

PLANNING

Turbines turned down

Noise is a key factor in the rejection of Dover wind farm on appeal. This is one of two important wind farm appeal decisions this month (*see also news p3*)

Wind farm developer Ecotricity wanted to put in five large wind turbines near Langdon but there were repeated fears that houses were too near to the turbines causing noise and other nuisance.

Full coverage of the decision next month, but in the nutshell, issues covered by the decision include:

- Background noise measurements: Wind turbines are assessed using the much maligned ETSU guidelines. These compare measurements of background noise at the nearest house and predicted

noise from the turbines. If there is more than a 5dBA difference, complaints can be expected.

It is in the developer's interest to have high background readings and arguments often involve whether developer's readings are representative. In this instance, consultants were criticised for not taking the measurements in an open and fair manner.

The appeal inspector said: "When carried out on the basis of the applicant's own unilateral choices there will always be a lingering doubt, whether unfounded or not, that the outcomes have been manipulated in such a way as to maximise rather than minimise the scope for turbine noise to be judged acceptable";

- Amplitude modulation: "I am also aware of criticisms that ETSU-R-97 does not adequately deal with the full range of noise emissions from wind turbines of similar size to those involved in this case, the blades of which penetrate the atmosphere at higher levels than smaller 'first generation' turbines";

- Predicted turbine noise: Developers have been obtaining planning permission for one turbine and swapping them for different types which have different noise characteristics;
- Nuisance: "I am left in no doubt from the intricacies of noise measurement involved that, as with any other noise source, separation distance is the best insurance against

- continued page three

ACTION PLANNING

Regs consultation confirms Defra U-turn

A consultation on changes to noise regulations in England confirms that Defra is abandoning centralised listing of quiet areas.

Defra had originally said it would fulfil environmental noise directive requirements to designate quiet areas with centrally-appointed consultants rather than by local authorities. Devolved regions involved local authorities and are far more advanced with the task than Defra which had set itself the task of finishing it by September 2007.

The draft regulations, currently being consulted on, explain: "It became evident that a centralised approach would be rather inflexible and potentially

difficult to implement. In addition, it became increasingly clear that making the identification of quiet areas an integral part of the action planning process – rather than being independent of it – could be beneficial in ensuring that, from a local perspective, the appropriate areas are identified.

"Noise is a predominantly local issue and perception of what constitutes a quiet area within an urban area is likely to vary across the country. At a national level, the results of the noise mapping should inform the process, but local knowledge of potential quiet areas should also play a role in the final determination.

Relating the identification and management of quiet areas to existing policies and practices used by local authorities for the management of open spaces and other areas valuable to the local community may also be desirable."

Other changes include removing the requirement to produce consolidated (ie all-source) noise maps. This will be more "cost effective". The duty to set limit values or other criteria for action plan priorities will also be removed.

- Consultation on proposed amendments to the *Environmental Noise (England) Regulations 2006* www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/enviro-noise-regs2006/index.htm

IN BRIEF

Wardens start

The first community wardens in Scotland to target noise nuisance in addition to their other duties took to the beat last month in East Renfrewshire.

Wardens have completed a special course to qualify them for the task which was formerly handled by environmental health officers and police.

The council said: "The addition of noise nuisance investigation to their powers means that we can deal swiftly and effectively with an area which is often a cause of friction and real distress for many people in their own homes." East Renfrewshire police said giving the wardens powers to deal with complaints of noise nuisance means that police time formerly spent on noise issues will be freed up to concentrate on other "more appropriate" areas.

Felixstowe felons felt

The anti-social use of vehicles in Felixstowe is to be targeted as part of an enforcement campaign.

Felixstowe's Safer Neighbourhood Team launched Operation Tourism, which is targeted at the anti-social use of motor vehicles. The aim is to deter, prevent and prosecute offenders for the anti-social use of motor vehicles on specified roads. Officers will aim to educate motorists by alerting them to the consequences of the improper use of their vehicles. They will also identify modified vehicles and will be contacting the relevant insurance companies to ensure that adequate insurance is in place as the modification of a vehicle may invalidate the insurance.

Office closed

Noise Bulletin's offices are closed 1st-14th April.

The best way to contact during this period is by email jackpease@empublishing.org or tel 01737 645348

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IN BRIEF

Flindell finds flaws in costing methods

Conventional costing of noise impacts using house prices may underestimate the value of nuisance.

In the past, economists have used house price data in a bid to put a price on noise disturbance. They look at average house prices in noisy areas and compare them to quiet areas, for instance suggesting that house prices drop 0.5% per decibel increase in noise. This relatively low price means that noise costs are generally not a significant disincentive to go ahead with developments, eg Heathrow.

But Ian Flindell of Southampton University said research he was involved with suggested this may underestimate noise impacts. His team studied house prices in Birmingham, London and Sutton Coldfield – all areas covered by published noise maps.

House prices appeared depressed in noisy areas in London and Birmingham but were upside down in Sutton Coldfield – ie houses in noisy areas were more expensive. Flindell suggested this could be because there were more old age buyers in the area who place a greater value on accessibility and town centre living where noise can be higher.

Flindell said that findings highlight serious weaknesses in standard hedonic pricing methods. Because pricing effects are small, the impact of those who choose not to participate in a particular market distorts results: “You only need a small proportion of old people who value living near a bus route rather than a quiet location to skew the sample.”

“Technical progress on pricing will depend on being able to collect individual questionnaire data from both purchasers and people who might have been interested and then subsequently decide against it, in addition to actual revealed price behaviour.”

NEWS FROM THE EPUK SPRING WORKSHOP HELD IN WARWICK

Defra’s thinking set out

Defra advisor Stephen Turner updated Epuk workshop delegates on progress towards meeting the European Environmental Noise Directive.

Defra is running well behind Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with implementation. Defra has yet to publish “current thinking” on how action plans will be developed, but this will soon be released as an informal consultation “to allow some public input”. In July, there should be a formal 16 week consultation on draft action plans with stakeholder workshops in September. Scotland was at this stage in 2007.

