



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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Welsh Government  
Consultation Document

# Noise and Soundscape Plan for Wales 2023-2028

Consultation questions

Date of issue: 26 June 2023

Action required: Responses by 2 October 2023

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg hefyd / This document is also available in Welsh  
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg / We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh

## Overview

We would like to hear your views on Welsh Government policies concerning the airborne sound environment. We have set out a summary of the evidence, our current policies and our priorities for the next five years in the draft Noise and Soundscape Plan 2023-2028. Once adopted, this will serve as our national strategy on soundscapes until its next review and update, which is expected to occur in 2028.

## How to respond

This consultation document sets out a number of questions.

Responses may be submitted in any of the following ways:

Web: <https://gov.wales/consultations>

Email: [environmentalnoise@gov.wales](mailto:environmentalnoise@gov.wales)

Post: Noise and Soundscape Plan consultation  
Environmental Protection Division  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ

## Further information and related documents

Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.

## Contact details

Please see above.

This document is also available in Welsh: <https://llyw.cymru/ymgyngoriadau>

## **UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)**

The Welsh Government will be data controller for Welsh Government consultations and for any personal data you provide as part of your response to the consultation.

Welsh Ministers have statutory powers they will rely on to process this personal data which will enable them to make informed decisions about how they exercise their public functions. The lawful basis for processing information in this data collection exercise is our public task; that is, exercising our official authority to undertake the core role and functions of the Welsh Government (Art 6(1)(e)).

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about or planning future consultations. In the case of joint consultations this may also include other public authorities. Where the Welsh Government undertakes further analysis of consultation responses then this work may be commissioned to be carried out by an accredited third party (e.g. a research organisation or a consultancy company). Any such work will only be undertaken under contract. Welsh Government's standard terms and conditions for such contracts set out strict requirements for the processing and safekeeping of personal data.

In order to show that the consultation was carried out properly, the Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then redact them before publishing.

You should also be aware of our responsibilities under Freedom of Information legislation and that the Welsh Government may be under a legal obligation to disclose some information.

If your details are published as part of the consultation response then these published reports will be retained indefinitely. Any of your data held otherwise by Welsh Government will be kept for no more than three years.

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- to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) who is our independent regulator for data protection

For further details about the information the Welsh Government holds and its use, or if you want to exercise your rights under the UK GDPR, please see contact details below:

Data Protection Officer:  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ  
e-mail: [dataprotectionofficer@gov.wales](mailto:dataprotectionofficer@gov.wales)

The contact details for the Information  
Commissioner's Office are:  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF  
Tel: 0303 123 1113  
Website: <https://ico.org.uk/>

## **Consultation Response Form**

Your name: Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive of the Design Commission for Wales, for and behalf of the Board of Directors

Organisation (if applicable): Design Commission for Wales

Email / telephone number: [cad@dcfw.org](mailto:cad@dcfw.org)

Your address: Design Commission for Wales, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff, CF10 5FL

## Introduction

**Noise**, meaning unwanted or harmful sound, affects health and well-being in a number of ways, including sleep disturbance, annoyance, impacts on learning, decreased productivity, hearing loss and increased risk of cardiovascular disease. It can arise from a wide variety of human activities including domestic, commercial and transportation sources.

**Soundscape** is defined as the acoustic (or sound) environment as perceived or experienced and/or understood by a person or people, in context. It includes the sounds people do want to hear as well as the noises they don't. [Planning Policy Wales](#) lists **appropriate soundscapes**, meaning the right sound environment in the right time and place, among our National Sustainable Placemaking Outcomes.

In 2018, we published the [Noise and Soundscape Action Plan 2018-2023](#) (NSAP), which reframed noise policy in Wales in terms of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ("the WFG Act"). It resulted in Wales being recognised as the first nation to include soundscapes in national policy, and it was referenced in the United Nations Environment Programme's [Frontiers 2022](#) report.

Earlier this year, we introduced the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Bill, which will require us to produce a national strategy on soundscapes. In 2018, we did this voluntarily in the form of the NSAP, but we believe giving the new Noise and Soundscape Plan 2023-2028 a more solid legal foundation will raise its profile and increase its effectiveness in guiding informed decision-making.

The draft Noise and Soundscape Plan 2023-2028 retains and refines the core messages of the NSAP, which include:

- our ambition being appropriate soundscapes;
- our commitment to embed the five ways of working in the WFG Act; and
- our commitment to join up action on noise and air quality wherever it makes sense to do so.

The draft Plan covers new topics that have come to the fore within the last five years, such as issues around remote working, aural diversity, air source heat pumps, changes in speed limits, and fireworks. It also sets out what we have delivered over the last five years, such as noise mitigation works completed on the trunk road network.

Developments in planning policy and guidance, notably work towards publishing and implementing a new Technical Advice Note (TAN 11) and related soundscape design guidance, on which we recently consulted, are also included in the Plan, as are our latest noise maps and results from the National Survey for Wales 2021-22.

