

# THE BOTTOM RUNG

Noise: the challenges, trends, technologies, politics and opportunities

Looking forward; seeking solutions

Summer 2024

## MILIBAND LIFTS THE BAN ON ONSHORE WIND TURBINES



A de facto ban on onshore wind farms in England has been lifted after planning rules were dropped with immediate effect. Wind farm developers had faced two planning hurdles. One was that local councils had to have plans for the best sites for turbines, which they often lacked resources to draw up. The other barrier was an unclear definition of what a requirement for “community support” meant, leading companies to worry that a single local person objecting could derail a scheme. Both those rules have now been dropped.

However, there are real concerns that Ed Miliband, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, is moving too fast. He tweeted a gushing video, with the caption ‘the onshore wind ban has been in place for 9 years. We've been in government for 72 hours, we've lifted it. That's the pace we're going to move at’. There are no signs so far that he has learnt lessons from Labour’s last period in Government when he was the man whose easy subsidies for wind farms caused many to be badly-sited causing lasting noise problems for people.

The Labour Government needs to take its time, assess whether the current ETSU noise guidelines are fit for purpose, decide on the minimum distance turbines will be permitted from residential properties and assess the noise implications of electrifying the grid, required to take power from onshore and offshore turbines to our towns and cities – see next page: *The noise challenges of decarbonising the grid*.

# THE NOISE CHALLENGES OF DE-CARBONISING THE GRID



Beaulieu is an attractive village just 12 miles west of Inverness in the Scottish Highlands. Legend has it Beaulieu got its name when Mary Queen of Scots visited it in 1564. She exclaimed “c’est un beau lieu” – “this is a beautiful place”. Today the talk is of the Beaulieu Buzz. In the spring of 2023 Scottish and Southern Energy Networks dropped a bombshell on stunned communities right across the Highlands, with proposals to build hundreds of giant pylons across iconic landscapes and through peaceful villages. All three 400kv lines are intended to converge at Beaulieu.

## Decarbonising the Grid

It is all part of plans to decarbonise Britain’s electricity grid which Labour wants to do by 2030. In essence, the UK will need to build a backbone of pylons to transport energy from its source to areas of population. So, for example, pylons will run from northeast Scotland to northwest England to transport electricity from new offshore wind farms. The pylons will largely carry wind energy though nuclear and solar will use them as well. Demand for electricity in the UK is expected to double in the coming decade as natural gas, petrol and diesel are phased out and we switch to heat pumps and electric cars as well as the electrification of industry and increased reliance on digital data. The current grid was built to carry fossil fuels. Thus, the new pylons

## Noisy, New Pylons

And 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.* One resident said: ‘On a wet day you can feel your brain frying.’ Others talked of ‘a horrid, whistling noise’. Some had sold up and moved away.

Decarbonising the grid would be hugely expensive, with estimates of over £100 billion. There is real scepticism that Labour will be able to do it by its target date of 2030. The alternative to pylons is to transport the energy underground but that would be even more expensive. If this new plan for energy does go through, there will be real noise impacts. **Isn’t it time it is spelt out to the public the all-round noise impacts of decarbonising the grid to accommodate net zero.**

# PRIORITISE MAIN ROADS



There is a strong argument for the new Government when tackling traffic to prioritise main roads. These are the roads with the highest levels of noise and pollution, the most important bus routes, the most vital arteries for business traffic, and the places where poor and black and ethnic minority communities live in disproportionately large numbers.

Moreover, although the detailed sums have probably not been done, these are roads where you almost certainly would get the biggest return on your investment. For example, the EU's Phenomena Study which sought to define the potential of measures capable of delivering significant reductions (20%-50%) in the health burden arising from the environmental noise of roads, railways and aircraft, found that concentrating on the noisiest areas was most cost-effective.

<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2779/24566>

We'll concentrate on noise.

**There are inexpensive ways of reducing noise on main roads.**

**Lower speeds.** Cutting the speed limit on urban and rural roads would cut noise. Enforcement will become easier with on-board speed limiters which will become mandatory on new cars in the EU. The UK would almost certainly need to follow due to the international nature of the motor trade.