Turner outlined the purpose of noise action plans: “To promote good health and a good quality of life through the management of noise within the context of sustainable development.” He then outlined issues that could be incorporated into a long term strategy: “Better clarity on who is responsible for road and rail noise, better complaint handling and better data.”

Turner says that the European Commission is not holding out

much hope that member states can meet the tight deadlines for completed action plans. There is only a year between mapping and action plan deadlines.

Defra has consulted on tweaks to Environmental Noise Regulations. These propose minor changes to regulations to reflect various policy U-turns made by Defra since regulations were laid in 2006 (see p1).

The latest U-turn was underlined by Colin Grimwood, who said that local authorities will now play a far larger role in production of action plans and designation of quiet areas. Originally this was to be done centrally by consultants, now councils will have a greater say.

Thinking on quiet areas is centred around the use of PPG17 on open spaces which mentions quiet areas and soundscapes. Future research may see PPG17 contain further detail on quiet areas and soundscapes: “PPG17 could become as important as PPG24” said Grimwood.

There is a line of thinking that existing policies could be used to designate quiet areas. Grimwood quoted

Westminster’s Open Space Strategy and the Corporation of London’s quiet zones.

Defra shortly expects to release final guidance to airport operators on draft action plans, and by July operators should hold a 16 week consultation on those action plans. In November, they should be returned to Defra and adopted in the New Year.

All the while the second round of noise mapping is looming and is “not a trivial task”. Some 65 agglomerations will need to be mapped (as opposed to 23 in the first round) covering 39 million people. “Perhaps mapping the whole country would be more cost effective,” said Turner.

If Defra did this, it would be yet another U-turn. Following the Rural White Paper in 2000, £13m was allocated to map all of England. Consultants spent much time and effort putting in bids for this work, and Schal was appointed in a £1m-plus contract to coordinate things, but it all collapsed. Instead Defra carried out the basic partial mapping required for the Environmental Noise Directive.

Death numbers decided but not released

A noise and health study carried out for Defra was outlined to the Epuk spring workshop.

The study has been completed and handed to Defra but not yet released. Defra has a track record of sitting on noise studies –sometimes for years – and these findings will be sensitive given their application to the expansion of Heathrow.

Bernard Berry of BEL Acoustics outlined the scope of the project which aimed to:

- Identify the potential adverse health impacts and review the

current state of evidence for each of the impacts;

- Where a robust evidence base exists, to develop robust dose-response functions for the impacts of noise and health which could be applied to policy appraisal in the UK;
- Identify emerging adverse health impacts that should be kept under review; and
- Identify any structural challenges to developing a robust dose-response function.

Previous research by Berry suggested that nearly 100

people a year die in London due to excess noise (*Noise Bulletin October 2008 p1*) however Berry believes the risk ratio in the UK is less than the 3% used in countries such as Germany.

Berry explained how the dose response estimates could be used to formulate action plans. If it was decided, for example, to cap noise levels to 70dBA, then 36 heart attacks could be saved every year in London and Daly’s (disability affected life years) would be reduced from 90 to 60, valued at £2.5m.

Nail in coffin for small wind?

“The national wind map is almost completely useless in urban areas,” Matthew Rhodes of Encraft told Epuk delegates.

Encraft ran the Warwick Wind Farm trials (*NB Feb/Mar p4*) which tested 29 turbines and found that urban building-mounted turbines produce very

little power and some produce noise resulting in a number being shut down.

The trials found that actual wind conditions at installations were considerably less than that shown by the agreed national wind map. In-use turbines were overstating performance by a

factor of 1.7 to 3.2. He warned that this is not a mass market technology: “Wind power has several potential roles in the right locations. Whereas larger turbines have payback periods of as little as six years, micro turbines can take as much as 500 years for payback.”

WIND TURBINE NUISANCE

Turbines turned down: from page one

unacceptable noise impact, whatever its cause. Paragraph 22 of PPS22 and paragraph 41 of the PPS22 Companion Guide both endorse that approach. Although ETSU-R-97 adopts the opposite stance of rejecting the stipulation of a minimum separation distance, it pre-dates both documents and I find its commentary on the subject of separation to be of relevance.

"In particular, this records that "the difference in noise emissions between different types of machine, the increase in scale of turbines and wind

farms seen today and topographical effects described below all dictate that separation distances of 350-400m";

● Costs: The developer was accused of late changes to its submissions and the local authority asked for a costs order against the developer.

This was declined but not without criticism of the developer (advised by acoustic advisors Hayes McKenzie): "With regard to the application for a partial award on noise grounds, failure to adhere to the recommendations for agreement

and consultation with the local authority voiced on page 99 of ETSU-R-97 undoubtedly prolonged the inquiry. The developer's noise consultant confessed, in cross-examination, to "not being proud" of the earlier stages of noise assessment in this case, and I find it disquieting that, in seeking to improve the evidence base, ETSU-R-97 recommendations on consultation were not followed to the letter in any of the later submissions.

● More analysis next month. Email us for the decision doc

PLANNING

Second turbine turned down in Shipdham

More turbines have been refused at appeal in Norfolk. Again, it appears deficiencies in official ETSU impact guidance are to blame.

The new Shipdham turbines appeal decision highlights the difficulties of using conditions to try to correct noise problems.

ETSU guidelines have been heavily criticised in the past as being unsuitable for modern turbines which can exceed 150m in height. Wind conditions at those heights bear little relation to wind at the standard 10m height.

Two years ago wind expert Dick Bowdler quit a working party looking at the issue saying that deficiencies in ETSU would cause future problems. At the time he said: "The irony is that if the original ETSU noise working group had been less influenced by developers then the developers would have had a much easier time now than they do."