People will experience the benefits of a transition from traditional noise control to a more inclusive soundscape-based approach when they can see public bodies taking on board local communities' views on their sound environments, in terms of both what they value and what they think needs to be improved.

## Consultation questions

### Question 1: Appropriate soundscapes

Our goal is to create the right sound environment in the right place at the right time. We recognise that different people will take different views as to what is 'right' for a given context. For decision-makers it will often come down to striking the right balance between competing viewpoints, whilst maintaining a diversity of sound environments in our villages, towns and cities, so that there is somewhere to suit everyone.

- a) What do you think would be the characteristics of a village, town or city that had achieved "appropriate soundscapes"?

Different places have different characteristics and soundscapes. One of the attractions of cities is that they are busy and lively, and as a result they are noisy. Villages can offer a quiet and tranquil environment, with a strong connection to nature. Towns are somewhere in between, and their soundscape will vary depending on their size and character. Therefore, what is an 'appropriate soundscape' for one place may not be for somewhere else. The achievement of a generic 'appropriate' soundscape may therefore be illusive in practice and over time. Taking steps to reduce intrusive, jarring and unacceptable sound and levels thereof might be a helpful means of approaching the issue in practice. The Placemaking Wales Charter sets out the characteristics for the development of high-quality places for the benefit of their communities. The charter promotes places with a mix of uses and, as appropriate to the location, higher density development. These are important characteristics that will inform the soundscape of a place and require good design to create a good environment for the people living and working there. The charter also promotes the prioritisation of walking, cycling and public transport, which can help reduce the noise caused by vehicles.

- b) What are the main barriers or obstacles to achieving appropriate soundscapes in reality?

Vehicles are a significant generator of noise. Traffic disproportionately affects people living towards the centre of towns and cities, particularly disadvantages groups. The new 20mph speed limit and move towards electric vehicles is helping reduce the noise from vehicles, yet our reliance on cars is not reducing and the low density, edge of town developments being built are creating car-dependant places that are adding more cars onto the roads. It is also important to note that other forms of transport create noise of an intrusive nature or level. Rail station environments both interior and exterior can be acoustically difficult for all users given the combination of noise. Well designed environments that help reduce poor acoustic environments are essential.

c) How should we seek to overcome those barriers?

Dense, mixed-use places are environments where useful things, places, and people are brought closer together. This means people can walk, cycle and use public transport rather than being reliant on travelling by car, which can reduce the noise problems caused by vehicles. Good design and materials selection are vital along with integrating greening and soft landscape interventions which also have advantages and can be combined with integrated SuDS to make contributions to nature and biodiversity.

Dense and mixed-use places require very good design to bring potentially conflicting aspects of everyday existence together and to create a better quality of life. For example, the traditional urban building pattern of enclosed blocks is a great way of accommodating density and a mix of uses in a way that creates a protected acoustic space. The surrounding wall of the buildings shelters the inside space from the noise in the streets. This can allow people to sit-out and sleep with an open window without being disturbed by traffic.



The Enclosed Block – Protected Acoustic Space (Soft City: Sim/Island Press)

Good noise insulation is required in higher density and mixed-use developments.

The design of streets is important in naturally slowing traffic speeds as is urban greening.

## Question 2: Applying the five ways of working

The Welsh Government expects public bodies subject to the WFG Act – and encourages everybody else – to follow the five ways of working in that Act when carrying out activities that may affect soundscapes. These ways of working are:



- looking to the long term so that we do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs;
- taking an integrated approach;
- involving a diversity of the population in the decisions affecting them;
- working with others in a collaborative way to find shared sustainable solutions; and
- acting to prevent problems from occurring or getting worse.

a) What do you think this would look like in practice?

Really good design involves systemic, iterative processes that lend themselves to the five ways of working. Soundscape needs to be considered as part of that process and of the placemaking approach advocated in Planning Policy Wales. This also requires a strategic and planned approach to how our villages, towns and cities grow and evolve. This needs to be led by local authorities, rather than reacting to the development industry, with proper engage with local communities. Good design is needed to realise these objectives.

b) Can you give examples of how a public body in Wales might demonstrate all five ways of working when taking a decision that is likely to affect people's sound environment?

Local planning authorities can use the five ways of working in planning for their towns and neighbourhoods. This is more than taking a decision on a planning application. It requires proactive planning from the identification of how a place grows to setting out the parameters for the site design. All these decisions will affect people's sound environment in existing and new places.

### **Question 3: Aural diversity and the sound generated by human activities**

The Welsh Government recognises that everyone experiences sounds differently, and some people are more affected by noise than others, for example people with autism or those who work night shifts. But we also recognise the need to treat fairly and consistently those people who carry out activities that generate sounds or who may enjoy hearing those sounds. We don't want a Wales that is silent.

