# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Noise and soundscape action plan consultation** |
| **DATE** | **11 July 2018** |
| **BY** | **Hannah Blythyn, Minister for Environment** |

Today I am launching a 12-week public consultation on a draft noise and soundscape action plan for Wales for the period 2018-2023. This document replaces the current noise action plan for Wales, which the Welsh Government adopted in 2013. Environmental noise legislation requires national noise action plans to be reviewed and revised, where necessary, at least every five years.

Noise – meaning unwanted or harmful sound – can, in the short term, disrupt sleep and increase levels of stress, irritation and fatigue, as well as interfering with important activities such as learning, working and relaxing. Ultimately, it reduces the quality of people’s lives. Exposure to loud sounds can cause hearing damage, while exposure to noise in the long term can increase the risk of hypertension-related illnesses and cardiovascular disease.

A question on noise was included in the National Survey for Wales for the first time in 2017-18. People were asked whether they had regularly been bothered by noise from outside their home in the previous 12 months. 24% said they had. Of these:

* 36% said the noise was caused by neighbours inside their homes;
* 47% by neighbours outside their homes; and
* 45% by traffic, businesses, or factories.

Other findings from the National Survey relating to noise are presented in an annex to the consultation draft of the noise and soundscape action plan. These include the finding that “people were more likely to be bothered by noise if they lived in materially deprived households or in deprived areas.”

Whilst acknowledging the negative impact of noise on our society, we also recognise that our lives are enhanced by conversation, laughter and cheering, music and the sounds of nature. A healthy acoustic environment is more than simply the absence of unwanted sound. The term “soundscape” refers to the acoustic environment as perceived, experienced or understood by people in any given context, and this includes beneficial and neutral sounds as well as noise.

The noise and soundscape action plan is the Welsh Government’s central noise policy document, and has been produced collaboratively with local authorities and other public bodies. It outlines the Welsh public sector’s strategic policy direction in relation to noise and soundscape management for the next five years. It has a broader focus than just clamping down on the decibels, recognising that we also need to create appropriate soundscapes – the right acoustic environment in the right time and place. Towns and cities should contain a variety of soundscapes appropriate to the land use.

Key points in the draft plan include:

* The Welsh Government expects public bodies subject to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to follow the five ways of working contained in that Act when managing noise and soundscapes.
* By defining environmental noise as an airborne pollutant within our Clean Air Programme, we will create and pursue any opportunities to further align noise/soundscape and air quality policy and regulation in Wales over the course of the next five years, in order to achieve multiple benefits from our actions.
* We will build upon the new air quality and soundscape content of Planning Policy Wales as we take forward Wales’ first statutory National Development Framework and produce further guidance on air and soundscape quality to assist local planning authorities in Wales. In particular, we will conduct a detailed review of Technical Advice Note (TAN) 11: Noise with a view to replacing it with a new TAN addressing air quality and soundscape.
* New arrangements for providing environment grants, including for improving the provision of tranquil green space in the built environment, will commence during the 2019/20 financial year.
* The Welsh Government will prioritise sites on the motorway and trunk road network for treatment, based on ranking the sites according to noise values, numbers of homes affected, complaints received in the five years to June 2018, proximity of network improvement works, cost and deliverability. We will develop a programme of works to treat the most pressing locations with mitigation measures such as noise barriers and low noise surfacing. Decisions on exactly which locations will receive mitigation in the next five years are, however, beyond the scope of the overarching noise and soundscape action plan document, and will be taken by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport.
* Through its membership of the British Standards Institution’s noise committees, the Welsh Government will continue to work to ensure that public bodies in Wales get clear and appropriate technical guidance to help them do their job.
* We will continue to work with noise regulators in Wales to keep legislation and guidance relating to neighbourhood noise up to date and provide clear and accurate information to members of the public on how to make a complaint about noise nuisance in their area.

I would welcome any views on the proposed content of the 2018 noise and soundscape action plan. The consultation closes on 3 October.