Back to Shipdham, Ecotric-

ity's wind farm was initially refused by Breckland Council and has been in and out of the courts. Once again Ecotricity was advised by Hayes McKenzie. The judgement highlighted issues such as:

- The turbines were too close to dwellings;
- Stable atmospheric conditions could lead to high wind shear factors, thereby making it difficult to interpret background and predicted noise against the ETSU-R-97 guidance;
- The frequent changes in wind shear, and the uncertainties about the measures that would be put in place to react to such changes;
- The tranquillity of "this very quiet area" of countryside;
- The shortcomings of Ecotricity's measurements of background noise on which its noise predictions were made (as with the Dover decision highlighted above, criticisms were made of gathering of

background noise data);

- Ecotricity's acknowledgement that the ETSU noise limits would be exceeded for 7% of the daytime (in fact the consultant had to admit that it had got the decimal point in the wrong place having initially claimed it would be 0.7% of the time!);
- The tightness of the margins by which noise limits would be met at other times;
- Protesters' predictions that the noise of the turbines would be at least 5dB over the background noise for between 31% and 34% of the time, and at least 10dBA above background noise for between 14% and 16% of the time;
- Ecotricity's reliance on conditions to make its scheme acceptable, coupled with the shortcomings of those conditions and the frequency with which they would be triggered.

More analysis next month. Email us for the decision doc

WIND TURBINES

ARM completes turbine nuisance probe

ARM Acoustics has finished collating data as part of a Defra project to produce a methodology and guidance for assessment of nuisance due to noise from wind farms.

It asked local authorities for instances of wind farm noise in a bid to find out how councils

dealt with noise issues, both during the planning process and after the implementation of schemes.

The questionnaire follows one carried out by Salford University a few years ago that prompted some debate. Salford claimed that virtually nobody

was disturbed by amplitude modulation from wind farms and then refused to produce evidence for that view.

Eventually a freedom of information request forced it to reveal details used to justify its claims (*Noise Bulletin Feb/Mar p3*).

IN BRIEF

Small wind lobby lashes out

The small wind turbine lobby has lashed out at Defra claiming it is holding back the market.

Speaking at last month's Epuk low carbon conference held in London, the British Wind Energy Association's Alex Murley told delegates that rules and regulations threatened to "kneecap a young, motivated and promising industry".

Murley was on the defensive because small building-mounted urban wind turbines have recently been exposed as next to useless in the Warwick Wind Turbines study as well as noisy (*Noise Bulletin Feb/Mar p4*). Murley said that it was accepted that there was a need to balance climate change against noise.

But he had particular difficulty with Defra's arguments that small wind turbines may cause noise nuisance. The DCLG, under pressure from BERR, has tried to remove domestic wind turbines from the planning system. The industry has produced a noise labelling system that it says will adequately protect neighbours from nuisance noise.

It wants a noise threshold value of 45dBA, but Defra says this will lead to a flurry of complaints. Few turbines would meet a suggested 40dBA limit. The impasse has held up deregulation of planning for small turbines enraging manufacturers and Berr. Murley told delegates: "What we have here is the dead, limp hand of central Government taking over three years to release guidance."

Meanwhile Epuk's Ed Dearnley revealed that there were similar tensions on the air quality side where biomass boilers were being pushed by industry on climate change grounds, but being held back by local air pollution. "We are used to things getting cleaner, not getting worse. Climate change can be like a steam roller coming towards us. We don't want to get flattened as it passes."

IN BRIEF

Scott Wilson grows

Scott Wilson says it is expanding.

It has appointed Miles Woolley as principal acoustics consultant, Heather Billin as a technician and Jorge D'Avillez as a research engineer.

● www.scottwilson.com

Landscape: noise not mentioned

Natural England is consulting on a draft policy for landscapes. It doesn't mention noise, quiet areas or tranquillity.

● *All landscapes matter* consultation can be viewed on www.naturalengland.org.uk/consultations/docs/all_landscapes_matters_compil_ete.pdf

Stansted delay

Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) has welcomed the decision by Government to postpone the start of the Public Inquiry into BAA's plans for a second Stansted runway which had been due to start on 15 April.

SSE has also welcomed the Inspector's recommendations, released today alongside the Secretary of State's letter, that the Inquiry should not have concurrent sessions and that its likely duration will be 18 months, compared to the six months originally envisaged.

The Inquiry is now unlikely to be completed before the end of 2010 which means that a Government decision could not be made until the middle of 2011 at the earliest.

SSE is less happy that its appeal against the decision to approve expansion by an extra 10 million passengers a year failed. A High Court Judge ruled that the Government's decision to approve the increase was valid and legal.

Meanwhile BAA has been told by the Competition Commission that it must sell both Stansted and Gatwick airports, some say this will delay development plans still further.

PLANNING ACT

Pitt lined up for IPC chair

Sir Michael Pitt is lined up to chair the Infrastructure Planning Commission. The Commission is being created as part of the Planning Act shake-up that will see major projects decided by the Commission rather than public inquiries.

Policy will be set through a series of National Planning Statements which are currently being prepared. Bodies such as Epuk have expressed fears that the Act will prevent nuisance actions being taken against large developments such as wind farms (*NB Dec 2008 p5*).

Pitt, a former civil engineer and chief exec of Kent and Swindon councils, recently presided over the Government's floods review. Now Pitt is the preferred candidate for the £184,000-a-year four-day-a-week IPC job, he was grilled in Parliament to find out how he intends to fulfil his role. As so little is known about the workings of the new planning system, the grilling provided considerable insight into the future. Most agree that the Act will lead to huge changes for noise consultants and councils.

Responding to criticisms that the IPC is being set up simply to rubber stamp Government policies, Pitt told MPs: "Then they have picked the wrong man. It is vital that the commission establishes itself as an independent organisation from day one – if that

independence is thrown into doubt that commission itself will be in grave difficulty."

Pitt will preside over 35 commissioners. A panel of commissioners will review larger projects, while smaller projects will be decided by one commissioner.