We have suggested that part of the solution to balancing people's various needs and expectations is to encourage a diversity of sound environments across our communities, and to make those responsible for bringing about a change responsible for managing that change. (This is sometimes referred to as the "agent of change principle".) However, these have their limitations.

How do you think society should address in a fair and balanced way the dilemma of sound generated in the course of people's lives being experienced by other people as unwanted noise?

This is mostly a societal and cultural issue. There are times and places when it is acceptable to make different noises. If these norms are not respected it can cause tension between neighbours. The design of places can help minimise this conflict.

#### **Question 4: Noise and air quality**

Road vehicle exhaust pipes and tyre/road interactions; aircraft in flight; diesel trains; extractor fans; construction; excavation; demolition; waste handling; industrial combustion sources; diesel generators; fireworks. All generate both air and noise pollution, and broadly speaking the air and noise pollution they generate affect most the same people, namely those who live their lives closest to the sources. The Welsh Government is therefore committed to ensure that national and local action to improve air quality seeks also to maximise the potential benefits to soundscapes.

- a) Which actions being taken by the Welsh Government and local authorities over the next five years to improve air quality in Wales do you think present the greatest opportunities to deliver additional benefits in terms of noise reduction and better soundscapes?

The promotion of active travel and the creation of environments that reduce and slow traffic, along with the transition to electric vehicles.

Far better design in infrastructure of all types – transport, energy, retail and logistics are all important.

- b) What more do you think we should be doing (if anything) to link up noise and air quality policy in Wales?

As the two issues are so interlinked, the policies should be completely integrated.

#### **Question 5: The draft Noise and Soundscape Plan 2023-2028**

The draft Noise and Soundscape Plan accompanies this consultation document. It contains Welsh Government policies and information relating to the sound environment that we would like devolved public authorities in Wales to have regard to when exercising functions that may affect soundscapes in Wales over the next five years.

Soundscape approaches are an emerging discipline, but one that is very much in keeping with the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. By promoting soundscape approaches we are at the forefront of moving away

from a purely data-driven approach to noise management, to one that acknowledges the diversity of our population and the importance of considering context and involving communities in decisions that affect them.

We accept that neither local authorities nor private sector consultancies in Wales currently have the level of expertise and capacity in soundscape techniques that we would like to see them possess in the medium-to-long term. However, if skills and experience relating to soundscape increase over the course of the next five years, a revised national soundscapes strategy in 2028 could be more ambitious in terms of its expectations of practitioners than the one we are consulting on this year.

Do you think we are striking the right balance for now between avoiding creating new burdens for public authorities and businesses in Wales, and driving the transition from traditional noise management practices to a more soundscape-centred approach that puts people and context at the heart of decision-making?

The transition to a more soundscape-centred approach should be accelerated by providing resources to invest in the right skills for public authorities and businesses.

#### **Question 6: The draft Noise and Soundscape Plan 2023-2028 (continued)**

The draft Noise and Soundscape Plan 2023-2028 contains updated Welsh Government policies for the types of sound previously considered in the Noise and Soundscape Action Plan 2018-2023, such as transport, industry and the sounds of nature, along with new sections covering other types of sound that have come to the fore in the last five years, such as fireworks, air source heat pumps and the sounds people experience when working from home.

- a) Are there any important points relating to Wales's airborne sound environment that we have missed?

The plan should reflect the importance of mixed-use and higher density development, and the important role of design in successfully achieving these forms of places and appropriate soundscapes.

- b) For the topics that we have covered, do you disagree with any of the items that we have outlined in the draft Plan?

No.

#### **Question 7: Expert advice on soundscapes**

It has been suggested that the Welsh Government should establish an expert

advisory panel on soundscapes, to inform its policies in this area.

Imagine we have established an expert advisory panel on soundscapes to help us implement our current strategy and develop policies to include in our next one in 2028, and suppose that panel had the capacity to advise us on one big question relating to noise and soundscape management each calendar year.

- a) What would be your top five questions for the panel to consider in the five calendar years from 2024 to 2028?

How can the planning system plan positively for appropriate soundscapes as part of a wider strategic placemaking approach for different places?

How can good design be integrated fully in different environments to improve acoustic experiences for all?

How can mixed-use and higher density development ensure design which optimises appropriate soundscapes?

How can we reduce the dependence on the car and create places where more people walk, cycle and use public transport?

How can local authorities and consultancies be supported in the move to a soundscape-centred approach?

- b) Are there any items that you feel need to be prioritised, and if so, why?

Measures to reduce the noise and air pollution from vehicles, including measures to encourage more walking and cycling.

### **Question 8: Welsh language**

We would like to know your views on the effects that the Welsh Government's policies on noise and soundscapes would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

No comment.

### **Question 9: Welsh language (continued)**

Please also explain how you believe the Welsh Government's policies on noise and

soundscapes could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

No comment.

**Question 10: Any other comments**

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:

No further comments.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: