

THE BOTTOM RUNG

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

Looking forward; seeking solutions

Winter 2024

OFFICIAL: GOVERNMENT ADMITS HEAT PUMP NOISE PROBLEM

In a report published in November the Government has acknowledged that noise from heat pumps can be a problem (1). It is most common in blocks of flats and terraced houses. 30% of people in social housing reported a problem but only 9% in private housing. The report admits that the survey was conducted some years ago and technology might have improved since then but it found that, overall, 25% of people reported noise problems from heat pumps.

25% of people reported noise problems from heat pumps

People most often report a low rumbling noise. It is thought that this 'tonality' is part of the problem. Sweden and Finland have cut permitted noise levels by 5 decibels to account for tonality. The UK continues to have one of the highest permitted levels in Europe. In its response to the recent report on noise and light pollution by a Parliamentary Select Committee (2), the Government said it is carrying out "an independent review of existing evidence on noise emissions and planning standards.

This is to be followed by a public consultation to establish whether the existing permitted development rights are fit for purpose and in line with advances in heat pump technology".

Our View

The Government continues to pour millions of pounds into grants to help people move to heat pumps by 2035 as part of its net-zero policy. It has, though, sensibly set an exemption to the phasing out of fossil fuel boilers, including gas, in 2035, so that households will not have to switch to a heat pump if their home is not suitable. Our view is it needs to go further and have a moratorium on the installation of heat pumps until the noise problems are resolved.



(1). <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6568b7b95936bb000d3167ef/ashp-planning-regulations-review-main-report.pdf>

(2). <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/42401/documents/210714/default/>

GOVERNMENT REJECTS KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF SELECT COMMITTEE ON NOISE



The Government has rejected key recommendations made by the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee following the Committee's investigation into noise and light pollution. In its response the Government has said it will not set up an expert body to give it advice on noise issues. It has also said that the adoption of a national noise reduction target is 'not feasible'. It has, though, acknowledged potential noise problems with wind turbines and heat pumps. It will review whether the current noise guidelines for wind turbines 'need to be refreshed'.

John Stewart, chair of the UK Noise Association, said, "It is disappointing that the Government is refusing to set up an independent noise expert body which could have both given advice and raised the profile of noise. It means that noise will continue to bump along as a Cinderella issue. But we are pleased that noise from heat pumps and onshore wind turbines are recognised as potential problems."

The Government's full response:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/42401/documents/210714/default/>

