



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

## 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.

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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/>



Rhwydwaith  
**CYMUNEDAU MWY DIOGEL CYMRU**  
**WALES SAFER COMMUNITIES**  
Network

## Consultation Response Form

Your name: Sarah Capstick

Organisation (if applicable): Wales Safer Communities Network (members from Policing, Councils, Fire and Rescue, Probation and Third Sector)

Email / telephone number: [saferscommunities@wlga.gov.uk](mailto:saferscommunities@wlga.gov.uk) /  
[sarah.capstick@wlga.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.capstick@wlga.gov.uk)

Your address: Wales Safer Communities Network, Welsh Local Government Association, One Canal Parade, Dumballs Road, Cardiff CF10 5BF

## 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”?**

From a Community Safety perspective it would be that the soundscape allows enough sound that people feel safe and able to enjoy the environment. This may result in vehicle sounds assisting pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders to have sound as well as visual warnings to prevent potential accidents. It could also include a reduced amount of reporting of noise nuisance and noise or environmental anti-social behaviour.

The soundscape within any area is unlikely to be consistent, for example different areas may be closer to parks and green spaces and others to major trunk roads. There may be times when the soundscape changes for more across the population, for example around the 5 November or at different times due to community or private events. As a result we do not feel able to provide a response to what is an appropriate soundscape in a context which is in constant flux. We know the changes that came through Covid-19, and we don't know what changes may occur due to technology developments or changes in health, mental health and tolerances for a range of activities.

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

Main barriers may be linked to financial costs of potential solutions or of a solution leading to higher costs that puts it outside of the financial scope especially with the cost of living issues individuals, businesses and communities are currently struggling with across Wales.

Poor planning or understanding may mean that mitigations have to be put in after which are often more costly.

People, whilst there can be legislation and measures put in place there will always be an element of personal choice in how much noise is made, and what are acceptable levels will also vary. Temporary farm noises caused by harvest or land maintenance may carry and lead to complaints when in a city the noise would be less noticeable.

**c) How should we seek to overcome those barriers?**

Awareness for people of what is acceptable and of what they are responsible for as individuals, businesses and communities. This should also include ensuring that people are aware of their rights to notify of breaches and funding enforcement for planning and environmental enforcement.

**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?**

There are many examples of how this can work in practice but there are also barriers which need to be addressed. The clearest of which is the cost and impact of budget restraints and the increasing costs caused by the cost of living issues currently being seen. Due to these financial constraints collaboration can be challenging when scrutiny is at an organisational or public body level. The political landscape with election cycles where future administrations spending is not always in the power of the existing administration, for example Welsh Government, Local Authority Councillors, Town Councils, and Police and Crime Commissioners as well as UK Government, which can lead to short term approaches.

Collaboration and partnership working should include the reserved public bodies such as Policing, as well as those devolved, as breaches may result in prosecution and therefore engagement with the criminal justice system.

**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?**

Community safety applies the five ways of working in its problem solving methods, with a focus on prevention which requires a longer term focus involving individuals from across a diverse range of the population whilst working together. One example of this is the ongoing joint work around fireworks and anti-social behaviour which incorporates awareness raising, the use of tools and powers by the local authority and or police and engagement with community groups and the retail sector.



### **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?**

Noise nuisance is one form of anti-social behaviour which can be part of neighbourly disagreements, harassment or hate crime and therefore needs to be taken seriously and dealt with consistently. The use of the Noise App or other electronic solutions may allow for more accurate reporting, reducing false reporting which can be for a range of reasons, but also ensuring that people understand what is not acceptable. A one off party should be managed differently to parties happening every week or for multiple evenings.

Community cohesion may assist as improved relationships may help with conversations to notify of noise events – such as fireworks, party, DIY – or allow any potential issues to be discussed, mitigated or resolved without relationship breakdown.

### **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?**

We do not have any view as some may improve for the short term, such as fireworks, but others may have a more consistent and long term change. Therefore, we don't think it is possible to do a comparison. From a community safety perspective fireworks are a known nuisance, health risk and fire risk but as acknowledged in the document legislation on fireworks is a reserved matter.

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

We have no suggestions in response to this question.

**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?**

We agree in principle that the approach may be balanced for the current economic climate, however technologies may lead to alternative approaches that may be relevant ahead of the next plan and therefore there should be the opportunity to monitor and use technology that will further improve the soundscapes across Wales.

The UK Government Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan and other measures and legislation are also likely to have some impact and may go further than the plan as proposed.

### **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?**

None that we are aware of at this time.

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

As the Wales Safer Communities Network represents community safety professionals we are pleased to note that anti-social behaviour has been incorporated. There were no items outlined that we disagreed with.

### **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?**

1. How will these changes benefit individuals, businesses and/or communities?
2. Will they make individuals and communities feel safer?
3. Are there any unexpected consequences not considered?

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

None in regard to developing an expert advisory panel.

### **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?**

We are not aware of any positive or negative effects that the plan being changed to enable increased Welsh language could cause.

### **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.**

We are not aware of any positive or negative effects that the plan being changed to enable increased Welsh language could cause.

### **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:

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: