERNOISE 2006

to be held in Honolulu, Hawaii, USA Contact: Institute of Noise Control Engineering, INCE/USA: www.inceusa.org

September 2-7th 2007

19TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ACOUSTICS

organised by the Spanish Acoustical Society/International Commission for Acoustics www.ica2007madrid.org

NOISE BULLETIN



Welcome to *Noise Bulletin*, a monthly newsletter covering noise pollution, its management and its consequences.

We welcome your comments and contributions and hope you enjoy reading it.

Jack Pease

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