

# THE BOTTOM RUNG

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

Looking forward; seeking solutions

Winter 2025

## GOVERNMENT SILENT ON NOISE



**The new Labour Government has said next-to-nothing about noise. It will turn to be a big missed opportunity if it does not seize the moment to tackle noise.**

**Noise is a problem with solutions.** Many are the responsibility of local authorities but national government has a critical role in setting the right overall framework. There are big prizes to be won if the Government seizes them.

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

**Noise impacts health and the economy.** According to the World Health Organisation, noise is one of the top environmental risks to health. Noise pollution costs the British economy around £20 billion annually in economic, social, and health costs.

**To read our full briefing spelling out the solutions in detail:**

[https://www.uknoiseassociation.com/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/practical\\_ways\\_to\\_cut\\_noise.pdf](https://www.uknoiseassociation.com/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/practical_ways_to_cut_noise.pdf)

# OVER 1 MILLION PEOPLE CALL FOR CURBS ON FIREWORKS



On 5<sup>th</sup> November a petition with over one million signatures calling for tighter restrictions on fireworks was handed in to the Prime Minister at Number 10 Downing St. The petition, organised by the Fireworks Campaign, had the support of numerous groups including the RSPCA, Dogs Trust and Redwings Horse Sanctuary.

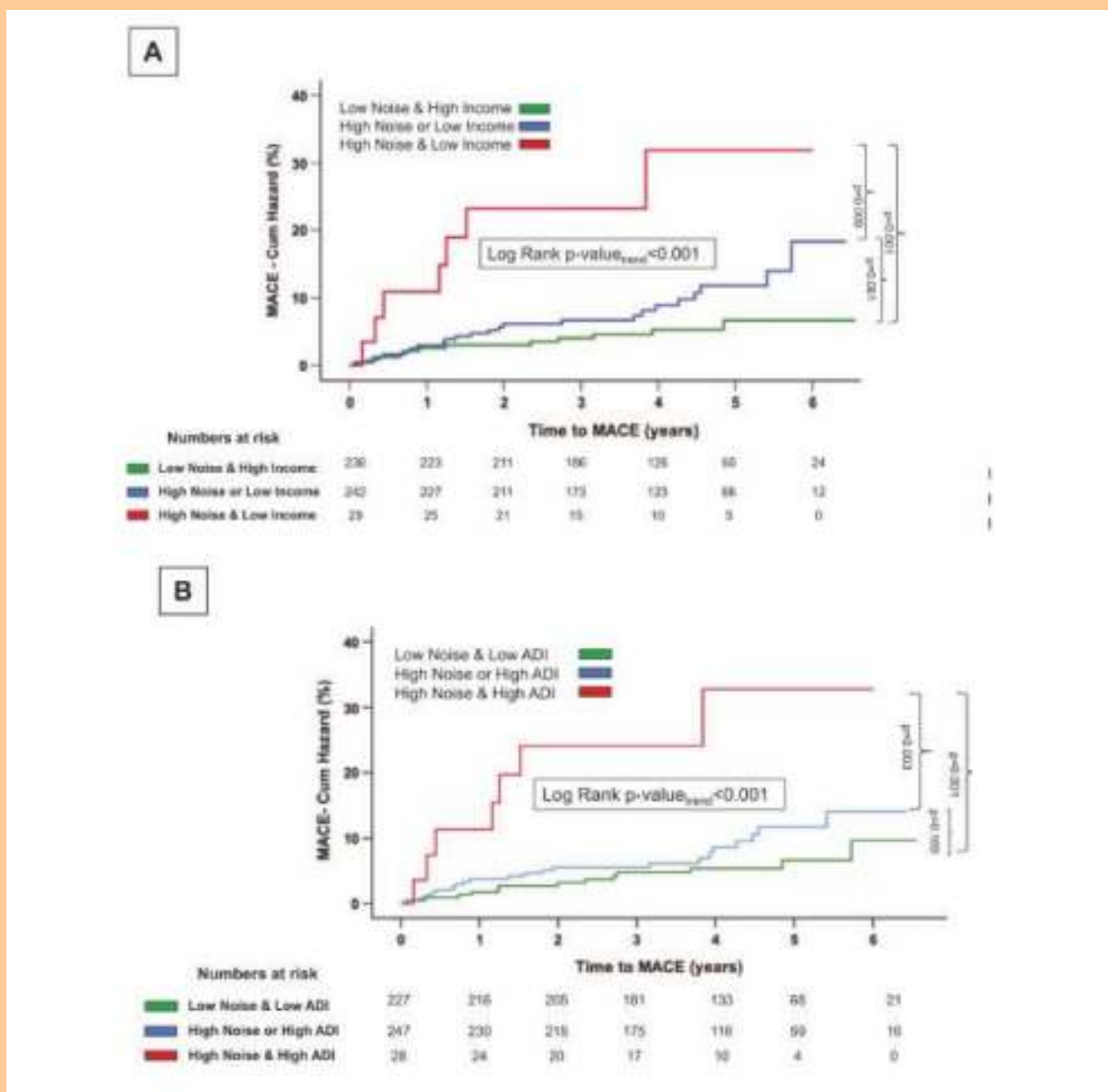
The campaigners are calling for the private use of fireworks to be restricted to traditional dates, such as Guy Fawkes' Night on November 5, New Year's Eve, Chinese New Year and Diwali. They also want to see the maximum permitted decibels for fireworks to be reduced from 120 to 97, for all public firework displays to be licensed, and for packaging on fireworks to include information on noise level to allow for consumer choice.