A criticism of the Planning Act is that there will be less local input into decisions with the Government producing the national planning statements. These must be consulted on and finalised before the IPC can get to work, this is estimated to take two years. Pitt promised that commissioners would adhere to these national statements but if there were special local circumstances or disadvantages, he would turn projects down. He added that "protesters can come and tell it straight" to the commission. Objectors can make written and verbal questions at hearings, commissioners will encourage public to ask the right questions

Part of the Planning Act requires the developer to carry out consultation before applying to the Commission for permission. Pitt said: "Applicants aren't used to consultation, and yet there is a legal duty on applicants to properly carry out the consultation exercise. I would advise applicants to turn to the local authority itself and ask them what form the

consultation and public engagement should take. The Commission can refuse to accept an application from any promoter that has not properly consulted on the proposal. If an application comes forward with weak environmental assessment, then the secretariat will ask challenging questions."

The Commission can impose conditions. Pitt explained: "Approvals are not just a binary yes/no. The Commission has big role in ensuring that mitigating factors that minimise the environmental and other impacts on the locality of a new development be minimised as far as possible. I think that one of the areas that we can add a lot of value is through conditions which are well thought-through and quite challenging on what they demand of the applicant."

The IPC will not have a role in monitoring those conditions: "Our experience is that they are very often forgotten and not properly monitored. It will be important for IPC to have confidence that they are being monitored, we will need feedback on success and failures of conditions."

The Commission will cost £5m to set up with annual running cost of £9.3m.
● Pitt's grilling can be viewed on www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/VideoPlayer.aspx?meetingId=3695

PLANNING

Act: things might get missed

"Things might get missed," warned Richard Atkinson of the Planning Aid Service, telling Epuk spring workshop delegates about the new Planning Act regime.

He said that if things do get missed because the process is being speeded up, there should be a means of recourse, eg through making a claim afterwards. "Everyone is going to have to move faster to meet the new deadlines – environmental health officers, the public, pressure groups and planners. There is an inherent danger in speeding up the work."

Not everything is bad. He

pointed out that under the new Act, developers will have to carry out consultations at a far earlier stage than before. "But who pays? The developer. This might set some alarm bells ringing as to whether the consultation is independent. We think there should be some distance between the developer and the organiser of the consultation, with Chinese walls between the two."

He also warned that there may be clashes between PPG24 and National Policy Statements. "There is a potential for a clash – which takes priority?" he asked.

Beat the slump

Norsonic claims it is doing its bit to ease the credit crunch by cutting costs and down time associated with calibrating audiometer equipment.

The Class 1 Sound Analysers Nor140 and Nor118 (approved to EN-ISO-61672) measures and displays not only the sound pressure level, but also the exact frequency and distortion. This means users no longer need to carry out separate measurement instrumentation to verify the frequency and distortion values.

● www.campbell-associates.co.uk

HEALTH EFFECTS

Heart impacts in Sweden

More research has been published linking noise and heart attacks.

Swedish researchers studied 1,500 residents who had a heart attack between 1992-1994 and studied their noise exposure over the previous 20 years. "Detailed traffic noise exposure assessment for all addresses made it possible to estimate the exposure for a longer period than in previous studies."

No clear correlation between noise exposure and myocardial infarction (MI – essentially heart attacks) was found in the entire study population. However, once people with bad hearing or exposure to other sources of noise had been eliminated, there was a 40% higher risk of MI in people exposed to road traffic noise exceeding 50dBA. This relationship applied independently of other known risk factors for MI, such as exposure to air pollutants.

Earlier studies have suggested an association

between traffic-related air pollution and MI and it is plausible that the association between noise and MI may be confounded by air pollution. "However, our data suggest independent effects of noise and air pollution on the risk of MI, with traffic related pollution affecting primarily mortality." There was no strong evidence of an interaction between exposure to noise and air pollution on the risk of MI.

Risk estimates for MI appeared elevated for those reporting noise annoyance mostly in their bedroom. This finding is in line with previous studies showing that noise induces cardiovascular effects during sleep and that disrupted sleep may cause MI. Taken together, the evidence suggests that night-time noise exposure may be of particular health importance. It is also possible that this elevation is a consequence of more precise exposure estimates. The participants were generally at

home during the night making the exposure assessment based on the residential address most relevant for this time period.

Risk estimates related to road traffic noise were more clearly elevated after exclusion of subjects with reported annoyance due to noise from other sources, eg railways. This suggests that the association in the full sample may have been diluted due to misclassification of total noise exposure.

The correlation between long-term individual exposure to noise and air pollution from traffic was high. The increased risk for MI associated with long-term road traffic noise exposure of 50 dBA or higher was 12%. Excluding persons with hearing loss or exposure to noise from other sources, this rose to 38%.

Long-term exposure to road traffic noise and myocardial infarction, Jenny Selander et al, *Epidemiology*, Vol. 20, Number 2, March 2009 pp272-279.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Parliament Office starts noise probe

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) is carrying out a probe into noise pollution.

Industry, NGOs, academics, regulators and government will inform the probe which will brief MPs and Peers by June. It

will cover:

- The main sources of environmental noise;
- Evidence for links between noise pollution and health;
- Methods for assessing exposure to noise;
- Noise mapping and noise action plans to meet the END and national environmental noise regulations;
- Options for decreasing or mitigating against environmental noise, and their costs and limitations.
- www.parliament.uk/post.cfm

TYRE NOISE

Lobby groups tired of delays

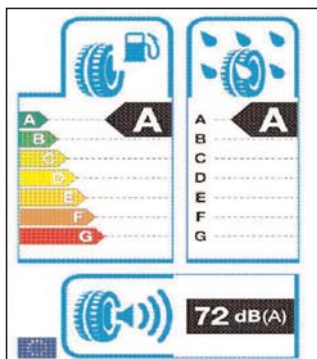
Epuk has welcomed the new EU regulation on tyre safety – which addresses noise, and for the first time, rolling resistance.

