NOISE SEGMENTATION
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RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To understand the attitudes and behaviours of noise makers and noise sufferers and to create a segmentation which brings to life the contrasting attitudinal groupings

IN DETAIL:

- What is the nature of the problem, and is there a spectrum of intensity?
- How does the noise problem impact on their daily lives?
- How do they feel about their neighbours, and how has the noise problem affected their relationship?
- What have they done, if anything, to try and alleviate the problem?
- What advice would they find easiest to act upon? Do they want help in tackling the problem themselves, or would they like outside assistance? If so, what type of help and from whom? Or would they rather just live with it?
**METHOD AND SAMPLE**

- 8 standard length focus groups
- All ‘noise makers’ – though respondents were not aware they had been recruited as such
- Mixture of those who had been prosecuted/warned, and those who had not
- Mix of male/female, all BC1C2D
- Groups split by tenure:
  - 4 x Mortgaged quotes shown in *blue*
  - 4 x Private/Council rented shown in *red*
- Split by age:
  - 21-40 years *underlined in relevant colour*
  - 41-65 years shown *not underlined in relevant colour*
  - Ethnographic quotes *shown in green*
- Research undertaken during January 2005 in Bristol, Slough and Manchester
- All research conducted by Carolyn Bird, Simon Strutt and Jackie Weaver
6 ethnographic interviews were conducted; 4 with noise makers and 2 with noise sufferers.

The interviews took place in the respondent’s home during the day and early evening.

The interviews validated the noise behaviour reported in groups as well as adding richness and depth to the overall findings. Quotes shown in green.

Witnessing the housing highlighted the source of noise problems; shared driveways, shared front gardens, long terraces, lack of space generally, poor insulation between housing.

Locations: Slough and Bristol.

Research undertaken in January /February 2005.

All Ethnography conducted by Carolyn Bird and Simon Strutt.
The level at which noise is perceived to be a problem can differ according to a number of factors:

- **The physical environment**: Housing type and density can make noise more problematical in some areas than others.

- **The neighbourhood mix**: Differences in lifestyle, and in tolerance of noise, can cause problems in mixed neighbourhoods.

- **Changing lifestyles**: Noise problems can be a side-effect of general changes in society, which are not themselves directly linked to noise.
THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Housing construction:

- **Thin walls** and flimsy housing construction generally, meant that even the normal sounds of day-to-day living could be heard by neighbours.

- **This was a particular problem for those living in flats:** "If I talk on the phone the guy living underneath me can hear every word"; "the flats walls are quite thin so I can hear him coughing next door or snoring. I just turn the TV up louder"

- But could also apply to those in terraced and semi-detached housing.

- And could have embarrassing consequences: "You can hear the boys next door going to the toilet"; "She said her daughter said what's that funny noise next door – and it was me and my husband. I was mortified"
THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

High housing density:

- High-density housing meant that **outdoor space can be very limited**: “The worst thing about the house is the closeness of the gardens really”; “It's difficult if you're in your garden, you're going to hear people talking and they're going to hear you”

- As well as noise, this could lead to other problems, including:
  - **Parking disputes** (a particularly sensitive issue for many): “We’ve had our cars keyed by the children next to us, because we were parked outside our own garage and they didn’t want us to”; “I used to go hammer and tongs with one of my neighbours. They used to park outside my drive. He smashed his door window once in temper”
  - And other ‘**territorial disputes**’, over issues such as wheelie bins: “They kept blocking my access... in the end I just picked it up and threw it over their garden”

- The bad feeling engendered by these issues often spilt over into noise disputes
THE NEIGHBOURHOOD MIX

Respondents mostly recognised that tolerance of noise varied considerably according to lifestage and outlook. For example:

• Young singles and couples living near older residents could experience problems: “Next door is an old couple and they’re quite disapproving of us being young”

• ‘Empty nesters’ could be intolerant of families: “All they do is moan about the children making noise. They’ve been there longer than me but their children have grown up, married, left.”; “If you live next door to a couple whose kids have gone and you’ve got kids, they’re bound to complain more about the noise”

• Those with teenagers tended to be more tolerant of others’ noise: “If you have teenagers you’re a bit more easy going with music, because you’re used to it. If you didn’t have that and you could hear it through the walls it would probably be really annoying”

• Some shift workers had problems with ‘normal’ daytime noise
A wide range of lifestyle changes over the past two decades was thought to have had an impact (directly or indirectly) on noise problems. These included:

- **Children’s play:**
  - Safety concerns meant parents preferred their children to play close to home: “I'd rather my kids were in the garden making noise than down the street where I can't see them”
  - Though paradoxically, older people complained that children were now more likely to stay up longer, and play outside until a late hour