Current laws allow people to purchase fireworks from registered sellers for private use between October 15 and November 10, December 26 to 31, and three days before Diwali and Chinese New Year. It is against the law for anyone to set off fireworks between 11pm and 7am, except for on Bonfire Night when the cut off is midnight, and on New Year's Eve, Diwali and Chinese New Year, when the cut off is 1am. It is also against the law to sell fireworks to under 18s. But the firework laws are poorly enforced.

## **Debate in Parliament**

There was a well-attended debate in Parliament on 9<sup>th</sup> December where numerous MPs called for better enforcement and tighter restrictions. The Government Minister didn't make any promises but was keen to continue the dialogue with MPs and campaigners. The Luton North MP, Sarah Owen has brought a **Private Members Bill** to Parliament which calls for restricting the sale of fireworks to licensed shops, lowering the noise limit to 90 decibels, and removing the loudest fireworks – F2 and F3 – from sale. We have yet to see whether it will get the Government support it would need to become law.

# NEW STUDY LINKS TRAFFIC NOISE, LOW-INCOME AND HEALTH



A major new study shows a clear link between traffic noise, low-income and cardiovascular disease (ADI). Previous studies have shown links between noise and low incomes and between noise and health but this is the first one to bring all three together. The focus was on Boston in America but was carried out by an international group of academics. The links are dramatic. The tables above from the study couldn't be clearer.

## Implications for traffic noise policy

Noise policy and practice might look very different if it was based on these findings. The noisiest roads are nearly always the 'main' roads, 'main' in inverted commas because, in built-up areas, they are roads where people live, work, shop, socialise or attend school. And low-income communities tend to spend more time on them. If you lack money, it's a treat to travel to the city centre. You go to the Café Nero, the McDonalds or the pub on your high street. This study would seem to strengthen case for focusing on 'main' roads when seeking to reduce noise from traffic. These days the technology exists to make it happen. It is the political will that is so often lacking. Slower speeds enforced by in-car speed limiters, quieter road surfaces, electric vehicles as and when they become viable, reallocation of road space to quieter forms of transport, the widespread introduction of noise cameras.

For details of the study: <https://nature.com/articles/s41370-024-00734->

# IMPACTED BY NOISE BUT DIGITALLY EXCLUDED



**The three groups of people most impacted by neighbour noise - older people, unemployed people and those in social housing - are also the groups most likely to be digitally excluded.**

Noise Nuisance, who carried out the research, wrote: “Much of the communication carried out by local enforcement bodies is carried out via email. There have also been amazing innovations like the noise app that help sufferers to tackle noise issues. A key message for public services therefore has to be that, whilst digital services can enhance and empower communities significantly, they must consider how they will support particular groups whose access to the web is restricted.”

**Our Comment:** These are sobering figures which should give us all pause for thought. As our friends at Noise Nuisance say, the Noise App and other forms of new technology have assisted those impacted by noise but we risk missing the worst impacted if we only rely on these new technologies. It is time for Government, local authorities and indeed campaign groups like ourselves to review our reliance on digital technology and (re)discover the best ways of communicating with digitally excluded people.