However, Epuk, which has lobbied hard for tighter noise standards, says the implementation schedule for quieter tyres is disappointing: "On the current timetable it will be beyond 2020 before the benefits of quieter traffic can be enjoyed in the UK. We plan to work with European partners to promote clear consumer labelling for quieter tyres and to raise awareness with fleet operators and individual drivers

that to replace their tyres with cleaner, quieter models, which will help improve local environmental quality and help us towards meeting CO₂ targets.

European pressure group T&E explained the 14 year delay: "The new tyre standards should have been introduced between 2012 and 2016 according to the European Commission's original legal proposal. But the European Parliament, under pressure from the tyre industry, added a two to four year grace period before all tyres have to comply, followed by a further 30 months when

existing stock can be sold off by retailers.



A suggested tyre label format

IN BRIEF

Urban noise studied

A research project has studied the impact of traffic measures on urban noise in Dublin.

Modelling was used to analyse the potential of traffic management as a noise abatement measure with traffic redirected from the main residential areas to alternative road links and the revised exposure levels determined.

The results show that traffic management measures have the potential to lead to significant reductions in the level of noise exposure provided that careful consideration is given to the impact of traffic flows on residential populations.

Estimating human exposure to transport noise in central Dublin, Ireland, *Environment International* Volume 35, Issue 2, February 2009, Pages 298-302

Going unitary

A handful of authorities are going unitary from 1st of April.

Some authorities have sorted out their new organisations (with new responsibilities and redundancies already agreed) while others appear to be behind. Seven areas are affected:

- Shropshire: Bridgnorth, North Shropshire, Oswestry, Shrewsbury & Atcham and South Shropshire combine;
- Wiltshire: Kennet, North Wilts, West Wilts combine;
- Northumberland: Alnwick, Berwick, Blythe Valley, Castle Morpeth, Tynedale and Wansbeck combine into one;
- Durham: Chester Le Street, Derwentside, Durham City, Easington, Sedgefield, Teesdale and Wear Valley combine;
- Cornwall: Caradon, Carrick, Kerrier, North Cornwall, Penwith and Restormal combine;
- Cheshire will be split into two: West (Ellesmere Port and Neston, Chester and Vale Royal), and East: (Crewe and Nantwich, Congleton and Macclesfield);
- Bedfordshire will split into two: Bedford City Council and the remainder.

Bristol: progress despite Defra

Lis Stedman interviews Steve Crawshaw of Bristol who has made progress in the face of Defra's dithering. If there were noise 'Beacons', Bristol would be there!

Bristol's much-admired noise map is recognised as one of the best in the country (*NB June 2008*). It's been praised for its excellent interface (via an interactive viewer, pdf or Google maps) and its level of detail, which is considerably higher than Defra's offerings.

The council is now consulting public opinion on how road traffic noise affects their lives (*NB Feb/Mar 2009*). But why is Bristol so far ahead of the game? Very few people will be surprised to hear that the reason is nothing to do with Defra help or funding.

Bristol's Steve Crawshaw explains that the Bristol mapping arose from the European SILENCE project. This three-year research project, co-funded by the EC under Framework Programme 6, developed an integrated methodology for the improved control of surface transport noise in urban areas. A whisk through the project website shows a wide range of sub-projects including the development of "a tool capable of modelling exterior noise of both road and rail vehicles, combining a precise estimation of the sound level and sound synthesis, for both road and rail vehicle modelling exterior noise."

SILENCE involved a number of other cities including Barcelona, Genoa, Dublin, Brussels and the Ile de France area around Paris. A number of consultants and academics were also involved. The manager of the pollution control team, Tim Clarke, originally bid for the work, Crawshaw explains.

At the time, the council had a strong transport initiative team of experts that bid for money for transport projects, and Clarke

identified the Environmental Noise Directive, which was coming through at the time, as being an issue where there was not a great deal of clarity. "He thought the project would be a good way of pump priming our work."

Crawshaw says: "We could get the software and some hardware costs, and information from the people in Europe who were attending the meetings. It was a win-win idea." However, Clarke was unable to progress the project due to other commitments so Crawshaw (with a complementary background in air quality mapping) was nominated to take the lead. "I'm not an acoustician, but I learned a lot about environmental noise," he says. "It was a bit of a steep learning curve."

He notes that there are synergies between air and noise mapping. "When you are looking at strategic management of transport sources there are similarities, as both air quality and noise are related to traffic flows and speed."

SILENCE finished with a final conference in May last year. Crawshaw says the council is now involved in the European CitizenScape project, which involves enabling communities to participate more fully in the democratic processes. Because of the existing body of work, environmental noise was chosen as the local topic.

Of Bristol's mapping and consultation successes, he notes: "I think other local authorities could have produced something similar if they were adequately resourced to do so." Turning to the Defra mapping exercise, he says that "Defra retained responsibility and the budget. Environmental (traffic) noise is not seen as

a priority for local authorities." This is entirely understandable given the Rogers review (of local authority regulatory priorities), he adds. Noise is nowhere to be seen in the top five, although air quality and food hygiene make it onto the list.

He stresses: "The reason we were able to do the noise map is that it was financed by our participation in the SILENCE project." Bristol's role in this was to demonstrate how noise could be reduced by traffic management. To achieve this, Bristol produced the noise map and undertook scenario testing, looking at three different options: a junction realignment near a new shopping centre; a reduced speed limit on the local M32 motorway, and a ban on HGVs on one of the arterial routes through the city.

Crawshaw says: "We produced the map because we needed it as a baseline. We ran the scenarios, and produced a report. The end result was that we had our own noise map probably slightly before Defra."