- **Social life:**
  - The ‘24-hour society’ meant that evenings out for young people may not end until early morning
  - More of their social life was taking place out of doors (barbecues, fireworks)
CHANGING LIFESTYLES

- **Home entertainment**: sophisticated home entertainment systems, for example surround sound, usually needed to be played at volume to be enjoyed to the full
- **Two-earner households** could mean barking dogs were left in houses all day
- **Wider home ownership** and interest in home décor meant more DIY
  - and current fashions in décor could also cause problems: *“I've got wooden floors all the way through and not much soft furnishings, it's quite minimalist in the house so the noise carries and echoes”*
- Parking disputes were mainly a function of the **increase in car ownership** and multiple car ownership per household: *“There's a lot more cars than there is space for really”*
NEIGHBOURHOOD NOISE

- Almost all respondents considered themselves, to a greater or lesser extent, to be noise sufferers as well as noise makers.
- Their responses to specific types of neighbourhood noise were similar in many ways to those of noise sufferers.
- However, they also responded (in cases which applied to them) as noise makers.

NOISE MAKERS ARE OFTEN SUFFERERS TOO
ATTITUDES TO OWN NOISE-MAKING

‘PART OF LIFE’:

• Many made the point that making a certain amount of noise was an inevitable part of life:

• This applied particularly to socialising with friends: “Being out in the garden having a few beers late at night with the music blaring, I'm sure we are a bit loud”; “If the party is swinging there's nothing you can do about it, you can't tell everyone to go home”

• And to children playing: “It is hard to get children to keep their voices down, they don't understand when they're being told to be quiet, they’re just children” “I don’t mind kids’ noise, they’ve got to play haven’t they?”

• And some sorts of noise, such as DIY, could not be minimised: “With the stereo you can turn down the volume. When you're knocking a wall down you can't do it quieter”
ATTITUDES TO OWN NOISE-MAKING

JUSTIFICATIONS, EXCUSES:

• Some who were aware they made noise justified it to themselves in a variety of ways – for example:

• It was **not constant** (eg parties): “I did a polite notice, I said there would be a lot of cars in the street and music. I must admit it did go on until 4am. But no complaints. It was a one off”

• Noise (from dogs, or alarms) was necessary for **security**: “It's good where I live to let everyone know I've got a dog – for security”; “if the dog is out there and it's barking it's protecting your property”

• **Children’s safety** was a concern: “I've a son of 8 years old, I certainly wouldn’t let him go over the park on his own to play football. I want him where I can see him”
ATTITUDES TO OWN NOISE-MAKING

MINIMISING THE IMPACT:

• There were various ways in which they felt they were minimising the impact of their noise on their neighbours:

• They tried to limit their noise to times when they knew their neighbour was less likely to be disturbed: “I'm at home in the day and I probably have got my music loud but both sides are at work in the day so it's not going to annoy them”; “If I know the neighbour is out or away I'll crank it up and if you hear someone come home you turn it down”

• And/or may try to avoid ‘unsocial hours’: “I’m not the quietest neighbour, I do shout [at my child]. But I wouldn’t go at 12.30 at night and shout in the corridor at him” “There are times when I say ‘look you can’t because Norah’s having a rest’”
ATTITUDES TO OWN NOISE-MAKING

MINIMISING THE IMPACT:

• Informing the neighbours was another tactic: “If you warn them if you're going to start drilling, it's fine. But if you say nothing then you're going to get a knock on the door saying what the hell are you doing” “It's courteous to knock and let them know first and then they shouldn’t have any problems.”

• As was inviting them to share their fun (for example, inviting them to parties)
ATTITUDES TO OWN NOISE-MAKING

“AM I BEING NOISY?”

• Others carried on making noise which they suspected might be unsociable, because their neighbours had not mentioned it to them: “I wonder sometimes because we’re quite noisy in my house.. [but] no one has actually ever come over and said anything” “I just use my own judgement and you would hope that if it bothered next door they would come and let you know”

• And/or they acknowledged that they might be noisy without realising it at the time: “Maybe coming home drunk in the morning and you’re louder than you think you are, that might wind them up”; “It's just you tend to bring people back after the pub, you get louder and louder”; “Sometimes you don't realise you're even doing anything, your music might not seem loud to you”
Images of noise sufferers

*We asked respondents to draw how they thought someone might feel when suffering from a noise problem*
WHAT DO NOISE SUFFERERS FEEL?

