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By email: shawj@parliament.co.uk

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Dear Jonathan Shaw

I am writing to ask for clarification regarding progress with the development of a Noise Strategy for England.

At the Quiet Conference last week it was encouraging to hear you advocating that local authorities should look to each other for examples of good practice, rather than necessarily seeking advice from central government. As the head of a membership based charity that represents approximately 60% of English local authorities, I can whole-heartedly confirm that many of our members are indeed involved in developing and applying innovative solutions and in taking leadership in the field of environmental protection. Just last week I was speaking at the launch of the Nottinghamshire Air Quality Strategy, which is the result of local authorities across the county coming together to address air quality and climate change issues in an integrated and holistic way. This is an approach we are encouraging other clusters of local authorities to adopt.

Having said this, it is also essential to have a clear national noise policy to enable local and regional authorities to set noise priorities in the context of other environmental issues where there are existing national frameworks. The long promised National Noise Strategy should be an essential statement of Government commitment, not just to fulfilling the requirements of the Environmental Noise Directive, but also to tackling noise in neighbourhoods and preventing the incursion of noise into existing areas of quiet – both urban and rural (an expectation raised the Rural White Paper).

At the Quiet Conference we heard of the innovative approach being taken by the London Borough of Westminster to deal with noise complaints. The same local authority is also planning to appoint a panel of noise experts to advise on the development of a noise strategy for the Borough. I fully understand why Westminster has taken this step, given the lack of certainty and confidence surrounding Defra's commitment to develop a national Noise Strategy. Indeed, our organisation has been asking government for such a strategy for over eight years now. In 2000 Michael Meacher replied to our request by saying "I will be very disappointed if we cannot publish a substantial consultation document on ambient noise within a year". We are

still waiting for the promised national strategy for England, with the hope that this would be rolled out to include the UK as a whole.

Indeed, in March 2004 the Mayor of London produced an Ambient Noise Strategy for Greater London, required under the Greater London Authority Act 1999. Issues identified included better planning and design of new development, quieter road surfaces, and traffic management measures. All these reinforce the need for noise to be integrated into existing local and regional action – in development plans, transport plans and local environmental protection. These actions need, however, to be informed by 'strategic' analysis and guidance by Government, so that noise can be given its due place alongside other environmental issues, which are the subject of national frameworks.