

PRACTICAL WAYS TO CUT NOISE

The new Labour Government has a real opportunity to make a difference on noise pollution.



We have concentrated on practical, deliverable measures. Aware of budget restraints, we have focused on relatively inexpensive and cost-effective things. We have tried to ensure everything is consistent with the new Government's Five Missions:

- 1) Kickstart economic growth
- 2) Make Britain a clean energy superpower
- 3) Take back our streets
- 4) Break down barriers to opportunity
- 5) Build an NHS fit for the future

**There are real opportunities
to cut noise, with big prizes
to be won if Government
seizes them**

We look to bring solutions rather than problems. Our view is that most noise problems can be solved. A lot of this will be down to local authorities. But national government has a critical role in setting the right overall framework. As we will show, there are real opportunities to cut noise. There are big prizes to be won if the Government seizes them.

WHY TACKLE NOISE



How noise influences homebuyers

Noise matters to people. It matters to voters. Noise is the single biggest cause for complaints made to local authorities in the UK (1). 11% of people in the UK are extremely disturbed by neighbour noise, with 54% bothered to some extent (2). 8% extremely disturbed by traffic noise; 55% bothered to some extent (2). Over 2.5 million extremely disturbed by aircraft noise, with 31% of the population bothered to some extent (2).

Noise impacts health and the economy. According to the World Health Organisation, it is one of the top environmental risks to health (3). Noise pollution costs the British economy around £20 billion annually in economic, social, and health costs (4). A variety of health problems can be associated with noise. For example, heart disease derived from exposure to daytime traffic noise costs approximately £1,183 million per annum. Tinnitus from traffic/leisure noise and hearing loss from loud music cost £52 million per annum and £38 million per annum respectively (4). Sleep disturbance is one of the most common consequences of noise pollution. When your sleep is interrupted, your memory and creativity become impaired, along with your sense of judgment and psychomotor skills.

**Cost of noise
£20 billion a year**

Noise is an equity issue. Low income communities are most likely to be exposed to unacceptable levels of noise (5). For example, people in social housing or flats typically have many more neighbour noise problems than those in detached homes. Poorer communities, including in some places people from black and ethnic minority communities, live in disproportionately large numbers on busy main roads. And poorer people often do not have the choice of moving away.

References:

- (1). <https://www.cieh.org/media/6561/cieh-noise-survey-england-2020-21.pdf>
- (2). file:///C:/Users/Dell/Downloads/12378_SummaryReportV1.0.pdf
- (3). <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789289053563>
- (4). <https://www.rockwool.com/group/advice-and-inspiration/blog/the-cost-of-noise-pollution/#:~:text=Noise%20pollution%20costs%20the%20British,only%20to%20air%20pollution2>
- (5). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6466273/>

Practical Solutions

ROADS AND TRAFFIC

For the first time the possibility of 'quiet traffic' in towns & cities is within reach

The introduction of electric vehicles, low speed limits, quiet road surfaces and noise cameras will make it possible

The health, productivity and quality of life benefits would be significant

THE PRIZE IS WITHIN LABOUR'S GRASP



1. Electric Vehicles

Electric vehicles will cut noise. There are caveats. First, tyre noise will still be present, meaning electric vehicles will only cut car noise up to speeds of about 35mph; above that tyre noise dominates. Second, it is uncertain how much noise will be added to electric vehicles – and the tone of it - so people can hear them coming. But, even with these caveats, electric vehicles will cut noise levels in built-up areas quite noticeably.

2. Lower speeds – 20mph to be the norm in built-up areas; reduced limits on 'A' roads and motorways

Cutting the urban speed limit from 30mph to 20mph will reduce traffic noise. 20mph limits are now commonplace in built-up areas across the UK, including most built-up roads in Wales. Cutting the motorway speed limit from 70mph to 60 mph could cut noise significantly (1).

3. Quieter Road Surfaces

The use of quieter road surfaces could halve the noise from traffic. Quieter road surfaces such as porous asphalt cost more than traditional road surfaces but are 3-10 times more cost-effective than mitigation measures such as home insulation or the construction of noise barriers (2).

4. Noise Cameras

Extend the experiment where noise cameras can identify and track the vehicle. Fine offenders. Outlaw 'boom' cars and 'souped up' motorcycles.

5. Focus on busy roads, not low traffic neighbourhoods

Low traffic Neighbourhoods can cut noise and traffic levels within the LTN but usually by increasing them on the surrounding roads which can be busy main roads that are often already the noisiest. The focus should be on cutting noise on those roads; not the already quieter roads. A focus on busy roads is not only more equitable but also more cost-effective. Health problems arising from traffic noise are generally at their worst on the busiest roads.



SUVs:

The huge growth in SUVs could undermine progress. Because they are so much heavier than the standard car, they create a lot more noise. There is a case for taxing them heavily.

References:

(1). *Speed and Road Traffic Noise*, Paige Mitchell, UK Noise Association, 2009

(2). *The Danish Road Noise Strategy*, Danish Environmental Protection Agency, 2003

Practical Solutions

AIRCRAFT NOISE

Aviation is an important industry

It facilitates trade, increases connectivity and provides jobs

It gives working people new travel opportunities

It will grow as more people from emerging economies can afford to fly

IMPROVING THE NOISE CLIMATE NEED NOT DAMAGE A KEY INDUSTRY



There is a strong case for implementing the noise recommendations of the 2018 Green Paper (1):

- a new national noise indicator to track the long term performance of the aviation sector in reducing noise
- noise caps to become routine at airports where planning permission is given for growth
- all major airports where there is no cap to draw up a noise reduction plan
- the introduction of multiple flight paths to provide respite but the decision will be down to individual airports
- to reduce the current point where noise insulation has to be offered from the 63dB LAeq 16hr contour to the 60dB LAeq 16hr contour
- to require all airports to review the effectiveness of existing compensation schemes
- the government or the new noise commission to issue new guidance to airports on best practice for noise insulation schemes, to improve consistency
- for airspace changes which lead to significantly increased flights overhead, a new minimum threshold of an increase of 3dB LAeq is introduced to be eligible for compensation
- provide more information to people moving into an area under a flight path
- promote best practice in operating procedures; give the CAA the duty to require information on the practices used;
- introduce a new power to direct airports to publish information, such as league tables of airline noise performance
- create minimum standards for noise monitoring around airports

(1). <https://aviationstrategy.campaign.gov.uk>

ENERGY NOISE

With its extensive plans for heat pumps, wind turbines and the decarbonisation of the grid, energy is the area which Labour will meet its biggest noise challenges

'The Government should take steps to ensure that the implications of the technological shifts required for net zero and adapting to climate change for noise pollution are understood and addressed early on' **House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee**



The grid. Labour plans to decarbonise Britain's electricity grid by 2030. It will build a backbone of pylons to transport energy from its source to areas of population. The pylons will largely carry wind energy though nuclear and solar will use them as well. They will be huge....and noisy. The Daily Telegraph went to the West Country ('In Somerset, noisy new net zero pylons are marching across the countryside – and locals are not happy', Tom Haynes, 13/5/23): *'Pylons of any kind generate audible whistling noise in high wind speeds and a buzzing noise in moisture. But T-pylon cables are gathered closer to the ground and residents have complained the effect is far worse than previously installed lattice pylons.'* That is the big noise challenge.

Wind turbines. The World Health Organisation found people start to get annoyed at lower levels by wind turbine noise than by any other environmental noise (1).

Where turbines are built onshore, we recommend:

- **Using accurate noise guidelines**

The current method of measuring wind turbine noise, ETSU-R-97 (2), has been heavily criticized (3) - particularly its ability to deal with the giant turbines which are now commonplace. ETSU needs to be revised or replaced.

- **No turbines within at least one mile of residential properties.** This is the distance recommended by the French Academy of Medicine. The terrain of course will influence how far the noise carries so, if there is nothing to block the noise, the distance would need to be greater.

Heat Pumps. Although many people do not experience noise from heat pumps, the Institute of Acoustics has said 'Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) and Ground Source Heat Pumps (GDHP) generate noise and can potentially cause significant adverse effects to people living nearby' (4). It is particularly the case for those in shared accommodation, flats and terraced housing. If improved technology comes on-stream, the problem may be eased. But any rushed move towards heat pumps will be problematic.

Nuclear. The previous Government committed £20bn to fund the development of a network of small nuclear power stations (SMRs) with the aim of nuclear plants (small and large) providing 25% of UK energy by 2050. Nuclear is the quietest energy source. Once built, nuclear plants do not cause communities noise problems.

(1). https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/383921/noise-guidelines-eng.pdf

(2). https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49869/ETSU_Full_copy_Searchable_.pdf

(3). <https://www.dickbowdler.co.uk/content/publications/ETSU-R-97 - The Alternative - Incl figures.pdf>

(4). [https://www.ioa.org.uk/news/heat-pumps-guidance-noise#:~:text=Air%20Source%20Heat%20Pumps%20\(ASHP,effects%20to%20people%20living%20nearby](https://www.ioa.org.uk/news/heat-pumps-guidance-noise#:~:text=Air%20Source%20Heat%20Pumps%20(ASHP,effects%20to%20people%20living%20nearby)

NEIGHBOUR NOISE

There is legislation in place to deal with neighbour noise. The challenge is for the police and local authorities to have the resources and find the will-power to use them effectively.



Key legislation:

Environmental Protection Act 1990 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/43/contents>

Noise Act 1996 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/37/contents>

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/12/contents/enacted>

Solutions:

1. Local authorities to be adequately funded and rigorously monitored

Local authorities have a big role in reducing neighbour noise. Many currently struggle with funding. Some performed badly even when they had funds. The House of Lords Select Committee's recent examination of noise policy ⁽¹⁾ recommended the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should set out what resources local authorities should have to tackle noise effectively. The Committee also felt DEFRA (the Government department responsible for noise) "does not appear to be receiving the information it needs to conclude whether its policies are being effectively implemented by local authorities."

2. Crack down on noise offenders

This has been made a lot simpler by the 2014 Anti-Social Behavior legislation which allows noise offenders to be prosecuted more easily and quickly. Sometimes a warning will suffice but the authorities should not hesitate to use their powers to confiscate the equipment or evict noise offenders, if required.

3. Give residents the right of appeal

When local authorities fail to crack down on noise offenders, there is little redress for noise sufferers. They can go to court (usually too expensive) or the Ombudsman (whose remit is often too narrow to deal with many of these cases). An Independent Appeals Panel needs to be set up.

4. Improve insulation of properties

Poor sound insulation is extensive but a nationwide programme to properly insulate all the UK's homes would be expensive. We recommend the worst affected should be done first as part of a 10 year programme to install effective sound insulation in all homes. Reducing energy demand by promoting 'passive houses' with minimal heating requirements is the norm elsewhere across Northern Europe. Lower running costs should repay the extra capital costs pretty quickly.

(1). <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5803/ldselect/ldscitech/232/23202.htm>

COMMUNITY NOISE

Many argue that our towns, cities, parks, and streets are noisier than ever before. It need not be like this. Existing or new legislation can be used to provide some peace and quiet.



Ensure there is:

- a clampdown on 'boom' cars, noisy motor bikes and stereo systems blaring from cars
- restrictions on the playing of amplified music on streets where people work, shop or live
- enforcement of by-laws that forbid the playing of music in public parks
- a limit to the number of music events allowed in any one park or open space in a year, with effective restrictions and enforcement
- the closure of premises which continue to present a noise problem in a community
- a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers (as over 100 American cities have done); with tight restrictions on the use of electric leaf blowers
- a limit on the number of firework public displays each year; the promotion of laser displays; lower the maximum levels for fireworks; the introduction of tighter restrictions on the sale of fireworks. The latter two measures are in place in Scotland.