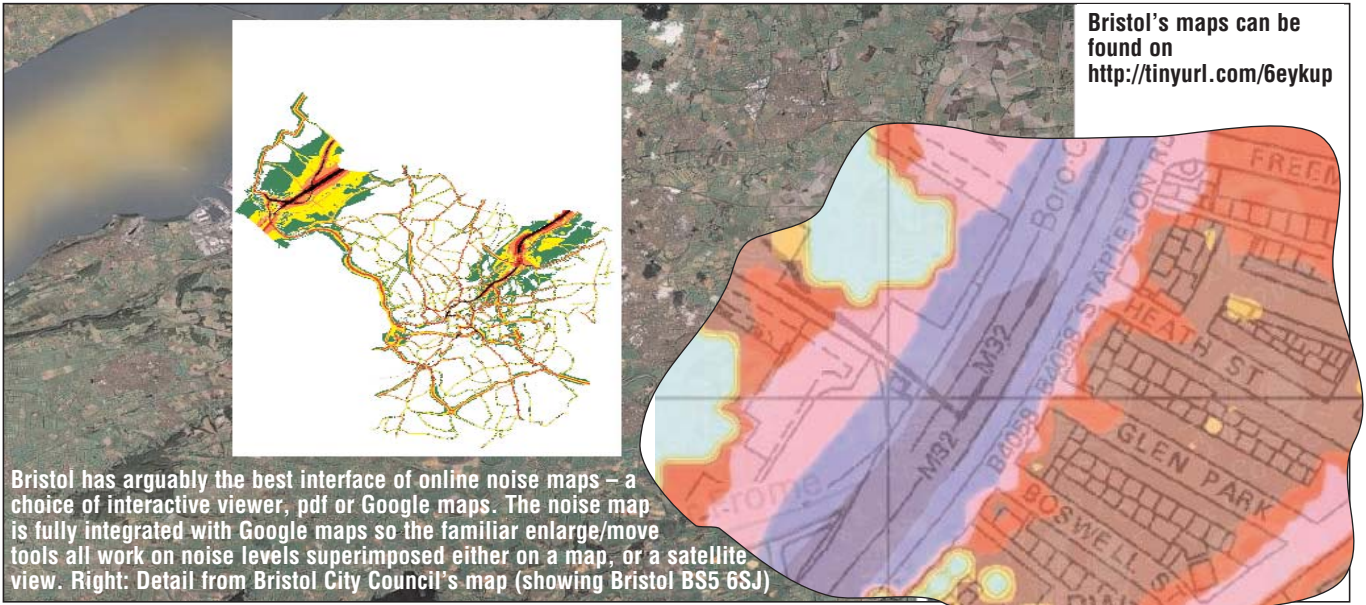
For CitizenScape, the council's main role is to get people who do not engage in democracy with the council to engage via a series of Web 2.0 methods such as blogs and wikis (webpages that can be edited by visitors to the website), online consultations and webcasting. Bristol has also uploaded videos of some of its consultation work to YouTube, "a whole lot of methods," notes Crawshaw.

The project coordinators "knew we had done work on noise, and we were able to progress it under CitizenScape. We were able to get maps where people could nominate quiet areas. We thought it would be good – people could relate to this instinctively", he adds. This approach hooks into local democracy, he notes, and makes people think about noise. "I also hope it will feed into the noise action plans for the city when Defra starts on these. Unfortunately, it seems that, with publication of draft action plans shortly, this is unlikely to happen."

CitizenScape has involved canvassing public opinion, which has ranged from what he calls "the normal 'I want to drive my car when and as loud as I want' to people who are genuinely disturbed by noise." He adds: "It is interesting when you ask people, they initially do not think noise is a problem but when they think about their day to day lives, it does disturb them – they have to close their windows, and walking round the city it is difficult for them to talk to the people they are with."



Crawshaw: making a difference. Check out the blog <http://bristolnoise.blogspot.com>



Bristol's maps can be found on <http://tinyurl.com/6eykup>

Bristol has arguably the best interface of online noise maps – a choice of interactive viewer, pdf or Google maps. The noise map is fully integrated with Google maps so the familiar enlarge/move tools all work on noise levels superimposed either on a map, or a satellite view. Right: Detail from Bristol City Council's map (showing Bristol BS5 6SJ)

A group of students from Bath Spa university are now making three videos to introduce the subject and generate more interest on the website. Crawshaw says they will be “humorous, and light hearted.” He feels the work is important, noting ‘Some people don’t mind noise – they like the idea of bustle. But the point is, it could be affecting their health even if they consciously like it.’”

So, surely Defra is champing at the bit to produce action plans for councils who clearly see the need to act? Crawshaw explains that Bristol had contacted Defra because it was already a long way down the road towards creating an action plan, but that Defra had not responded. He believes that management of environmental traffic noise is “ten years behind air quality management. The guidance is still being written, and the whole regime is much less mature. Noise is suffering the same problems that bedevilled air quality in the early days.”

Defra is “not very responsive” on noise, he adds, and has not yet issued guidance on action plans. “There are no limit values [in the mapping],” he points out. “In my view it is stymieing things. In terms of enforcement, it is difficult to draw up an action plan when you have got no standard way to define what constitutes a problem.”

Councils around the Bristol area were hoping that, given its advanced and sterling work on the issue, it might lead a coalition of local authorities on producing the action plans, but of course the plan in England is now for this work to be undertaken by consultants. “It is running late, and we are very disappointed. It will be very broad-brush, not so much an action plan as a strategy, and it will be imposed on us. We won’t have any ownership.”

Of Wales and Scotland, where there was wide-ranging consultation with stakeholders including the local councils, he says simply “it’s the way it should be done. It’s very sad, especially when you think that 23 cities in England come under the requirements.

We needed to start a couple of years ago, to fund local authorities appropriately – we could have done this. We have a body of expertise that could be implemented in an action plan.” He is clearly not optimistic about the contents of the plans when they do finally arrive.

He attributes the sheer lack of interest to the fact that traffic noise “is just not a priority. Although traffic noise does affect vast numbers of people and when they are asked, they say it does disturb them and it does affect their quality of life, they don’t complain. It’s not an issue that’s being driven by customers pressing for results. And there is no legislative duty and no funding, so no incentive for local authorities to do anything, even though it is more and more widely acknowledged, there is more and more evidence, that low-level exposure to traffic noise can cause hypertension, learning difficulties, and learning problems in children.”

