

Sounds on the streets are a natural and often enjoyable part of the daily lives of people using them. Noise is not. One way of defining noise is as unwanted sound. Street noise can take many forms - transport noise, construction noise, loudspeaker noise - even noise from burglar alarms.

Noise can act as a deterrent to many people who would otherwise use and enjoy public space. What is a pleasant or valuable addition to the street soundscape for some can be an intolerable, intrusive noise for others. Street noise is on the increase, and this policy briefing explains our policy, what the law says and what steps can be taken to tackle the problem.

We want to create living streets that are alive with sound but not polluted by noise.

Our policy

Living Streets campaigns for streets that are pleasant and relaxing places to be. Street noise can be a significant deterrent to people considering using public space to walk, talk - or just watch the world go by. It is a source of irritation and stress for people on foot - and can damage hearing if it is excessively loud.

Living Streets wants to see the existing legislation strengthened - particularly the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act that should be extended to cover excessive traffic noise. We also want to see legislation rigorously enforced. We want to see local authorities prioritising noise reduction in public space. We also aim to raise

the awareness of noise pollution in public space and to encourage inclusive and innovative solutions.

Because people use streets for different purposes, what is one person's enjoyment can be another's noise. That's why compromise and tolerance so important when it comes to street life.


Government policy


The Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993 makes noise in the street a statutory nuisance. Unfortunately, traffic noise is excluded, but the Act prohibits the use of loudspeakers between 9pm and 8am. Local authorities can licence use outside these hours. The Act also covers noise


emitted from motor vehicles caused by car repairs, noise from car radios, car alarms and parked refrigerator vehicles.


The noise made by industrial vehicles is limited by the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use Regulations) 1986. Vehicles must be fitted with an efficient exhaust silencer and there are general regulations requiring road users not to make excessive noise or run engines unnecessarily when stationary. Noise from horns is regulated by the Road Traffic Act 1972. Horns may not be sounded in a restricted road between 11.30pm and 7am. Private vehicles may not be fitted with a gong, bell two tone horn or siren. The Noise Act 1996 gives local authorities the option of imposing restrictions on noise emitted from dwellings between the hours of 11am and 7pm. In Scotland, similar action can be taken under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.

What you can do

 Many incidents involving noise can be resolved by a polite informal request to the person responsible - if it can be done, it's by far the best solution.

 If this fails, contact the environmental health department of your local authority. It must investigate your complaint. If the investigating officer agrees that the noise is a nuisance, the offender will be contacted - informally at first, but an abatement order will be issued if necessary. If the offender fails to comply with the notice, proceedings can be taken in the Magistrates Court (Sheriffs Court in Scotland).

 Become a member of Living Streets and contact your Living Streets branch or local Contact. If there is no branch or local Contact nearby, why not consider becoming a Contact or helping to form a branch?

 Contact your local media and underline the importance of this issue. Emphasise that excessive noise can deter people from using public space and that this can lead to more crime and less social cohesion in our streets. Aim to raise awareness of the issue - particularly the distinction between sound that enhances the street and noise that pollutes it.

Fact Stats

1. In Britain, 32 million people are exposed to high levels of noise on a regular basis. Noise levels are expected to rise 17% in the next 10 years (CPRE)
2. More than 118,000 noise-related complaints were made in the UK during 2000 (Guardian Learning Online)
3. Recent research at the University of Innsbruck has found that children subjected to excessive traffic noise are likely to underachieve at school.



Sounds can enhance living streets, but noise can be a significant deterrent

For further information

Contact Living Streets' information and advice hotline (020 7820 1010)

Contact the National Society for Clean Air (www.nasca.org.uk)

Website: www.livingstreets.org.uk