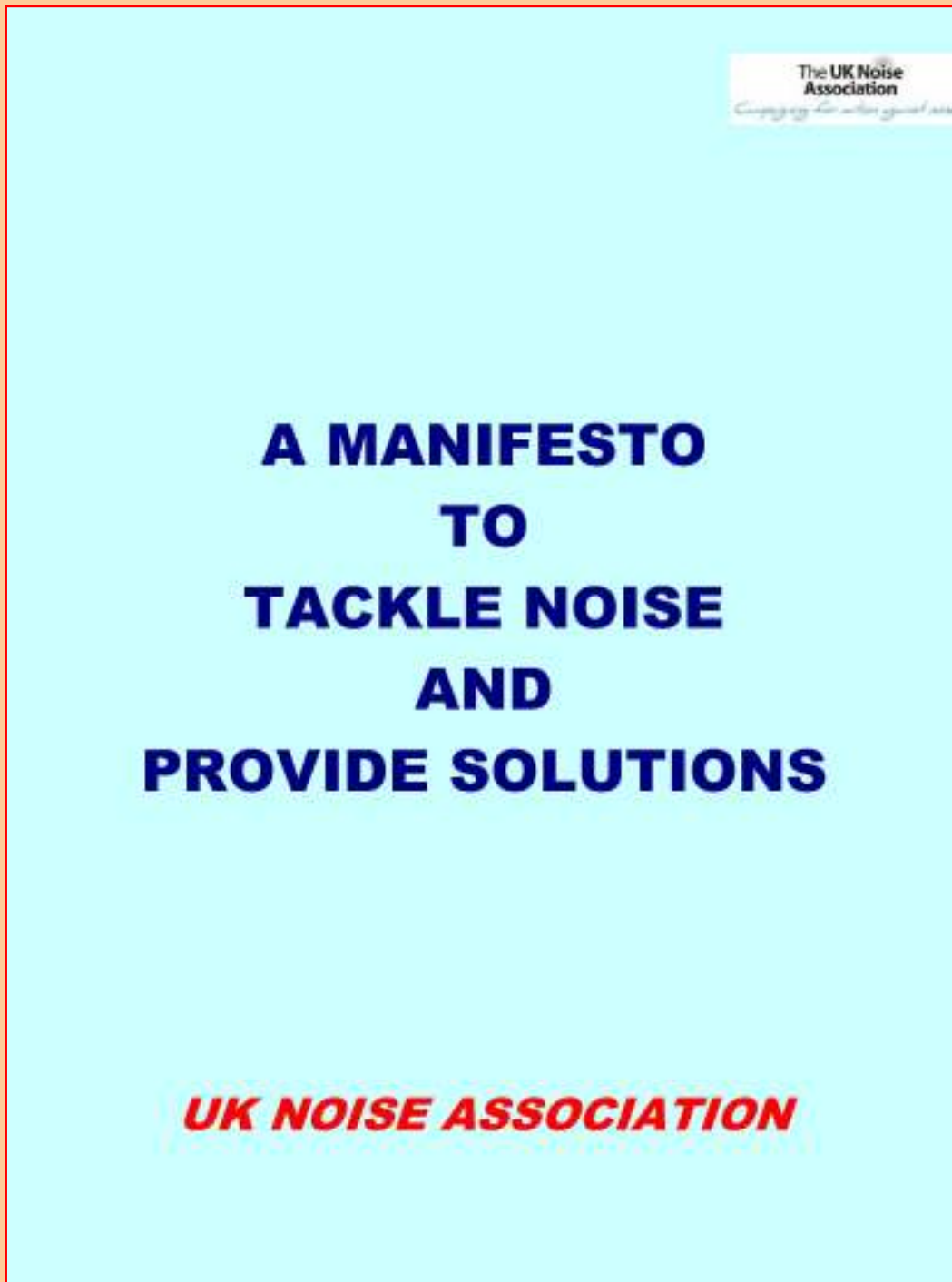
The Welsh Government has published its Noise and Soundscape Action Plan. It is a detailed piece of work. It has two distinctive features. It tries to integrate noise into the Government's other policy areas so it does not become an add-on extra. And it actively seeks to promote noises people enjoy, what it calls 'soundscapes'.

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

The Scottish Government is being less ambitious and is concentrating on producing noise maps and noise action plans.

PRAISE FOR THE UK NOISE ASSOCIATION'S NOISE MANIFESTO

Our Manifesto has won praise from a wide range of organizations and individuals. Published at the end of last year, it is intended to influence politicians in this election year as well as whichever Government comes to power post-election. It covers all aspects of noise in a clear, accessible way, with a focus on solutions.



You can read the full Manifesto here:

https://www.uknoiseassociation.com/uploads/4/1/4/5/41458009/ukna_noise_manifesto.pdf

NOT AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM

TRAFFIC NOISE CAN BE CUT –
EVEN ON 'MAIN' ROADS



Anerley Road is a 'main' road in South London, an important thoroughfare for traffic. But it is also a residential road and a local shopping high street.

The speed, noise & volume of traffic takes you aback. Part of the road is a steep hill. In the evening it can become a racetrack, with speeds of over 70mph.

To appreciate the horror, have a look at this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8TrtLeEk-A>

It will always be an important traffic thoroughfare but there are measures which can be taken to cut the noise:

- Install quieter road surfaces.
- A 20mph speed limit enforced by cameras.
- The installation of noise cameras.
- Make some of the traffic islands into 'green man' crossings to make it less of a race track.

THE CASE FOR PRIORITISING MAIN ROADS

We have used Anerley Road as an example to show it is quite possible to cut noise on main roads. Indeed, there are strong reasons to prioritise main roads when cutting noise because.....

