

## Quiet Areas - England

**NSCA** (National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection)

NSCA has been working for a cleaner, quieter, healthier world since 1898.

From 18<sup>th</sup> of October 2007 our name will change to **Environmental Protection UK**.

### **Introduction**

With increasing demand for all forms of transport and development spreading across space and time, there is continued erosion of areas that are free from the intrusion of noise created by road, rail and air travel, industry, power generation and mechanised and large scale recreational activity. However, new technologies also offer more environmental protection opportunities. In recognition of the potential for the impact of noise on health and quality of life to increase, the EU Environmental Noise Directive 2002/49/EC (END) sets out to reduce the impact of noise on citizens by managing noise sources and protecting areas that are currently quiet from the intrusion of disturbing and harmful noise.

### **What is a Quiet Area?**

Under the END:

- A Quiet Area in an **agglomeration**<sup>1</sup> is a space in an urban area that is delimited as such by a competent authority and, for example, is not exposed to noise levels above a certain limit.
- A Quiet Area in **open country** is an area that is undisturbed by noise from traffic, industry or recreational activities.

### **Towards Quiet Areas in the UK**

Under the Environmental Noise Regulations (England) 2006, (and equivalent regulations for Scotland, Wales and N Ireland), which transpose the Environmental Noise Directive:

- The Secretary of State must identify, in the form of regulations, Quiet Areas for first round agglomerations<sup>1</sup> no later than 30<sup>th</sup> September 2007
- No later than 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012 for second round agglomerations
- No later than 30<sup>th</sup> September in subsequent relevant years (ie every 5 years thereafter) must identify quiet areas if he considers it necessary

These requirements relate only to identifying quiet areas in large agglomerations (urban areas) and as such, do not provide any protection for quiet areas in open country or smaller populated areas.

### **NSCA View**

Ideally, Quiet Areas would be identified locally, with local authorities drawing on their extensive knowledge of local conditions and applying national guideline criteria sensitively having regard to local needs. This would be informed by full local democratic input and public participation, in a process integrated with their other

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linked responsibilities, including producing development and other local plans. The centralising approach in the 2006 Regulations, which makes the Secretary of State 'competent authority' for most purposes under the Directive, risks divorcing Quiet Areas policy from the existing planning, design and management processes which can make it a practical, cost-effective reality.

However, under 2006 Regulations there is very little time left for identifying first round Quiet Areas in agglomerations. Defra commissioned a report from TRL<sup>2</sup> which reviews existing research and makes recommendations on methods for identifying quiet areas.

There is, as yet, no legislative driver other than the END requirement to protect quiet areas in open country. The CPRE has mapped 'tranquillity' in rural areas, based on extensive work with users of such areas. Noise is one of the criteria by which tranquillity is measured and proved to be one of the most significant.<sup>3</sup>

Having considered the timescales set by the regulations and available knowledge, NSCA believe that the following is a practical way forward to designation of quiet urban areas, which fulfil the needs of local populations, and can be protected into the future. While there is no legislative deadline for protecting quiet areas in open country, in order to prevent further intrusion of noise into existing rural areas of quiet we believe work to identify these must be commenced at the earliest opportunity.

- 1. By September 30<sup>th</sup> 2007, the Secretary of State to designate a first round of Quiet Areas in agglomerations as:**

### **Quiet Urban Areas Nationally Designated (QUANDs)**

*Rationale:* These can be identified using data sets currently available, which identify parks and other public open spaces in urban areas, many of which are of historic interest, and can readily be identified as needing protection from noise. This designation should be well publicised, to act as a driver to highlight the importance of protecting areas from noise.

- 2. The Secretary of State to provide a framework for protecting:  
Quiet Urban Areas of Local or Regional Importance  
(QUALIs and QUARIs)**

*Rationale:* Because QUANDs would have been identified on the basis of simple quantitative data, as proposed in the TRL<sup>2</sup> report, they would not necessarily include areas which are qualitatively important in the local or regional context. For example, an area could provide an important oasis of calm in an inner urban area, even if it did not meet absolute quantitative criteria. It is well established that people's perception of noise tends to be relative, i.e. influenced by local context. National Guidance should thus allow local authorities to adapt criteria to local circumstances, take account of qualitative factors, including assessment of soundscape quality, and include QUALIs and QUARIs in public consultation on future local and regional development plans. Technical work on Urban Tranquillity should also be commissioned to sit alongside that commissioned by CPRE on Rural Tranquillity. The framework should be subject to review based on practical experience allowing for a refined framework to be in place for the identification of the 2<sup>nd</sup> round areas in 2012.

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### **3. The Secretary of State to set in motion a consultative process to identify Quiet Rural Areas (QRAs) of National, Regional and Local Importance, so that criteria are in place by 2012.**

*Rationale:* It would be inconsistent, and unjust not to develop policy for quiet rural areas in parallel with policy for urban areas. Indeed, it is important to recall that the commitment to producing a national noise strategy at all was first made in a Rural White Paper<sup>4</sup>. It has been acknowledged that the specific noise criteria within the CPRE's Tranquil Areas definition require development. Government should commission technical work, including on issues of soundscape quality, to develop guidance to support local and regional authorities in working with their communities to identify QRAs of different levels of importance, having regard to their context and local significance.

### **4. The Secretary of State to provide guidance on the protection of Quiet Areas**

In addition to designating quiet areas for protection, there also needs to be consideration of and guidance on the protection of quiet areas – as quiet is very difficult to reinstate once lost. This guidance should form part of a package to support noise action planning – as care must be taken that measures to reduce noise in hotspots, while they may displace some noise, should not impact on areas that are currently quiet.

### **Notes**

1. The Identification of Noise Sources (England) Regulations 2007, SI415  
[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/uksi\\_20070415\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/uksi_20070415_en.pdf)

23 urban areas of dense population over 250,000 have been identified in England – Blackpool, Bristol, Brighton, Bournemouth, Coventry, Hull, Leicester, Liverpool and Birkenhead, London, Manchester, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Preston, Reading, Sheffield, Southampton, Southend, Teeside, The Potteries, Tyneside, West Midlands, West Yorkshire

18 Airports have been identified in England – Birmingham International, Blackpool Squire's Gate, Bournemouth, Bristol Lulsgate, Gloucestershire, Leeds Bradford, Liverpool John Lennon, London Biggin Hill, London City, London Gatwick, London Heathrow, London Luton, London Stansted, Manchester, Newcastle International, Nottingham East Midlands, Shoreham, Southampton Eastleigh

2. Research into Quiet Areas: Review and Recommendations, P.A Morgan, P.G.Abbott, G R Watts, CA Burke, C Harmer, TRL Limited  
Research into Quiet Area: Recommendations for Identification  
PA Morgan, PG Abbott, GR Watts, CA Burke, C Harmer, TRL Limited

3. Saving Tranquil Places, CPRE - <http://www.cpre.org.uk/news/view/368>

5. The Rural White Paper, 'Our Countryside: the Future, 2000' committed Government to publish 'a measure of change in countryside quality, including such issues as biodiversity, tranquillity, heritage and landscape character.....' ( paragraph 9.5.2).

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