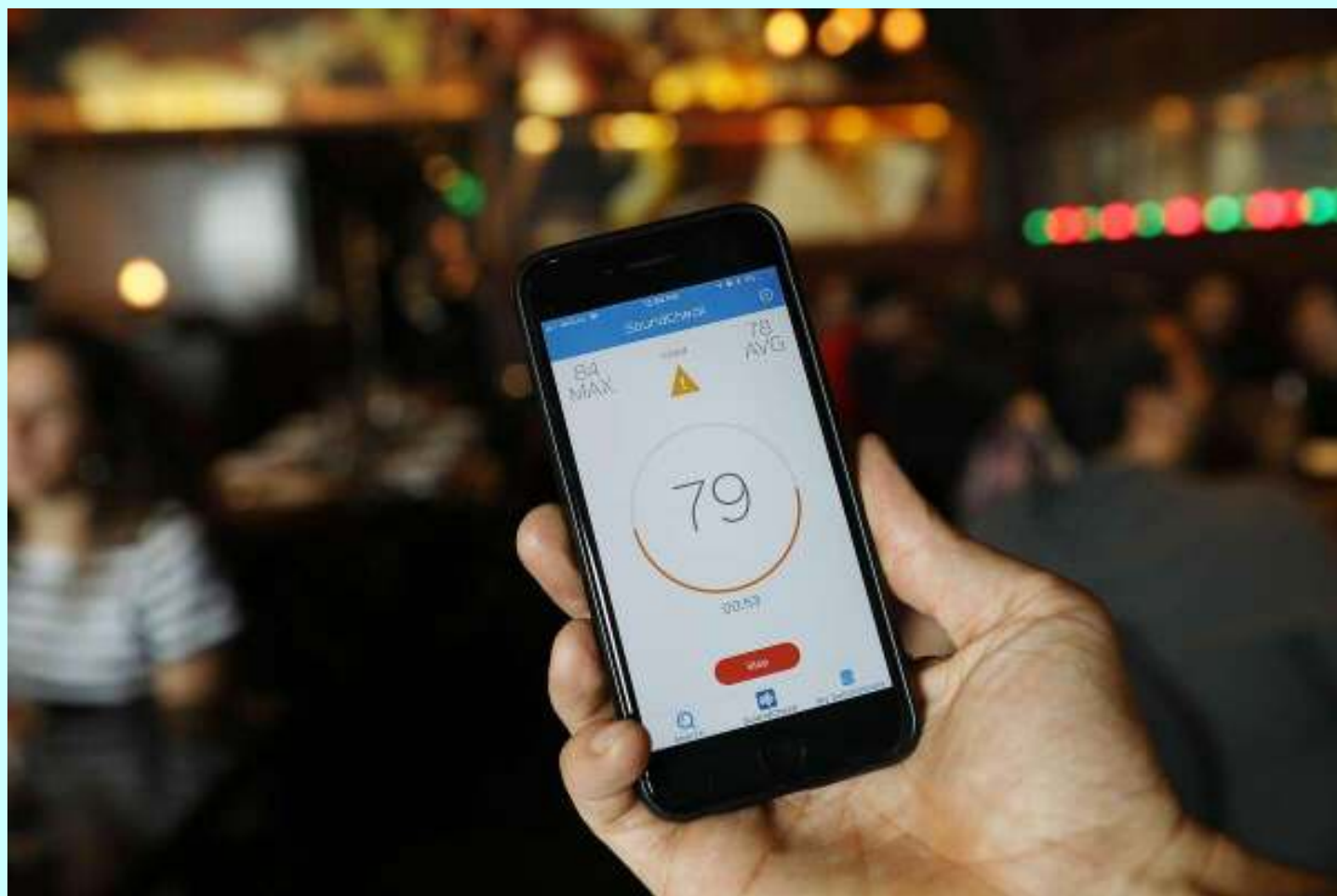
On Trains, Buses and Tubes, ensure:

- the number of announcements is cut to the barest minimum: those required by law to assist visually impaired people and those essential for safety and disruption
- a reduction in the loudness of the announcements
- operators get tough with people playing music on public transport

These may not sound like the big decisions of our age but these inexpensive measures would give real reassurance to the 'silent' majority that the Government is on their side.