- Most drew their own feelings about suffering from noise-making by others.
- In this case, emotions covered the same range as in the noise sufferers groups – but perhaps with a stronger emphasis on anger and frustration than on helplessness and despair.
- Among those who responded by drawing their perception of noise sufferers who had complained to them about their own noise-making, anger was easily the most common theme.
IMAGES OF NOISE SUFFERERS

“Someone yelling and shaking their fist at you. Angry, wants to get hold of you, probably chasing you down the street”

“My neighbour coming around with a gun”

“Guy with steam coming out of his ears and a big expletive coming out of his mouth. An outburst of anger”

“I’ve got a really angry face. People probably feel angry”
How do noise makers feel?

*Respondents were then asked to write down, or draw, how the noise maker might feel whilst causing a noise nuisance*
WHAT DO NOISE MAKERS FEEL?

- Again, not all put themselves explicitly in the position of being the noise maker
- However, they were more prepared to see the noise maker’s point of view: "A guy that's completely oblivious to what he's doing. I think most people it's not necessarily they don't care what they're doing, it's just the fact that what they're doing winds people up"
- A number of respondents pointed out that noise makers covered a spectrum of views: "I've put a scale from somebody being unaware about it through to being dismissive then maybe a bit anxious but concerned and then justified, saying I don't care less and through to somebody who just couldn't give a toss and they put the music on full blast"
- The respondent quoted above was also aware that lack of communication between noise maker and noise sufferer could lead to differing views about the noise maker’s motives: "If it was me making the noise I might think I'm somewhere on the spectrum whereas my neighbour probably thinks I'm somewhere else"
WHAT DO NOISE MAKERS FEEL?

• In the ethnographic interviews, the noise makers were aware that they were making a noise largely because their neighbours ‘complained’. “They say ‘oh I heard you coming in.’ It’s not a complaint but they’re letting me know they heard me and I was a bit loud. I just say I’m really sorry, I will try to keep the noise down in future, but it happens”

• In this particular instance, the next door neighbour was also noisy, and she felt able to approach him in a similar way. “I will mention it to him the next day and say ‘look you know that was a bit loud last night.’ He will be really apologetic but I wouldn’t take it any further than that”

• Because she knew she was guilty of noise making, she was more tolerant of her neighbour’s noise and as a result the relationship overall was good. “I think that’s why I don’t get nasty and complain, I know I’m not always quiet either…I don’t think I should be on his back all the time and then one month I might do it myself”

• Additionally she was convinced that although her neighbour’s noise making was selfish, it wasn’t done maliciously in any way. “So he just said ‘I’m so sorry, I was really drunk, I didn’t realise it was so loud’” “I know it’s not intentional, if it was every week and I knew he was doing it on purpose I might think twice about doing something else”
WHAT DO NOISE MAKERS FEEL?

• Another respondents were less tolerant of their neighbour’s complaint, partly because in one instance, she felt she tolerated his noise without saying anything and partly because of the ‘aggressive’ way in which he complained. “I’ve got 4 children, when I go away they tend to put their music up...he starts on me as soon as I’ve got out the car, he’s there having a moan”; “I just think he’s a miserable old sod” “I think some people are just too fast to jump in”; “he was just being bloody-minded about it”

• They were against the idea of complaining to their neighbours, because they were keen to keep the peace. “I don’t really want to get in an argument with anybody about it. I don’t retaliate. I do talk to the boys and say ‘oh for god’s sake you’ve upset old grumpy next door’”; “If I was to constantly moan at him, it would create a hostile atmosphere that you’ve got to live in”; “You’ve got to be careful not to upset them”

• At some level one thought that the complaining about her children’s noise was unreasonable, and was urging for greater tolerance. “Some of the older fuddy duddies I think sometimes they’ve forgot they’ve had children or maybe they haven’t got grandchildren coming around all the time to see them”
PERCEPTIONS OF NOISE MAKERS

They recognised that making noise can be pleasurable

"I'm not being unreasonable we don't do it very often, enjoying ourselves, stop being so miserable"

And that the noise may be finite

"Task completed, great. I've done my thing, that's it"

The noise maker may not be aware of the problem

"no care in the world, they don't realise the decibels they're making and they're having a good time"

"Having a good time, they're not working tomorrow so they're having a couple of beers, not even thinking about it"

"Too happy or busy to realise the amount of noise that's being created. Mind is too occupied on that particular moment"
HOW SHOULD COMPLAINTS BE MADE?

