

WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION: A NOISE ACTION PLAN FOR WALES

RESPONSE FROM NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

Summary

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Noise Action Plan for Wales. We welcome the action plan, in particular its consideration of issues beyond the requirements of the Environmental Noise Directive.

We have responded to each question and provided any suggested amendments under question 5.

Consultation Response Form

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1. Does the draft noise action plan accurately describe the way in which noise is managed in Wales?

The action plan describes the current scope of the activities of Natural Resources Wales with regard to noise.

2. Do you agree with the proposed actions to be taken by bodies with responsibilities in Wales in the next five years?

With respect to Action 3.5(b) Natural Resources Wales will disseminate a new GIS data set to local authorities in November 2013 which will show potentially accessible natural green space across Wales according to the former Countryside Council for Wales criteria. This will enable local authorities to bring their own green space assessments across onto a modern base map which will be easier for them to update. Natural Resources Wales' GIS unit has agreed to assist local authorities in keeping this data set up to date as land use changes.

We strongly welcome Welsh Government's commitment to continue to offer a grant scheme to local authorities for tranquil urban green space improvements. We also welcome the commitment to review designated quiet areas that have failed to achieve Green Flag status five years after designation.

With respect to Action 3.5 (e), Natural Resources Wales will continue to work with the Green Flag sub-licence holder for Wales, Keep Wales Tidy, to ensure judges trained in Wales have a proper understanding of tranquillity as it relates to the Green Flag Awards. The Green Flag Awards provide independent assessment, by trained judges, of a green space's quality of management, and as such offer an unbiased and objective view as to whether a Tranquil Area is likely to fulfil its purpose.

With respect to actions 6.5(a)(ii) we will continually review our capability to discharge our regulatory noise responsibilities. Natural Resources Wales retains a seat on the Environment Agency noise sector group and now has a seat on the All Wales EPR Link group.

We welcome the links made between the planning and permitting processes, in Actions 6.5 (b) and (c), in relation to the location of industrial sites. Planning concerns relating to the location of industrial sites cannot be addressed through Environmental Permits.

3. Do you think that the draft action plan fulfils the requirements for the second round of noise action planning under the Environmental Noise Directive?

We think the action plan fulfils the second round of noise action planning as required by the Directive. We recognise that the requirements of the Directive are limited to the agglomerations and therefore welcome the broader scope of the Noise Action Plan for Wales, which considers the management of noise issues beyond the agglomerations.

4. Do you agree that the candidate quiet areas nominated by local authorities in Annexes C, D and E offer places of relative tranquillity for local residents, and should be identified as quiet areas for the purposes of the Environmental Noise Directive?

Some of the larger parks and green spaces are excellent candidate areas. Even the small spaces within inner urban areas will, relatively to local residents, be important places for quietness. We welcome the wider issues considered to have an effect on our perception of noise pollution, e.g. presence of nature, safety, visual quality.

It would be helpful for designated quiet areas to be presented on maps in relation to the wider green space network that many will be part of. This is particularly relevant for linear or corridor designated quiet areas, since they may be routes used on the way to other tranquil areas e.g. semi-natural places in open countryside beyond agglomerations.

We recommend that all Local Authorities use a common, recognised method for assessing the need for urban green spaces. This does not appear to be the case currently. We would also expect all Local Authorities' to commit to achieving Green Flag status for designated Quiet Areas, in line with Welsh Government's aspirations, or to provide a clear justification for deviation from this.

5. We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

3.2 Developing tranquil urban green space

We suggest that an introduction to NRW, similar to that provided on pg.51 or in the text box on pg.52, be included in this section.

pg. 23, para 3. We suggest amending this paragraph to reflect the formation of NRW to read:

"The Countryside Council for Wales recommended, prior to the creation of NRW, that no person should live more than 300 metres from their nearest natural green space. This is roughly the equivalent of a six-minute walk, and was adopted as an official target in the Welsh Assembly Government's 2005 Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity. The Countryside Council of Wales recommended a minimum of 0.25 hectares, and considered that provision should be made for at least 0.25 hectares of accessible natural green space per thousand people following a system of tiers into which sites of different sizes fit as follows:"

9.5, 10.5 and 11.5 Actions and long-term strategy

We suggest adding the following section under each of 9.5, 10.5 and 11.5:

"c) Natural Resources Wales will take into consideration priority areas, designated quiet areas and other tranquil urban areas when determining permits for industrial sites."