BACKGROUND MUSIC

Background music can be a big problem in shops, restaurants, pubs, hospitals and elsewhere



Background music can be particularly problematic when there is a 'captive audience': patients in hospital, nursing home residents, workers in shops or restaurants.

Regulate piped music and televisions in hospitals and nursing homes.

No patient should unwillingly be subjected to piped music or televisions in hospitals or nursing homes. Separate television rooms and headphones for people who want to listen to television or music in wards should be the norm, and also for outpatients.

Legislate to protect workers in shops, restaurants and elsewhere.

The piped music played is sometimes loud and often very repetitive. Such inescapable forced music is particularly stress-inducing. Legislation is needed to give workers the right not to have to listen to it in the same way that non-smokers have gained the right not to have to breathe others' smoke.

Provide tax-breaks for 'muzac-free' shopping malls.

Shopping malls are like a public street. Particularly in many of the UK's smaller towns and cities, it is difficult to get what you want without visiting the mall meaning you have little choice but to listen to the music.

REVISIT SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee's 2023 report into noise and light pollution ⁽¹⁾ made some key recommendations which the previous Government rejected.



The Current Position

The Noise Policy Statement for England (NPSE) published in March 2010 set out the Government's long-term vision for noise policy. It states the Government wishes to 'promote good health and a good quality of life through the effective management of noise within the context of Government policy on sustainable development.' This is supported by three aims: to avoid significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life; to mitigate and minimise adverse impacts on health and quality of life; and where possible, contribute to the improvement of health and quality of life.

1. An independent advisory panel should be set up to provide independent advice to the Government

The UK Noise Association backs this and we feel the panel should be made up of a diverse range of people with knowledge and/or experience of noise. It should be a high-profile panel along the lines of the Committee on Climate Change whose advice is promoted to the press and the public. This would raise the profile of noise.

2. Local authorities should be adequately funded and rigorously monitored

The Lords Committee recommended the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should set out what resources local authorities should have to tackle noise effectively. The Committee also felt DEFRA (Government department responsible for noise) 'does not appear to be receiving the information it needs to conclude whether its policies are being effectively implemented by local authorities.'

The Government would do well to revisit these recommendations, taking a more reasoned and scientific approach than its predecessor, as well as adopting two key recommendations in the Welsh Noise Plan ⁽²⁾.

Noise should be fully integrated into all policies and plans from the start

'It is no longer acceptable to regard noise as a technical matter to be mitigated at the end of the process. Rather, it is 'integral to the design, functioning, health, amenity and well-being of places'.

Making 'the average person' the benchmark for nuisance should be re-examined

It has been used in the assessment of complaints of noise nuisance for decades but in its Noise Plan the Welsh Government recognised the 'average person' does not exist in reality and calls for further research and debate.

(1). <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5803/ldselect/ldsctech/232/23202.htm>

(2). <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-04/noise-and-soundscape-action-plan.pdf>

A QUIETER, HEALTHIER COUNTRY IS POSSIBLE



For the first time the possibility of 'quiet traffic' in towns & cities is within reach.

The noise impacts of aviation on communities can be cut without damaging the industry.

There is legislation in place to deal with neighbour noise. Funding & monitoring needed.

Inexpensive measures can be put in place to tackle community noise.

Simple, effective measures can be taken to deal with unwanted background music.

Energy will be the biggest challenge: the noise impacts need to be central to all decisions

An advisory body could provide independent advice to Government & raise the profile of noise.

SEIZE THE MOMENT! CLAIM THE PRIZE!

This briefing has been produced by the UK Noise Association, a noise lobby group set up in 2000. We publish a regular newsletter and briefings. We work closely with aligned organisations.

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