- Most said that they would *prefer their neighbour to approach them direct* if they were disturbed by their noise.
- Neighbours’ reticence could leave the noise maker *unsure about what they can and cannot do*: “I wonder sometimes because we’re quite noisy in my house, sometimes when we’re all in the garden chatting it might be quite late to be out there. But no one has actually ever come over and said anything”; “Perhaps you haven't been made aware of it because they haven't told you about it.”
- Or may *exacerbate the problem*: “If he knocked on the door and said ‘look I'm not happy about the kids going up and down the road’, I'd actually say to the kids ‘don't go outside his house go up the other end.’ But they go down there because they know it aggravates him to do it. If he had the balls to come to me then I would have had the balls to do something about it”; “I wouldn’t mind it providing they told me. It would wind me up if they were really, really upset and didn’t actually physically come and do something about it.”
HOW SHOULD COMPLAINTS BE MADE?

- Mentioning the problem at an early stage could stop problems escalating: "Banging hell out of the door saying ‘shut that bloody noise up’, or something like that only puts your back up. Because they’ve left it and left it until it's driving them to distraction and they just flip”

- Some were scathing about those who did not confront them directly, but complained about them behind their back: “They won't tell you anything, they say ‘Hi’ in the mornings and then moan about you” ; “Two-faced”

- Particular scorn was reserved for neighbours who shouted at noisy children without facing up to their parents: “They would never say anything to us but would shout over the fence, ‘shut up’ at the children. I lost respect for them completely because they wouldn’t confront us with it, they were just making the children feel uncomfortable”
HOW SHOULD COMPLAINTS BE MADE?

HAVING SAID THAT THE DIRECT APPROACH WAS GENERALLY PREFERRED...

THE BARRIERS TO A SUCCESSFUL COMPLAINT WERE CONSIDERABLE

IN PARTICULAR, THE WAY IN WHICH COMPLAINTS WERE MADE WAS CRUCIAL

• Several cited examples of what they considered to be the ‘right way’ to raise the subject:

• A light-hearted approach often worked well between friends: “She did that in a very good way actually, she just said it like a joke”

• A direct, but polite approach worked best where neighbours did not know each other particularly well: “They do it in a polite way, they may knock on the door, or they will wait to catch us as we’re leaving the house and they’ll just approach us and ask us to keep the noise down, which is fair enough really. You can get carried away when you've had a few beers”
HOW SHOULD COMPLAINTS BE MADE?

• But they also easily described the ‘wrong way’ to complain
• A style of complaining which implied a personal criticism of the noise-maker, or their lifestyle, was likely to be counterproductive: “I might prefer it if someone knocked on my door and told me. But if it's coming up and saying can you control your kids, they're making too much noise, that's personal”; “There's a way of telling people, you don't belittle them, there's a way of talking to people”; “If someone asks you nicely you feel obliged don't you. You think they're civilised they're nice people. If someone comes around and talks to you as if you're some sort of idiot you think ‘boy who is he?’ Turn it up”
• As was anger and rudeness: “If they went around shouting the odds, you know, ‘turn it down now’ then you wouldn’t turn it down would you?”; “if they were rude then that would get my back up straightaway”
• Though some did recognise that rudeness could mask fear: “They could just be scared but come across as being rude”

Many acknowledged that an upset complainer could easily fall into an inappropriate style of approach as they were likely to be emotional
HOW SHOULD COMPLAINTS BE MADE?

• Some **felt vulnerable** when neighbours complained: “I got offended when he said about my telly. He said I could hear your telly on late last night. I don't think he should have said anything because I'm not a noisy neighbour, it's just myself and my son. I felt he was intruding, mentioning that I was up late”

• A minority said they would be **mortified** if their neighbour were to mention their noise at all: “My neighbour has said he can hear my television on late, which bugged me. I thought I don't say anything about you. He said it politely – but it bugged me that he said it” ; “I'd get really offended. I wouldn't talk to them”

• In some cases, disputes with neighbours – over issues such as parking, as well as about noise – had reached such a level that all **complaints were ignored**: “Initially it's very distressing because nobody wants to fall out with their neighbours, but as time goes on you get used to it, you just get used to ignoring them”
HOW SHOULD COMPLAINTS BE MADE?
PROMPTED

- **Letters** were mostly seen as a ‘cowardly’ option
- Except perhaps for ‘embarrassing’ noise such as noisy lovemaking: “I would be embarrassed, they are probably going to be embarrassed themselves, so just a little note, just keep it down”
- **Complaining to the Council**, or to other authorities, without mentioning anything to the noise maker first, was generally disliked: “He's been to the Council over everything He doesn’t moan directly to me”; “I think most people get wound up when a letter from the Council comes out of the blue, and you knew nothing about it before”
- Though some who had received complaints about specific incidents were relatively sanguine about it: “the [party] we did get a letter about it, it was about 6 in the morning when people finally left, so I can see why people were upset then”
HOW SHOULD COMPLAINTS BE MADE?

