

CURRENT POLICY ON ENVIRONMENTAL NOISE

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out the Government's current policy on environmental noise. It covers progress on developing a National Ambient Noise Strategy; the EU Environmental Noise Directive and its implementation in the UK and the review of planning policy guidance.

2. NATIONAL AMBIENT NOISE STRATEGY

The Government consulted on the need for a strategy for environmental noise in 2001, in its paper "Towards a National Ambient Noise Strategy". The need for a National Ambient Noise strategy was emphasised in the Rural White paper of 2000 and the UK Sustainable Development Strategy of 2005. The Government is committed to agreeing a strategy by the end of 2007. A separate strategy is being developed for neighbourhood noise.

The consultation paper proposed that the strategy should consist of three phases:

Phase 1 would aim to establish:

- the ambient noise climate in the country. In simple terms, the number of people affected by different levels of noise, the source of that noise (i.e. road, rail, airports and industry) and the location of the people affected;
- the adverse effects of ambient noise, particularly regarding people's quality of life. Special consideration will also be needed in regard to tranquillity.
- The techniques available to take action to improve the situation where it is bad or to preserve it where it is good; and
- The methodology to be used to undertake economic analysis.

In **Phase 2** we would aim to evaluate and prioritise options for action identified in phase 1 in terms of the costs and benefits including the synergies and conflicts with other Government priorities (such as other environmental, economic and social issues)

Finally, in **Phase 3** the Government would need to agree on the necessary policies to move towards the desired outcome, i.e. the completion of the National Ambient Noise Strategy.

Work has already started on the mapping of major roads. Mapping of other ambient noise sources will be taken forward under our commitments to comply with the EU Environmental Noise Directive. This work will take place during 2006. In parallel, it is a high priority for Defra to begin discussions with stakeholders on the strategy during 2006 with a view to agreeing high level objectives.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL NOISE DIRECTIVE

The Environmental Noise Directive (2002/49/EC) requires member states to produce noise maps for major road, rail, aviation and agglomerations of a specified size (the latter also incorporates ports and industries) by 2007. Its aim is to provide information on environmental noise and its affects on the general public through a system of mapping. Scotland, Wales and North Ireland are writing regulations and implementing the directive independently. The England mapping project is already underway and the regulations are in the final stages of construction with a technical consultation to be held shortly. Once these regulation are complete they will be presented to parliament. The noise maps will identify areas of both significant noise (that need to be reduced) and those of tranquillity (that need to be preserved). From this information action plans are required to be produced by the competent authority, as outlined in the regulations, in 2008. The Secretary of State will be responsible for producing both noise maps and action plans except for non-designated airports. One of the next steps that Defra will be working on is devising criteria and priorities that need to be addressed in the action plans.

4. PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE

Existing planning policy guidance is set out in Planning Policy Guidance 24 (PPG 24). This document provides advice on how planning systems should be used to minimise adverse impact of noise without placing unreasonable restrictions on development or adding unduly costs and administration burdens on business. The main thrust of this document is to ensure that either noise-sensitive development is separated from major noise sources or that new potentially noisy development is not placed amongst noise sensitive land use.

The Government is in the process of reviewing this guidance. This is part of a general policy, set out in the 2001 Green Paper: Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change, to review all planning guidance. The aim is to provide shorter and more succinct policy statements which are integrated with other strategies and plans and which are in tune with the Government's Policy to promote and achieve sustainable development.

There are further reasons for reviewing this guidance now. PPG24, was created ten years ago and the world has moved on. Increasingly there is a need to recognise that it is becoming difficult to reconcile Brownfield development policies with the current guidance to separate noisy and noise-sensitive developments. Furthermore, the World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines which underpin PPG 24 were revised in 2000. We want to take this opportunity to provide more technical guidance in a companion document to the policy statement. This technical guidance is likely to include:

- the measurement and assessment of noise
- sources of noise: civil aircraft, road, rail, industry, commercial, sport and recreation, MOD airfields and establishments
- noise receivers: residential, schools, hospitals, amenity areas,
- examples of planning conditions.
- since the PPG24 document was created and more technical guidance is required.

The policy statement for the PPS24 document has been agreed by the steering group and is currently awaiting legal clearance whereas the companion guide is currently under discussion in the

technical working group. Once these have been finalised they will be presented to a public consultation in 2006.