

The Weakest Link on Noise: the current Government

By John Stewart

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Perhaps I'm feeling particularly sore as my office neighbours had an ALL DAY noisy party last week. But it reminded me how little the current Government is doing about noise. To call it low-priority would be to do a disservice to the word 'priority'.

I don't mean the civil servants in DEFRA, the department which takes the lead on noise. There are just two of them – each of them part-time – which says everything about the way the Governments looks at noise. They are heroines, working wonders.

Their boss is Emma Hardy MP, a junior minister at DEFRA, who is also responsible for lots of other policy areas. To my knowledge she has only made one speech on noise. Imagine if Ed Miliband had just spoken once on climate change. (Many would say we would - literally – be better-off, but that is another story).

The running about noise is being made by those outside government.

- **Acoustic firms and their umbrella bodies** like the Institute of Acoustics, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Institution of Environmental Sciences have stood against Government attempts in its consultations to water down the regulations on building standards, wind turbines and heat pumps.
- **Academics** have led the way on highlighting the links between noise and health.
- **New organisations like Noise Network Plus** have been formed to develop noise solutions using technology and engineering.
- **Local residents and businesses** have taken to the courts to challenge unacceptable noise levels from busking and padel courts.
- **Campaign groups** continue to work on neighbour noise, outdoor noise, noise in venues and traffic noise.
- **Even organisations like Heathrow**, not the Government' are taking the lead on aircraft noise from a third runway.

We all dream of the day when a Government will take seriously its responsibilities to the millions impacted by noise. We'd even forgive it shouting about noise from the rooftops. Meanwhile, we'll all continue beavering away at an issue the Government refuses to touch.