PROMPTED

- **Complaining to the police** was likely to exacerbate the situation: “If they took it upon themselves to call the Police I would get really angry at that”; “You know that's going to kill a relationship, there's going to be animosity”; “I've still never forgiven that woman who did that to me”

- And anonymity received a broadly hostile reaction
  - It would cause ill feeling
  - It could be abused by those with a vendetta
  - Some thought you could often guess who the complainer was likely to be
HOW SHOULD COMPLAINTS BE MADE?

MOST NOISE MAKERS PREFERRED A PERSONAL APPROACH

- But it has to be friendly and unemotional
- Some would find it unacceptable no matter what

REMOTE OR VIA A THIRD PARTY WAS MAINLY SEEN AS UNHELPFUL, EVEN PROVOCATIVE
I SUFFER TOO

Know they make noise, but justify it mainly on the basis that they suffer from neighbourhood noise (or other neighbourhood problems) themselves

Relations with neighbours may be amicable:

Live and Let Live

..or not:

Tit for Tat
"I suffer too"

**Live and Let Live**

- "We've got a green out the front so all the children go there to play. But it doesn’t worry me because I know mine will be out there before long."
- "I don't mind their music, they don't mind when we have barbecues in the summer. Just communicate with each other."
- "It does get a bit noisy sometimes but then I'm noisy as well."
- "He's a nightclub owner and he tests his decks and things like that, but because we've got 3 teenage daughters it works both ways for us."

**Tit for Tat**

- "I suppose they'd say we're not that easy because we're noisy with the music, but I think they're not very considerate to us so why worry about it."
- "They complain about my kids’ noise but then she does her housework at about midnight."
- "I make a noise and I know I annoy [next door neighbour] but I just think well I'm not as bad as [neighbours other side]."
- "I thought how dare you tell me what we can and can't do in our own home, her children sometimes are horrendous."
- "The kids on the other side, started playing football in the summer. I said to mum and dad don't forget when we were kids we'd be playing out."
NOISE MAKER SEGMENTS

PASS THE BUCK

‘It’s not my fault’

Deny that the noise they make themselves is a problem

They may blame other members of their own household:

‘What Can I Do?’

Or a single neighbour who has unreasonable expectations of what level of noise is acceptable:

Persecuted
"My oldest child is 20, so when I'm not there they might play their music loud, but it's certainly not when I'm at home. I can't see how I would annoy anybody. Except when I go away for the weekends"

"I've got two teenage girls at home. I'm sure they must at times annoy the neighbours, particularly if they go outside in the summer and play music loud, It's when we're not there that they will tend to do things like that"

"My son is a DJ, I understand you come down the road and hear this thump, thump from the bedroom and that causes a lot of problems with the neighbours"

"My son’s in a band ,they rehearse sometimes. I go out but the neighbours don’t. They have a moan now and then. They complain to me, wouldn’t complain to him, he’d hit them"

"Fuming, I was fuming. She was complaining about things like she could hear me going up and down the stairs, she could hear me talking at night and my telly is too loud, everything I did to live was too loud, so I couldn’t live. She is an absolute lunatic"

"I don't think we were making a racket but next door was a manic depressive married to a schizophrenic. They used to throw things at the wall"

"Got a witch as a neighbour. She’s just a trouble maker, accuses me of all sorts"

"He’s just horrible, horrible to the children, shouts and swears at them I said to him, ‘where do you want them to play - on the train tracks or on the motorway?’"
NAIVE

Suspect that they do annoy their neighbours with noise at least sometimes – but have low awareness of what is ‘acceptable’

They don’t know how much noise they can make in their daily lives without upsetting their neighbours

Or may simply forget their neighbours sometimes, especially when enjoying themselves with friends:

‘What’s Aloud?’

Just Having Fun
"Sometimes if I have the lads around if there's a match on, I like to turn the telly up quite loudly to get the atmosphere and he's knocked a couple of times and said can you turn it down."

"I don't think my husband even realises that perhaps he is too loud. He's a loud sort of person anyway."

"When I first moved in he did say we don't tolerate loud music, that was like because we were young. I've not given him reason to complain but I felt a bit under pressure, then I think 'oh well this is my house', sort of thing. I don't know if it's excessively loud."

"Sometimes you have to wait for a complaint before you can actually gauge your behaviour."

"His bedroom was underneath our dining room where our music system was. We were like, we will turn it down a bit and we did. But you didn't want it on so low that you couldn't hear it at all."

"I know in the evening in the house, there's only 3 of us, but it's like there's 10 of us, I've got the telly on downstairs, my son has his music on upstairs. I shout at him to turn it down, but they've never said anything."