It is a very different situation in the UK than in other member states, Crawshaw adds. “The colleagues I met on the SILENCE project were well on their way to maps and were thinking about action plans.” The only authority in the UK similarly advanced in mapping to Bristol is Birmingham. “They are a bit further down the road,” he explains. “They are looking at action plan measures now and how much they will cost, addressing the 1% of noisiest buildings in the city.”

For Bristol, he says “it is difficult to see where it is going. By the end of CitizenScape, at the end of this year, we will have a body of information that will tell us in quite a lot of detail what the people of Bristol think about noise, and what they want done about it. We will have a comprehensive map of noise and the quiet spaces that people value. We have a draft noise strategy but this needs to be fully agreed, adopted and integrated with our other policies and strategies, particularly the local transport plan.” This process is somewhat hampered by the lack of a

national noise strategy, which was promised as long ago as 2000.

He continues: “Unless we have a duty to manage traffic noise from central government, I don’t think we will have the incentive for a strong noise strategy. A lot depends on the action plans out of Defra, and if this involves us. If it puts the onus on us to manage roads better, it gives the impetus for us to adopt a strong strategy. If not, it is difficult to see what the driver is for continued work on noise.”

Once the CitizenScape project ends, Crawshaw will (unless something remarkable happens) return once more to his main work on air quality. ‘Once CitizenScape ends, there is no further time for me to devote to the environmental noise issue,’ he explains. “I would quite like to carry on, but it may not be a priority.”

He emphasises that this is not in any way Bristol CC’s fault. “It is perfectly reasonable – if noise is not a priority with central government, it is not surprising if local authorities divert resources to other things that they have to do.” His frustration at this situation is clear, and (given the huge admiration around the country for Bristol’s work) it is difficult to accept that Defra’s slow progress and unwillingness to engage with local authorities could result in a wasted opportunity for progress on noise management.

Draft noise action plans were scheduled for release in March 2009, but Bristol has not yet had any contact with Defra despite their early approach. Crawshaw says “We hope that the good work we’ve done in Bristol will be fully adopted and used by Defra in the action plan for Bristol.”

It seems that Bristol’s approach of seeking funding through European projects for noise has paid dividends for the city in terms of its potential ability to manage traffic noise. It remains to be seen whether Defra will reward this innovative work with the support needed to actually improve the noise situation for the residents of Bristol and other UK cities.



tricky bit,” summed up **RSK**’s Neil Jaques. Health impact at airports has been a good area, said Bernard Berry of **Berry Environmental**, but he wonders if there might be some repercussions from the Competition Commission’s report into BAA in terms of plans for Stansted.

Acoustics & Noise Partnership has found that work related to conversions and changes of use are still holding up in the current climate.

Sanctum Consultants has already seen a boost in its *Noisedirect* service and Nargis Kayani thinks she knows why. “The residential noise market is likely to increase with more individuals forced to stay in their homes because of economic factors. With people less able to sell their homes and move away from ‘annoying neighbours’ we expect the demand for simple straightforward low cost advice to resolve noise problems to increase significantly,” she said. **Waterman**’s Paul Colclough also highlighted work in response to the public’s increased sensitivity to noise and vibration issues.

And there are specialist sectors where demand remains steady. “Our expertise is mainly in industrial noise and renewable energy projects, two areas which are subject to fairly tight regulatory control and as such the market for our services has not experienced any downturn as a result of the overall economic slowdown,” said **BMT Cordah** principal consultant Stuart McGowan. “I expect these areas of work to remain fairly constant for us in the coming months and year.”

Something that wasn’t picked up a great deal was the impact of the Planning Act, perhaps because it is so new – you read it here first (or not, as the case may be – some surprisingly large consultants clearly think they know it all and don’t bother reading *Noise Bulletin*!).

The thrust of the Infrastructure Planning Commission is that developers will have to carry out full consultation before they submit their applications to the planning commission. Now this is going to require a serious number of consultants, especially for sensitive environmental issues such as noise!

We think that this once the Commission kicks in, there will be a lot of work in this area (**Temple** mentioned this too) – environmental impact assessments are going to be have to be thorough and done very quickly.

Staff numbers

Almost all respondents predicted that staff

firms will remain static in the next year, though there were plenty of qualifiers such as “essentially”, “hopefully” “at best” or “much the same” – which might indicate that they see a chance of numbers being pared. “Remain static at best; overcapacity requiring further action at worst” seemed to sum up the feeling.

Answering this question is an understandably sensitive issue and we can’t help but think that – understandably – people might be reluctant to admit that they are foreseeing cuts in case it damages staff or client morale. Certainly consultants are very quick to point to the redundancies at their competitors and if those reports are to be believed, then there is trouble.

Some businesses – **URS** and **Scott Wilson** – bucked the trend by forecasting a slight increase. **Buro Happold** is also expanding its team and **Faber Maunsell** expects 10% growth minimum.

Graham Cowling, who heads up the **URS** noise practice warns that the profession may experience a gap year where fewer graduates are employed. “We may be short of junior talent in the near future.”

Another consultant told us that because of the boom in pre-completion testing for new homes, some small operators had set themselves up solely to serve this market. “There are therefore a lot of 25-30 year old consultants who only have experience in pre-completion testing. They are going to find job hunting very difficult,” said one.

Recruitment

Those requiring extra staff could find recruitment easier in the current market, though this is not necessarily the case. Firms such as **Waterman** find that it remains difficult to recruit good staff and

Paul Colclough sees a lack of suitably qualified and experienced staff as a key issue in the medium term.

WSP’s David Maundrill believed that people don’t want to move in this market. “They don’t want to risk redundancy shortly after joining a new firm,” he said.

“Other acoustics companies are making redundancies so there is a good supply of people,” says **URS Corporation**’s Graham Cowling who heads up the noise practice. “However, I suspect they are holding on to their best people, so quality of supply is no better.”

RPS Planning & Development’s operational director Philip Evans and **Atkins**’ Graham Haines are among those to have found recruitment to be getting easier.

