



# “The Occasional Echo”

Vol 1: July 2011

*This is the first of my occasional information bulletins; I won't promise a monthly issue, as I'll only send out news and information as and when something interesting or informative happens. I'm also going to make each one topic-specific as it's the only way to get all the info in without it becoming too un-wieldy and tedious. I hope you find it useful, informative, interesting or, preferably all three. Please do let me have any suggestions for improvements. If you have any news, views, comments or other feedback, I would be delighted to hear from you or to include these in my next bulletin – contact me:*

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This week's edition is **Policy & Guidance**-specific:

- **National Policy Statements for Energy**
- **Environmental Noise Mapping**
- **Noise Policy Statement for England**
- **School Acoustics – IoA responds to James Report**
- **New Scottish Guidance on Planning and Noise**
- **Draft National Planning Policy Framework**
- **Natural Environment White Paper**
- **Sounding off, observations and comments, specific or general**

July saw the release of six [National Policy Statements \(NPSs\)](#) for Energy. DECC says that “*The energy NPSs set out national policy against which proposals for major energy projects will be assessed and decided on by the Infrastructure Planning Commission*”. Noise is addressed generically at Section 5.11 of the over-arching NPS, EN-1 whilst sector-specific noise guidance is provided in EN-3 *Renewable Energy* and EN-5 *Electricity Networks*.



[Directive 2002/49/EC](#) (the Environmental Noise Directive [END]) aims to produce common noise measurement and control strategies across member States. Implemented in the UK through the [Environmental Noise \(England\) Regulations 2006](#), with separate Regulations for [Wales](#), [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#), it is certain that increased emphasis on the adverse secondary health effects of long-term environmental noise exposure will lead to increasingly stringent planning requirements on Development; it has already influenced new planning guidance in Scotland (see below). Further details can be found on the DEFRA [noise mapping](#) web site.

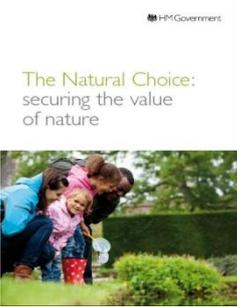
Following on from the above, 2010 saw the publication of the Government's [Noise Policy Statement for England](#). This long-awaited document comprises a 'Vision', 6 paragraphs of relatively succinct text, 3 aims, 5 guiding principles and 4 pages of explanatory notes and “*sets out the long term vision of government noise policy, to promote good health and a good quality of life through the management of noise*. It does not attempt to provide detailed technical advice and, being a high-level strategic document, leaves much to individual interpretation - will be interesting to see how many variations individual local planning authorities come up with.

In April, the Institute of Acoustics strongly criticised the [Review of Education Capital](#) led by Sebastian James for failure to recognise the importance of good noise conditions in classrooms. Professor Trevor Cox, Institute President, said: “*Acoustics barely rates a mention in the 105 pages of the report which we find absolutely incredible given the crucial role it plays in the classroom .... There is a wealth of scientific evidence to show that external and internal noise affects children's performance in literacy, numeracy and memory tasks, and that these effects can be reduced by good acoustic design. Children with special needs are more seriously affected by noise than others – the impact on their performance in spelling and reading is three times that of the impact on other children*”. The IoA will continue to lobby Government on this issue.



Earlier this year, Scotland issued new guidance on noise and planning; Planning Advice Note (PAN) [1/2011](#) and its associated [Technical Advice Note \(TAN\)](#) replace PAN 56 which utilised much of the NEC assessment method presented in [Planning Policy Guidance Note \(PPG\) 24](#) as used in England, but which is now 17 years old and in need of updating. The new guidance is based around the Environmental Noise Directive (see above) and separates generic guidance from technical acoustic assessment advice. Some describe it as “woolly” whilst others prefer “flexible” - the proof will be in how useful the document proves to be in future planning applications.

There has been much discussion recently about the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). For noise, current guidance such as PPG 24 "Planning and noise" may be replaced by the Framework and the Advisory Group suggested appropriate wording but it is very generic – as one commentator recently observed, the reason we have prescriptive regulation of environmental issues (including noise) is because it is needed. 'Simplifying' the planning process may make life easier for planners, but at what cost to the environment and local communities? DECC's consultation is open for responses until 17 October 2011 and there are also some interesting comments on the Planning Blog.



And finally, alongside and complimentary to all the above, the Government has published a White Paper "The natural choice: securing the value of nature" (the 'Natural Environment White Paper'). Environmental features are treated as "services" which are valued through cost benefit analysis – the UK National Ecosystem Assessment, released by DEFRA earlier this year. Local communities will be encouraged to protect locally environmentally valuable resources through Green Areas Designation and through greater use of urban green spaces. The White Paper states: "*We are committed to delivering the Noise Policy Statement for England that promotes good health and quality of life. As part of this, we will work with local authorities to establish mechanisms for formally identifying and protecting urban Quiet Areas, so that people living in cities can benefit from access to areas of relative quiet for relaxation and contemplation*".

#### **Sounding off:**

It's all about timing: I sometimes receive requests, in Autumn or in the middle of winter, for a noise survey and assessment to support a planning application, to be submitted in a few weeks time. Noise surveys are constrained by weather conditions, requiring dry conditions and average wind speeds below 5 metres per second (m/s or m.s<sup>-1</sup>) or approximately 11 miles per hour (mph) for those still working in old money. Why? Because wet roads lead to higher tyre noise, wet surfaces reflect noise more effectively than dry, heavy rainfall can add to the overall noise and wind across the top of a sound level meter's microphone can significantly increase measured noise levels.

Similarly, for design matters such as school acoustics; if presented with a completed and submitted architectural plan which can't be changed but which doesn't meet the acoustic requirements of BB93, we (and the client) are a bit stuck.

My plea is simple: please consider noise as early as possible in any proposals. I'm always happy to talk over scheme proposals, even if just a red-line plan; that way we can identify whether noise is likely to be a potentially significant aspect and get the Regulator dialogue going nice and early.

*Echo Acoustics Ltd is an independent noise and vibration consultancy, owned and operated by Mike Potts. I have considerable experience in a wide variety of environmental and occupational noise issues for schemes ranging from 10 residential units to major infrastructure master plans, from deep down mines to the top of wind turbines. I have worked in a regulatory role within the Environmental Health Department of Manchester City Council and can also provide Public Inquiry expert witness services.*

*Project experience has been gained not only across the UK, but also in the Republic of Ireland, the Middle east, and Denmark.*

*My mission is to provide my clients with a personal, customer-focused service, adapted specifically according to the needs of each project.*

*If you have any queries on environmental noise, please don't hesitate to call to talk over any issues.*

Thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'M. Potts' with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Mike Potts**

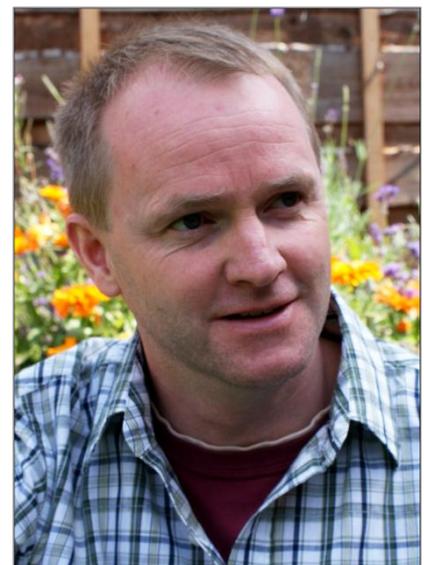
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