"Only [make noise] if I watch a DVD because I plug in the home cinema speakers and obviously it's really bassy."

"with parties, time goes by so quickly you don't realise it's as late as it is. And if you've had a few to drink you don't think your music is actually all that loud and it could well be."

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WHO CARES?

Know they annoy neighbours with their noise - but have no conscience about it

NOISE MAKER SEGMENTS

Selfishly prioritise their own right to make a noise over their neighbours’ right to a quiet life:

‘I’ve Got a Right’

A small minority take pleasure in making deliberate noise:

Neighbours From Hell

‘I don’t give a damn’
“I don't care, I work all day and I do my housework when I'm ready for it and that's late at night sometimes”

“I will not be quiet for neighbours. They have to accept I'm not going to make my children be quiet, they're going to enjoy themselves”

“MY 3 dogs are outside, 6 – 6.30 every morning without fail they start fighting. You can see the lights going on all the way down the street, it wakes everyone up. It's just an alarm call”

“I don't take no notice at all. The kids carry on, what can you do, children are children”

“WHO CARES?”

“I've Got a Right”

“Neighbours From Hell”

“If you knock on their door and say can you turn the music down they say, ‘fuck off now, get out or I’ll do you’. They're violent and they're abusive and they don't respect people”

“Neighbours from hell. They throw paint on your car, music, shouting, screaming, horrendous, dirty”

“There's been at least 3 fights I'm aware of and the whole building shakes when he's trying to break into the doors. So that's a lot of noise when that kicks off and then when the police are raiding the place that's a whole load of other noise as well”

“PART OF A MUCH BROADER SOCIAL/CRIMINAL PROBLEM”
• More likely to be female than male
• Common among young people living near other young people
• And those with teenage children
• And some with young families who remember their own days of ‘freedom’

But the key point about this group is that **they can empathise with others**

- **Good relations with neighbours** – but neighbourhood mix is important
- **Complaints** are not usually an issue: “*My neighbour plays the piano... at 1am... but I haven't complained because they put up with a lot of noise from us... babies crying, we have a lot of barbecues in the summer and they're always nice*”
- Though some said they would complain if they were complained about: “*If they complained about the kids then I'd obviously say something about her telly*”
• Present in most age groups and lifestages
• Relations with neighbours almost always **poor**
• In some cases, other neighbourhood issues were also a problem: “They consider me the noisy house, I consider them the inconsiderate parking house”

• Any type of noise making could be involved (usually – but not always - different from the type of noise their neighbour makes...)
• May be simply a case of trying to ‘drown out’ noise from neighbours: “If they're playing loud music or listening to the telly loud, you instinctively have to turn yours up a bit, you're trying to cancel each other out but are making the problem worse”

• They tended to **react negatively** to face-to-face complaints: “It makes me angry. We have to put up with what he does”; “I got shouted at one Sunday morning at 10.45 because I had the drill on and I shouted something quite rude back through the wall. I haven't spoken to her since”.
PASS THE BUCK

‘What Can I Do?’

• Most common amongst those with teenage children
• Also included dog-owners whose dogs barked when they were out
• And some with recalcitrant car alarms

• Noise usually took place when respondent was not at home:
• Relations with neighbours generally **not too bad**
• Were usually **sympathetic to complaints** from neighbours – but tended to be **ineffectual** in dealing with them:
  "[Neighbours] mention the noise quite often, I get them to turn it down, they turn it down for a second and then it all goes back up again. It is difficult"
• The ‘persecuting neighbour’ could fall anywhere along a spectrum from the mildly interfering neighbour to the extreme Victor Meldrew!

• The persecutor usually caused trouble for the whole neighbourhood, giving credence to the idea that the noise making does in fact fall within acceptable limits

• The Persecuted were present in most groups – but especially young adults, and those with young children

• Relations with neighbours: very poor with ‘persecutor’, though harmonious with the rest of the neighbourhood: “I hate it, because I get on with everybody else and everybody else gets on with me. It's just this one that doesn’t get on with anybody”

• The situation could escalate to the extent that the persecuted neighbour was ‘waiting for something to happen’: “As soon as I see them come out the drive I know they’re going to have a go at me and I just boil, I'm waiting for it”; “When she tries to approach me about it I get quite aggressive, I'm sick of it”

• And could contemplate violence themselves: “I really want to chase him and whack him one”
• Usually **young**, perhaps in first home - and/or have only recently moved to the neighbourhood

• This group also included those who suspected they sometimes made unacceptable noise but continued doing so because **neighbours had not complained**

• Primary noise maker may be a partner or other member of the household: "**He does play his music loud and he does make a lot of noise but he doesn't register he's hacking people off**"