For details of the research: <https://noisenuisance.org/2020/01/01/complain-about-noise/>

# NEW TOWNS CAN BE NICE AND QUIET



New towns in the UK have a mixed image. Some have worked. Others have not. The new Government is committed to building many more of them. It is an opportunity to build fine towns. A new report from Create Streets and Remade Britain points to a way forward (1). It envisages “walkable, cycle-friendly towns with lush scenery, spaces for work, leisure and life, all in one place.” Public transport towns with good public transport links to other towns and cities. Separately, Create Streets, along with Campaign for Better Transport, has launched a new mission, ‘Tram Network’, which will support more cities to create tram lines and work with government and industry to reduce their cost (2).

**Our Comment:** Any new town which limits traffic though investment in other transport modes can reduce noise. But the compact new towns with high densities and mixed-use areas could create noise problems. People living in flats or in terraced houses are more likely to be disturbed by their neighbours than those in detached properties. And if you live close to a pub or shops there can be noise problems. They can, though, be overcome through well-designed buildings, careful planning and sensible restrictions on street activities. Above all, noise measures need to be designed in from the start. The Welsh Noise Strategy puts it well: “It is no longer acceptable to regard air quality and noise merely as technical matters to be mitigated at the end of the process. Rather, they are integral to the design, functioning, health, amenity and well-being of places. Accordingly, an integrated approach should be taken towards drawing up strategies and formulating proposals for places, including those relating to air quality and soundscape.”

(1). <https://www.createstreets.com/projects/creating-new-towns-fast-and-well/>

(2). <https://www.createstreets.com/projects/launch-of-tram-network/>

# INSTITUTE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CALLS FOR WIND TURBINE GUIDELINES TO BE REVISED



**The influential Chartered Institute of Environmental Health has written to Ed Miliband, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero to ask that the wind farm guidelines, ETSU-R-97, be revised arguing they are ‘outdated and unfit for purpose.’**

“We accept the need for cheaper and more secure energy for the UK. Delivering on that ambition in a just and fair manner requires an approach that avoids unforeseen consequences, particularly the potential for residents to be negatively impacted by sound generated by wind turbines.

“ETSU-R-97 is outdated and unfit for purpose. Without clear and adequate guidance, the permitting of onshore windfarms could face major delays and lead to undesirable outcomes. New guidance should be developed as a matter of urgency, reflecting the latest British Standards, guidance from the World Health Organisation and the latest scientific evidence on the adverse effects of noise from wind turbines”.

**The full letter:** <https://www.cieh.org/media/kzadg5c1/cieh-ies-joint-letter-to-ed-miliband-mp-on-etsu-r-97>.

## **As Miliband relaxes restrictions on heat pumps.....**

The Government is to relax noise restrictions on heat pumps. It will scrap current rules that block homeowners from installing a heat pump less than a metre from their property’s boundary. And there are informed rumours that it might also weaken the restrictions on the ‘tonality’ of heat pumps. The tone of the noise emitted by heat pumps is of concern to noise experts. Any watering down of the regulations on tonality would face opposition.



# CITIES ACROSS SPAIN ARE RISING UP AGAINST NOISE



**The number of neighbourhood associations that are organising themselves to combat urban noise pollution caused by nightlife, terraces and mass tourism is growing.**

This is a slightly abridged version of an article by Aristotle Moreno for Publico (08/09/2024).

Noise kills. And it is not a cliché. Nor an advertising slogan. It is confirmed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). And it is the litany that is repeated over and over again among the growing citizen movement that runs through Spain in defence of the right to rest. If not, just ask Kiko Marcos, a regional official from Extremadura. His body collapsed twenty years ago due to the effect of intense noise pollution that turned his health and the street where he lived with his family in the historic centre of Mérida upside down.

A pedestrian street that went from just four hospitality businesses to no less than 17 and a sea of tables open until the early hours of the morning. "The terraces [outdoor drinking and eating] closed at three at night and I got up at six in the morning to work," he says in a telephone conversation with Público. The torture did not end with the closure of the businesses. Then the waiters would pick up, clean, drag the furniture and smoke a cigarette under the Marcos family's window.