**Electric Vehicles.** Greater use of electric and hybrid vehicles will cut noise. However, they come with two important caveats. First, tyre noise will still be present – this means that electric vehicles will only cut car noise up to speeds of about 35mph; above that tyre noise dominates. Second, it remains uncertain how much noise will be deliberately added to electric vehicles – and the tone of it - so people can hear them coming. Watch this informative short video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnAGxvNMB8>

**Quieter Road Surfaces.** The use of quieter road surfaces could halve the noise from traffic. Quieter road surfaces like 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.

Labour is likely to devolve much decision-making on traffic but these three measures could be brought in in conjunction with Mayors and local authorities.

# UKNA CALLS ON LONDON MAYOR TO APPOINT NOISE CZAR



The UK Noise Association has called on Sadiq Khan, the newly-elected Mayor of London, to appoint a Noise Czar. Last month it issued a paper detailing how noisy London has become. The paper shows that only 8% of Londoners say they have never being bothered by noise, slightly higher than the 6% who describe themselves as being very hard of hearing. 14% of Londoners are dissatisfied with the noise levels they are exposed to when at home; 23% are dissatisfied with noise levels in their neighbourhood and 35% are dissatisfied with noise levels in London as a whole

In launching the paper the chair of the UK Noise Association said, "London is shaping up to be the noisiest city in Europe. That is why we are calling on Sadiq Khan to appoint a Noise Czar to tackle the problem."

## **Amongst the key findings from the paper:**

- London's restaurants are the loudest in Europe
- London is overflowed by more aircraft than any other European city
- Traffic noise is amongst the worst in Europe
- Platform announcements on London Underground can reach 98 decibels, louder than a plane landing at Heathrow

The report proposes a range of solutions.

[https://www.uknoiseassociation.com/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/ukna\\_mayoral\\_term\\_noise\\_solutions.pdf](https://www.uknoiseassociation.com/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/ukna_mayoral_term_noise_solutions.pdf)

The UK Noise Association is planning to lobby the Mayor of London as well as members of the London Assembly.



# OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL NOISE: A GROWING PROBLEM

Organisations from across Europe have come together to call for recreational noise to be included when member states are required to map their cities. The initiative by the Paris-based Droit au Sommeil has gathered widespread support as recreational outdoor noise has become a real problem in many towns and cities – [see page 6](#)

Here is a snap shot:



Right: Zaragoza, Spain. Top Left: Paris.  
Bottom Left: Soho, London

The residents of Soho fought a successful battle to have scenes like these removed. The complaints from Europe are very similar. Residents understand they live in areas of cafes, restaurants and bars but feel their neighbourhoods have been taken over. The outdoor eating and drinking, the loud music (often well into the night), the constant noise are unacceptable. And, typically, the authorities are refusing to act.

# MOUNTING PRESSURE TO INCLUDE RECREATIONAL NOISE IN EU DIRECTIVE



COLLECTIF POUR DES POLITIQUES PUBLIQUES QUI PROTEGENT VRAIMENT LE SOMMEIL ET LA SANTE DES PARISIENS



European elections

## Mapping recreational noise of European cities



In recent years, we see that more and more urban centers across Europe are affected by «recreational» noise: multiplication of terraces of bars and restaurants on the public space, repeatedly alcohol consumption or crowds on public roads that increase night noise, disturb the sleep of inhabitants, many in dense urban areas. These situations are repellents for families, some affected residents flee.

- ▶ To act against pollution, it is necessary to measure it, to raise public awareness and to engage the public authorities to take actions, monitor the evolution of situations, correct actions for more effectiveness.
- ▶ This is what the European Union has long established regarding air pollution, and also noise pollution (Directive 2002/49/EC on noise pollution generated by road, air, rail traffic and industries). About 500 European cities report noise data.
- ▶ There is, however, one major absent in this directive: so-called "recreational noise", which is increasingly damaging urban centres in many European countries. We know that the measurement and modeling of recreational noise on a large scale is possible thanks to the work of *Bruitparif* in France for example.