• Types of noise: music, parties, general household noise (eg wooden floors, TVs)

• Relations with neighbours: generally **good, though fairly distant**

• **Anxious not to upset them** – but at the same time, **aware of own ‘rights’** to live as they want, making what they consider to be a normal amount of noise: "**It's probably me being paranoid that it is only just me [making a noise]. If you've got a pair of heels on, you can't help but clatter upstairs. I'm not going to carry a pair of slippers around with me**"
• Typically young, gregarious, sociable
• Love loud music, having fun, but try (though do not always succeed) to think of neighbours as well:

• They may not be the prime noise maker – but may be torn between upsetting their neighbours and seeming a killjoy to their friends
• Mostly get on well with neighbours, and don’t want to upset them
• Normally very receptive to reasonable face-to-face complaints: “if somebody was to come around to me and say ‘look Pete that's a bit loud’ the first thing I'd do is turn it down” ; “At times when we have been noisy they have actually said. So we do try and control the noise level”
• Fairly aggressive; strong personalities: “If he moans about the horses neighing in the morning I say ‘you should get up earlier. I'm up at 6 o'clock you get up earlier’”

• May have disputes with neighbours in other areas (eg parking)

• Large families, pet owners: “Summertime when it's light I leave them out playing until 9 -9.30. If people start moaning I soon tell them what to do with themselves. How can you tell kids to stop playing”

• Relations with neighbours usually poor: “They're 60-70yr old people. They come around banging on my door. It gets my back up straightaway”

• And complaints tended to escalate the problem: “Whatever he throws I throw back at him. He says the kids are being too loud, I think I will stick my music on in a minute, that will upset him”
• Predictably, little or no representation in focus groups
• But several did point out that they suffered from this sort of neighbour themselves, or had done in the past

• Noise making may be **deliberate**
• Noise maker may be **criminal** – or on the **edges of criminality**
• Or with mental health problems
• **Complete disregard** for neighbours
• Most neighbours were afraid to complain for **fear of reprisals**
TESTING IDEAS

Anonymous form/letter delivered by sufferer

Anonymous form/letter from a phone call

Anonymous form/letter from a website

General Information Leaflet
CONCEPT IDEAS

“A special leaflet designed for the purpose of putting through your neighbour’s letterbox, with a polite message about the noise”

- May be treated as junk mail: “A bit poncey aren't they really. I don't think anyone would take any notice”; “I'd say junk mail and chuck it in the bin”

- The anonymity might cause ill-feeling: “It just makes you paranoid because you don't know who it is”

- Though its ‘semi-official’ nature might make some noise-makers stop and think: “If I got one through my door, first of all I'd wonder who it was but you'd never find out, and it's semi official. So it might stop you in your tracks”

- And it might be a better option than waiting until the situation got very bad: “It's better than waiting until you're absolutely at the end of your tether and then you go steaming in don't you, screaming and shouting”
• The anonymity could be abused:  
“*That could be malicious, somebody could just have something against the neighbour. If you don't leave your name and address and you can't stand up and be counted*”;  
“*you could just have a vendetta couldn’t you?*”

• Could cause ill-feeling:  
“*if I got an anonymous letter I'd be going around trying to find out who it was*”

• Good for those who might be nervous about complaining:  
“I *think it's a great idea for vulnerable people who live on their own*”;  
“*Good if you're a woman on your own and you're feeling threatened*”

• But cost was an issue:  
“A *freephone number which you can ring anonymously and which ends with a letter being sent to your neighbour, without your name on it*”

“A *leaflet with all the relevant numbers and official contacts open to you (eg the police, council etc). Which one you then call/write to is up to you*”

• Reactions to the web site option were very similar

• A good starting point:  
“A *lot of people don't know what they can do*”
MESSAGES FOR NOISE MAKERS

• Respondents recognised that getting messages across to noise makers was a complex issue, not least because many noise makers also considered themselves to be noise sufferers. Suggestions included:

• **Encouraging awareness** that they might be disturbing their neighbours with their noise: “in most cases people don't even know they're doing it. A poster that says ‘do you make too much noise’ just to make people think” ; “If they didn’t realise they were making the noise, if they're good people they are going to take heed of what you say”

• While at the same time, **encouraging tolerance** for some of the inevitable noises of everyday life: “I think you've got to be more tolerant of ordinary every day noises, like lawnmowers because people have to do it” ; “It's being tolerant of others as well, because a lot of people aren't tolerant. perhaps people ought to think they were young too, and people did play football”
MESSAGES FOR NOISE MAKERS