"I fell into a deep depression and needed medical assistance," she reveals. The nightly noise disrupted her life to such an extent that the family had to move and abandon a house that had been occupied by three consecutive generations. Since then she embarked on a long and tortuous path of neighbourhood activism, which in just two decades has articulated a constellation of associations throughout Spain demanding a fundamental right enshrined in national and community legislation.

"The fight against noise is complex and arduous," argues this Extremaduran official. "There are important players involved, such as the hotel industry and even venture funds, and the administrations do not want to take effective measures. Fighting against leisure venues hand to hand is impossible. Bear in mind that there are 360,000 bars in Spain and tens of thousands of tourist apartments. It is absolute

madness." The problem, in his opinion, is that the law is not being enforced. "Politicians are not interested," he concludes.

Kiko Marcos is a member of the executive committee of the Federation of Associations against Noise, which brings together fifty groups from all the autonomous communities. It is not the only citizen network that fights urban noise pollution. Josefa Sánchez Doreste presides over the Federation of Associations Against Noise Pollution and in Defense of Historical Heritage (Facuspat). Her personal battle against noise began in the early nineties in Gran Canaria. She had a diabetic mother in her eighties, subjected to the daily torment of bars and restaurants on her street. "We did not rest at night."

She filed her first complaint against the owners of a business. And years later, against the Las Palmas City Council for granting opening licenses to hospitality establishments in unauthorized areas. "I won the litigation and the appeal," she emphasizes. They were not the only lawsuits. And she has won them all. First as a citizen and then as a neighborhood representative. "Our battle horse has been nightlife and terraces. There is increasing municipal negligence in not defending the quality of life of its neighbors".

For years, she has also been the president of the Triana-San Telmo Residents' Association, one of the most noise-polluted areas of Las Palmas. "We realised that a national federation had to be created because the problems in Cáceres and Palencia are no different to ours." Sánchez Doreste believes that there is a regulatory mess in relation to noise, such that many autonomous communities do not adapt the state law or simply do so inadequately. "The national law says that after 11:00 p.m. the noise volume must be substantially reduced, but that rule is not respected."

Josefa Sánchez Doreste is clear about it. "We have rights," she says. "People suffer and get sick. We pay our taxes and demand that they respect us." The organization she presides is not going to give in. The Las Palmas City Council has a recent complaint in its drawer about the celebration of the night of the Three Kings . "More than 50,000 people come to the Triana-San Telmo neighborhood to celebrate the festival. And they stay up for 24 hours straight. We made acoustic measurements and filed a complaint in court."

Citizen awareness is growing by the minute. They are no longer helpless neighbours lacking legal knowledge. They are now fully advised and have a good command of the regulations that protect them. There are dozens of active complaints in the courts throughout the country. In fact, there is already a group of lawyers specialised in the matter that has been working since 2002. They are grouped under the name of [Jurists Against Noise](#) , which includes around thirty professionals.

"It is a very serious problem, which has a very negative effect on our health , as indicated by the WHO," says its vice president, María José Rodríguez. Intense and continued exposure to noise pollution can cause cardiovascular diseases, anxiety, ischemia and metabolic disorders. And there is "extensive legislation" to set limits on urban noise. "We have European directives, as well as state, regional and municipal regulations on noise pollution," warns Rodríguez. "Citizens have the right not to be exposed to certain noise levels and, if they are exceeded, corrective measures must be taken," says the lawyer.

The response from the administrations is uneven. But there is a common denominator: "The town councils tend to remain inactive , so we usually go to court," says Rodríguez, to assert citizens' rights. There is no concrete data on the number or percentage of complaints related to noise exposure. "It is a growing demand ," he admits. And most cases are usually won.

Noise pollution is a thorny battle in a country that lives off the service sector and has a thousand-year-old tradition of street celebrations. "Culture in Spain is understood as noise. And that is not true," says Kiko Marcos. "Culture is something else." Meanwhile, tens of thousands of citizens are organizing themselves to face an urban challenge of considerable proportions.



## 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)

**Noise Nuisance** provides information and help from experts.

<https://noisenuisance.org/about-us/>

**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/NR1lLokp28>

'Boom' cars in Manchester

<https://youtu.be/G2fDzqgq23Y>

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.**