Recruitment has been a perennial difficulty in consultancy, said **Accon UK**’s Graham Parry. “So few people have the right technical, business and personal skills,” he says. “It is always very difficult,” found **Scott Wilson**’s Paul Shields – and salary expectations often exceed abilities. **Entec** too said that it has in the past found it extremely difficult to recruit the right staff into the noise and vibration team.

“It is difficult to find the right mix of technical and professional experience and an understanding of the range of noise issues from British standards, WHO guidelines, nuisance, ASB and HHSRS,” said **Sanctum**’s Nargis Kayani. “Contrary to popular belief not anyone can be a consultant!”

AIRO’s David Watts too has found it difficult to recruit people in the last few years and **Cole Jarman**’s Tom Zarebski agreed: “It has always been difficult to recruit the right calibre of person in acoustics due to the limited pool of suitable graduate applicants to choose from and the high demand for such graduates within the industry.”

The difficulty depends on what level is being sought, said **Mott MacDonald**’s Derek Mackay. “Graduates tend to be fairly consistent, having recently obtained their qualifications. With seniority it can become more difficult as people tend to become more specialised and reluctant to move. We have experienced difficulties in recruiting in Scotland, particularly consultants with intermediate levels of experience.”

For **Buro Happold**, London is singled out as a difficult market to find experienced consultants in.

It helps to keeping a high profile, for instance through work as government advisors, said **Bureau Veritas**’ Simon Ient. “At present, people approach us.”

Omissions? Mistakes?

Our survey was based on responses to a questionnaire sent to everyone we could think of.

But as it’s the first time, we’re bound to have missed some people or sent our emails to the wrong address or wrong person. If your company didn’t hear from us this time round (or someone simply decided they couldn’t be bothered to answer our questions and are now regretting it), please email jackpease@empublishing.org.uk and we’ll run a ‘scoop up’ article in the next issue.

If anyone went to the Epuk workshop intending to get a definitive view of what Defra was up to, they'd be sorely disappointed.

They got Defra advisors Colin Grimwood and Stephen Turner who are jolly nice but in the end are not allowed to say much. If civil servants talk in double speak, their consultants use triple speak to avoid annoying their masters.

So it still isn't really clear what local authorities will be doing (if indeed anything) in terms of action planning in England. Bear in mind that Scottish and Welsh action plans are done and dusted with full involvement of local authorities (not just rubber stamping what has already been decided). Read our feature on Bristol to see what local authorities can do if they are allowed to.

When pinned down, Grimwood and Turner did moot the possibility that 69db L_{eq} could emerge as a target for a future noise strategy (so rumours of its death are premature!). But death has not cheated PPG24, this now appears to have been officially put on hold, but the hope is that some of the work will appear 'disguised' in national policy statements.

And IEMA noise impact guidelines? Don't go there. In 2006 Turner said these were due "soon" and even then said it was like "waiting for Godot". Wait on!

Epuk's Mary Stevens insisted we included a note about your editor chairing a workshop session. She said: "Pease displayed a hidden talent for disciplined rabble management, honed through his years of experience managing unruly Scouts, on making his chairing debut at noise workshop. Faced with a front row of eminent and excitable acousticians, he threatened to split them up for heckling." Well they were being very noisy!

Wind farms are starting to bring shame on the acoustics profession.

Acousticians like to think they are clever, and it's true that dealing with decibels is certainly no breeze. But it is starting to get embarrassing the way some consultants appear to be glossing over the blindingly obvious problems that are emerging with wind farms.

Wind farm sceptic Dick Bowdler at least had the honesty to resign from the ETSU working group two years ago over

the Salford Report (which refused to reveal its sources so was impossible to peer review). Given that the Government used this report to pretend that amplitude modulation doesn't exist, Bowdler was spot on.

We observe with disbelief acousticians, buoyed up with passion in the belief they are saving the world who dismiss noise protesters as a minority of nimbys.

They completely miss the point. Wind energy firms are there to make money. Modern industrial-scale turbines are whole orders larger than envisaged by ETSU, and noise issues need to be treated with respect. In the two judgements we report in this issue, the arguments of opposers appear to have been treated with contempt by the legal profession and acoustic consultants alike. The appeal inspector appears to have reacted to this and punished the developer with an unfavourable result.

We note from the IoA's *Acoustics Bulletin* that the ETSU team have reconvened and produced updated guidance for handling windfarm noise. So ETSU did get it wrong then. Will submissions to inquiries now reflect this?

NOISE EVENTS 2009

5th-8th April

NOISE AND VIBRATION: EMERGING METHODS

ISVR conference to be held at Keble College, Oxford, website www.isvr.soton.ac.uk/novem2009/

28th-29th April

INSTITUTE OF ACOUSTICS SPRING CONFERENCE 2009

Environmental Noise Management in a Sustainable Society, to be held at Dunchurch Park, Warwickshire, Linda Canty, 01727 848195

18-22 May

NOISE ACTION WEEK

Coordinated by Epuk, website www.noiseactionweek.org.uk

17th-19th June

WIND TURBINE NOISE 2009

3rd International Conference on Wind Turbine Noise to be held in Aalborg, Denmark <http://www.windturbineoise2009.org/>

23rd June

DID YOU HEAR THAT?

concepts of audibility and inaudibility Measurement & Instrumentation, IoA meeting to be held at The Royal Society, London contact Linda Canty, 01727 848195

8th July

ASSESSMENT & MITIGATION OF NOISE

IoA North Western Branch meeting to be held in Ipswich, www.ioa.org

23th-26th August

INTERNOISE 2009

to be held in Ottawa website www.internoise2009.com

7th October

EPUK NOISE UPDATE

To be held at Aston Business School, Birmingham, contact Epuk, 01273 878 776

26th-28th October 2009

EURONOISE 2009

to be held in Edinburgh, website www.eurnoise2009.org.uk

2010

13th - 16th June

INTERNOISE 2010

to be held in Lisbon, Portugal

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