**So that our cities do not become amusement parks stifled by hypertourism and noisy behavior under people's windows, so that our cities may preserve their souls and their inhabitants, we ask the candidates lists to position themselves on the following proposal:**

### Our proposal for Europe

**To complete the directive on noise pollution by integrating «recreational» noise to raise awareness and urge member states to act to preserve the populations suffering from these nuisances increasingly numerous in urban centers**

The answers from the candidate lists for France will be published on our site [droitausommeil.fr](http://droitausommeil.fr). Associations and collectives in France and elsewhere that support the proposal are invited to make themselves known [contact@droitausommeil.fr](mailto:contact@droitausommeil.fr) or @droitparis on X, to share the idea on their networks and those who wish will be mentioned on our site [droitausommeil.fr](http://droitausommeil.fr).

**References:** currently, about 500 agglomerations report data on road, air, rail or industrial noise  
France: 75, UK: 74, Germany: 71, Spain: 61, Italy: 40, Switzerland: 13, Greece: 8, Belgium: 6, Portugal: 6, etc

**Source:** <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/datahub/datahubitem-view/c952f520-8d71-42c9-b74c-b7eb002f939b> **See also:** <https://noise.eea.europa.eu>, <https://www.bruitparif.fr/pages/En-tete/300-Publications/680-Articles-scientifiques/2023-HBM.pdf>



## Become a Member

We have introduced a new membership scheme. Members will receive our briefings and reports as well as invites to our events. No fixed annual fee but we suggest £20.

Email [johnstewart2@btconnect.com](mailto:johnstewart2@btconnect.com) for details

## Website Address

<http://www.uknoiseassociation.com/>

Reports, Briefings, Blogs, News  
Check it out!

## Help! I've got a noise problem!

You can contact:

**The Noise Abatement Society**

<https://noiseabatementociety.org/>

Helpline on 01273 823 850;

email [info@noise-abatement.org](mailto:info@noise-abatement.org)

The Noise Abatement Society also carries out a range of activities including research and lobbying

Or contact **ASB Help**, a charity which aims to provide information and advice to victims of anti-social behaviour

<https://asbhelp.co.uk/noisy-neighbours-noise/>

**Noisedirect**  
08453 31 32 30

Independent advice line from noise professionals

*The Bottom Rung* is a quarterly journal, edited by John Stewart. We are always looking for contributions, be it articles or opinion pieces. Email [johnstewart2@btconnect.com](mailto:johnstewart2@btconnect.com)

Our blog site is at:

<https://www.cutnoise2day.co.uk/>

Twitter: @cutnoise

## Listen and Watch!

A selection of watchable noise videos

<https://youtu.be/QKrFXZ-0E7w>

An outstanding video, shot in London, from our friends at SoundPrint. How noisy are London neighborhoods Covent Garden and Soho? Is it safe to have a conversation in a busy food hall? Is the public aware of safe noise levels?

[https://youtu.be/kFh\\_OdMb5v8](https://youtu.be/kFh_OdMb5v8)

How noise is all around us and silence is hard to find. Refreshing, fun, watchable

<https://youtu.be/FDJY1EuhLwI>

Leaf Blowers

<https://youtu.be/f7DQ3SgSg0c>

Living 1600ft from a wind turbine

<https://youtu.be/qd-k0rHS-DM>

Traffic: noise from M8 in Central Glasgow

<https://youtu.be/NR1Lokkp28>

'Boom' cars in Manchester

<https://youtu.be/G2fDzqqg23Y>

Loud music ruins Soho Square in London (listen first with the sound off)

[Bradford noise-detecting camera to crack down on boy racers - BBC News](#)

Widespread coverage in papers on the roll-out of noise cameras.

<https://youtu.be/dBVCU8xuG9E>

When will we start taking noise pollution seriously?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMGniph-uPo>

A fascinating discussion by campaigners from 4 continents discussing aviation noise. Part of UECNA's recent conference: [www.uecna.eu](http://www.uecna.eu)

You'll find more videos on our website.