

Lord Taylor
Planning Guidance Review Group
Department of Communities and Local Government

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Dear Lord Taylor

I am writing as the chair of a working group on planning and noise set up by the Association of Noise Consultants (ANC), with regard to your review of the existing 6,000 pages of planning practice guidance which supports the implementation of national planning policy.

The ANC is a trade association for acoustic, noise and vibration consultancy practices in the UK – you can see our web site at <http://www.association-of-noise-consultants.co.uk/>. Membership has grown to over 116 member companies, including several international members and representing nearly eight hundred consultants. Established in 1973, the ANC seeks to raise the standards of acoustic consultancy and improve recognition of the vital role which good acoustics, and the management and mitigation of noise and vibration play in achieving good design and effective planning in the built and natural environment. Membership of the ANC is open to all acoustics consultancy practices able to demonstrate the necessary professional and technical competence. Virtually all members of the ANC actively contribute to the planning process and provide advice to a wide range of clients including developers, architects, designers, planners, statutory bodies, Central Government departments and local authorities.

Noise is often a material planning consideration, especially in those proposals which involve the generation of noise or could be affected by unacceptable levels of noise, and it is also a common ground for objection to development proposals. For many people noise represents one of the most immediate aspect of their living environment and can be a strong determinant in people's quality of life and social well-being. There is also increasing evidence that at high levels of exposure noise can also adversely affect physical health. In the context of the new planning policy, it is therefore evident that noise should be an important aspect of sustainable development and the planning system and the NPPF recognises this at section 123 where it sets out clear policy objectives as follows:

- avoid noise from giving rise to significant adverse impacts²⁷ on health and quality of life as a result of new development;
- mitigate and reduce to a minimum other adverse impacts²⁸ on health and quality of life arising from noise from new development, including through the use of conditions;
- recognise that development will often create some noise and existing businesses wanting to develop in continuance of their business should not have unreasonable restrictions put on them because of changes in nearby land uses since they were established;²⁸ and
- identify and protect areas of tranquillity which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason.

²⁷ See Explanatory Note to the Noise Policy Statement for England (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

²⁸ Subject to the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and other relevant law.

The ANC recognise that proper application of the noise elements of NPPF within the context of government policy on sustainable development should lead to good acoustic design and positive outcomes, ensuring that noise is considered alongside other relevant issues and not being considered in isolation. However, the ANC is concerned that the policies expressed in the NPPF will not be sufficiently addressed or could otherwise be seriously undermined unless Developers and Local Planning Authorities are given further guidance and support on:

- guidance on use and interpretation of the plethora of technical standards, guidelines and research on noise and vibration levels and dose responses which could be used to achieve the general aims contained within the NPPF, and
- best practice guidance on the design and control of new development so as to avoid and minimise significant adverse impacts from new development.

Both these requirements were reasonably well met by the existing guidance in PPG 24 – Planning and Noise (1994). Although the document was showing its age and was in need of a thorough review and update, it did provide a common baseline that Developers and Local Planning Authorities could work from in trying to manage the impacts from noise generating and on noise sensitive development. The ANC therefore considers that a replacement for PPG 24 is needed in order to facilitate the consistent and appropriate application of noise policy in the NPPF. In part this has already happened because PPG 24 was a hybrid of policy and technical advice and the NPPF has modernised and made policy on noise relevant to the needs of today and the foreseeable future; but has cancelled the existing technical advice on how this can be achieved in practice.

Consequently, the ANC believe that PPG24 should be replaced with new technical guidance on planning and noise in order to:

- ensure that noise is not used as a reason to refuse or overly constrain sustainable development and that noise and vibration impacts are suitably balanced against other positive attributes of a proposed scheme;
- ensure that noise is not properly taken into account at the appropriate time so as to appropriately inform decision making and to adequately mitigate adverse noise and vibration impacts;
- encourage good acoustic design within the context of wider planning and sustainable development objectives;
- avoid a fragmentary and piecemeal approach to the acoustic design and control;
- avoid unreasonable burdens being imposed on new development; and,
- avoid unnecessary obstruction to socially, and environmentally beneficial development and economic growth.

The ANC therefore ask if you would recommend that technical guidance on how noise and vibration can be dealt with in the planning system is required in order to achieve policy objectives in this area. We would also advocate the need for planning guidance on noise to be flexible enough to support local decision making and would strongly support a less prescriptive approach than was common in the interpretation of the previous advice of PPG 24.

The ANC are willing to support the DCLG in the development and preparation of new guidance on planning and noise. To this end we have already approached other stakeholders such as the Institute of Acoustics and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (EHPs typically consider the technical noise elements of a development proposal and make recommendations to their planning colleagues) and established in principle a working group able to assist in preparing new guidance for endorsement by government. This working group would be happy to collaborate with the DCLG to establish the gaps in technical guidance and help to draft advice to fill those gaps.

Yours sincerely

Dani Fiumicelli
Working Group Chairman