Main roads are where:

- Noise is at its worst and people's health is most at threat
- Poorer people and people of colour live in disproportionately high numbers
- Large numbers of people walk, cycle, socialise, shop, work or attend school
- Measures are also likely to reduce air pollution, emissions and road danger.

Side roads, particularly those used as 'rat-runs', should not be neglected but the best value for money comes from investing in measures where noise is at its worst – that is usually main roads.

OUT AND ABOUT IN THE NOISY CITIES OF EUROPE

"Can you imagine this and constant music for 6+ hours 365 days a year? The residents of Plaça Nova and De la Palla, Boters, Dels Arcs and Capellans streets want SOLUTIONS. The Gothic is not a circus. Sign our petition"

Loud music just yards from people's homes in Barcelona (picture right):

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/8TQ4PDsIMdw>

This situation is being repeated in cities across Europe. Authorities refuse to clamp down on excessive street noise, very often loud amplified music, close to where residents live. Often it goes on well into the night. But local communities are fighting back. In Brussels and Paris, in cities across Spain, in London (particularly in Soho) people are mobilizing.

In many cities there are laws in place. They are just not being enforced. Read this account from Paris.

The law is the same for everyone: *"No particular noise must, by its duration, repetition or intensity, harm the peace of the neighborhood or human health, in a public or private place (...)"*. The terraces are therefore not allowed to create noise pollution likely to affect your peace and quiet. With more than 12,000 annual terraces and more than 3,000 summer terraces declared, the authorities are struggling to regulate these installations. In 2016, the General Inspectorate pointed out that 75% of the City's terraces were in violation of the regulations. Even though it has been demonstrated by the General Inspectorate that 75% of authorized terraces do not comply with the regulations and that the City has not put in place sufficient means to regulate noise pollution from professional activities, the City of Paris has decided, without consulting Parisians, to perpetuate the Covid terraces by integrating them into a new Regulation on terraces."

For a longer version: <https://droitausemmeil.fr/terrasse-bruyante-a-paris-que-faire-contre-les-nuisances-sonores-de-terrasses>

Although some European cities are putting in measures to reduce traffic noise, they are failing to tackle street noise. Some places even seem to encourage it in the belief that it might be good for business.

- **Please feel free to contact us about your experiences. We are planning to contact organizations in Europe to see what interest there may be in having an online meeting about the issue.**



WIND FARMS 'ARE DESTROYING RURAL COMMUNITIES' IN SCOTLAND

UK Noise Association chair **John Stewart** whose grandparents lived through the Highland Clearances sees history repeat itself as wind companies force people off the land.

My parents grew up in rural Scotland. They were born in the Scottish Highlands in the years spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were raised in poverty, the children of crofters. Crofts were small pieces of land between the mountains and the sea where families scraped a living. Many had been forced to relocate to these areas as a result of the Highland Clearances when a huge number of people were moved to make way for sheep farming.



Campaigners have called the proliferation of wind turbines the '21st-century clearances'. There is an uncanny resemblance to what happened centuries ago. The Highland Clearances came in two phases between 1750 and 1860. In the first phase families were moved from their land to make way for large-scale sheep farming which made the landlords more profit (at a time when the growing cities of the Industrial Revolution presented an increased demand for food). The second phase was more brutal. Following the relocation of phase one many people had lost the means to support themselves. "Assisted passages" became common, when landowners paid the fares for their tenants to emigrate. Tenants who were selected had in practical terms little choice but to go. My grandparents lived through this period.

Wind companies are paying people to leave their homes leading to depopulation of the countryside

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Today it is the wind companies which are paying people to leave their homes leading to depopulation of countryside. Graham Lang, chair of the campaign group Scotland Against Spin (SAS), puts it like this: "The general pattern sees wind farm developers buy up properties where the impact of the facility will be unacceptable for various reasons". SAS claims developers dangle huge offers for homes standing in the path of developments that owners have little choice but to accept. Lang said: "Quite often the value of homes has been massively reduced because of their close proximity to planned wind farms and would be difficult for the existing owners to find buyers. Thus, when wind farm developers swoop in with an attractive offer, owners are left with little realistic option but to agree to sell or be left with a worthless property. Either that or they face having to stay put and then live with all the negative downsides of being in close proximity to wind turbines, such as the impact of noise, pollution or potential loss of their only water supply, as well as flicker not just during the day but at night from aviation safeguarding lights." Scotland plans to almost double the number of onshore turbines to more than 7,500.

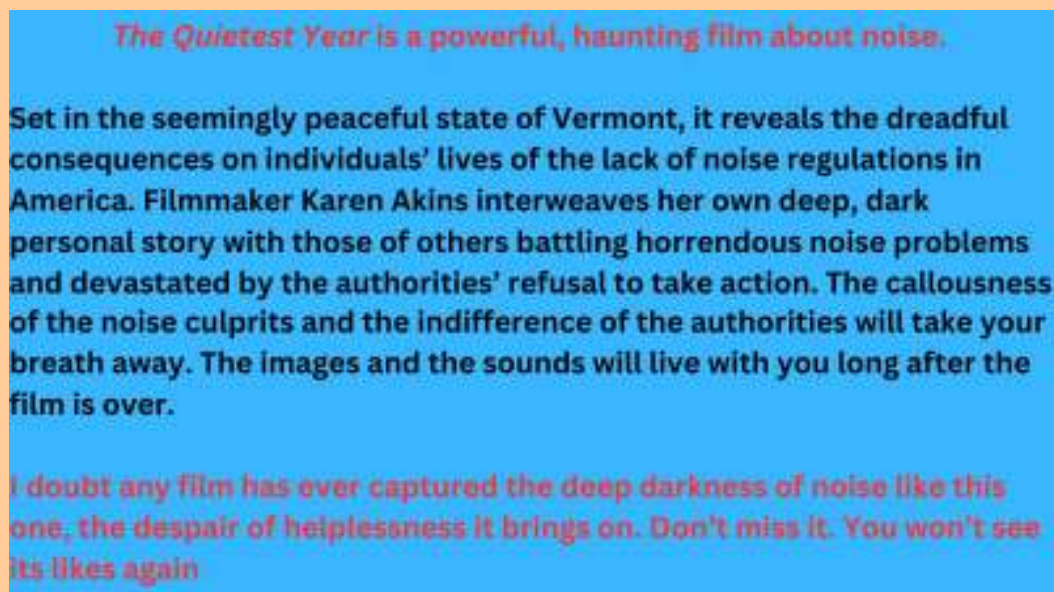
Campaigners have called what is taking place the '21st-century clearances'

A fuller account of the current situation in The Times, 18/12/23 (behind a paywall)

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/wind-farms-are-destroying-rural-communities-2c28szrls>

Scotland Against Spin: <https://scotlandagainstspin.org/>

NEW NOISE FILM PREMIERED IN LONDON



A remarkable new film about noise was premiered in London towards the end of last year. *The Quietest Year* is an American film by director Karen Akins. Our review of it is above. We will be staging an online screening of it later this year.

Here is the link to its trailer: <https://vimeo.com/user5665570/tqytrailer?share=copy>

MAKE LISTENING SAFE CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

The Make Listening Safe Campaign, of which the UK Noise Association is an official supporter, was launched towards the end of last year. It aims to educate people to the dangers of excessive listening to loud sounds. In 2015 the World Health Organisation raised the alarm about the growing risk of hearing damage among young people. Loud sounds heard during the use of personal audio devices while



gaming and at loud venues are leaving up to half of all teenagers and young adults (aged 12-35) at risk of hearing loss, with the figure of young people at risk in the UK estimated to be over 10 million people. It has launched a petition calling on the Government to adopt new safety standards for headphones sold in the UK and provide users with information which will enable them to manage their sound exposure to avoid hearing loss and related conditions <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/650365>.

Its website is <https://www.makelisteningsafecampaign.com/>

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

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/NR1lLokkp28>

'Boom' cars in Manchester

<https://youtu.be/G2fDzqgg23Y>

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

You'll find more videos on our website.

Website Address

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

Reports, Briefings, Blogs, News
Check it out!

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 jdm.stewart@virgin.net for details

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

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

Our blog site is at:

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

Twitter: @cutnoise