• Where there was a genuine noise problem, a communal approach might work: “a local representative people could go to, somebody who was elected by the street, or like Neighbourhood Watch. If people know that was the representative of the local community they might give them more respect”; “If it was a petition from everybody else on the road, then I'd think hang on, I must be doing something wrong here”

• And in more extreme cases, it might be worth emphasising the penalties for noise-making: “a poster that tells them what can happen if they make too much noise, you can get one of these ASBOs or something”

• It was recognised, though, that ‘Neighbours from Hell’ were probably beyond most reasonable measures: “There is no message you can give to a crack head. You can grab them and slap them about but they’re still going to go and get cracked up and do it”
MESSAGES FOR NOISE MAKERS

In many cases, however, problems of neighbourhood noise could be much reduced by concentrating on three key concepts:

COMMUNICATION

“You've got to be able to talk to people”

RELATIONSHIP

“It really, really is important having a stable good relationship with your neighbours on the street”

EMPATHY

“Be with someone how you would like to be treated yourself”

“Think of others, put yourself in somebody else’s shoes”
NOISE SUFFERER SEGMENTATION
Stage 1
RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To understand the attitudes and behaviours of noise sufferers and to create a segmentation which brings to life the contrasting attitudinal groupings.

IN DETAIL:

- What is the nature of the problem, and is there a spectrum of intensity?
- How does the noise problem impact on their daily lives?
- How do they feel about their neighbours, and how has the noise problem affected their relationship?
- What have they done, if anything, to try and alleviate the problem?
- What advice would they find easiest to act upon? Do they want help in tackling the problem themselves, or would they like outside assistance? If so, what type of help and from whom? Or would they rather just live with it?
METHOD AND SAMPLE

4 Groups with Noise Sufferers took place in 2003, and the January 2005 groups supplement that original study. The method and sample therefore mirror the 2003 method as follows:

- 4 standard length focus groups
- All ‘noise sufferers’ - personally suffering a noise problem
- Half had complained, half had not
- All high density housing, mix of male/female, all BC1C2D
- Groups split by tenure:
  - 2 x Owner Occupiers quotes shown in black
  - 2 x Private/Council rented shown in purple
- Split by age:
  - 21-40 years not underlined in relevant colour
  - 41-65 years underlined in relevant colour
  - Ethnographic quotes shown in green
- Locations: Greater Manchester and Bristol
- Research undertaken in January 2005
- All Research conducted by Carolyn Bird and Peter Arnold
WHAT NOISE PROBLEM DO THEY SUFFER FROM?

- Both **Loud Music** and **Dogs Barking** were the most frequently mentioned problems for all types of respondent, with around 2/3 experiencing them. “The people upstairs have a laminate floor, once they start playing their music it’s like an echo chamber”; “They shut the dog out and it barks...a real deep woof”

- A few (mostly rented/council) complained of **Cars Revving** “Young lads in their cars constantly racing around, the revving...”

- **DIY** - late at night and occasionally early Sunday and **Arguing/Shouting** were other problems for a handful. “The neighbour suddenly starts yelling at his partner”; “A hammer hammering...you think ‘oh peace and quiet’ and then you hear another tap”

- Three council/private rented complained of **Loud Parties** “They come in, the stereo goes on”

- A couple of older respondents suffered from **Loud TV/Radio** “Elderly couple next door have gradually gone deaf, my kids’ bedrooms are next to them and they constantly tell me the TV is too loud”
WHAT NOISE PROBLEM DO THEY SUFFER FROM?

- A couple of council/rented complained of **Late Night Washing Machine Noise** “3am and the washing machine goes on in the upstairs flat”
- Other, single mentions included:
  - Trumpet practice “The young chap next door”
  - Ladders crashing early am “The window cleaners load their vans at 5am”
  - Furniture scraping “Scraping furniture late at night - god knows what she’s doing”

Dogs more of an issue than in previous study
WHAT NOISE PROBLEM DO THEY SUFFER FROM?

- Both the Ethnographic interviews revealed multiple noise sufferance. In one instance, the respondent was suffering from a noisy young couple who had inconsiderate visitors every evening. “They rev up as they pull in...the stereo goes on then...then it’s the friends going all at different times, shouting and bawling ‘bye, bye, see you’...it’s loud because they’re talking over a revving car usually” as well as a noisy father and son next door the other side. “the rowing that goes on between the bloke and the girlfriend, and the bloke and his ex-wife. He’s also got a teenage daughter that stays with them every now and again and you can hear her mouth 24/7”

- Apart from the immediate next-door neighbours, there was noise from neighbours over the road. “We have a weird woman that lives across the road that cuts her grass at 5.30 in the morning...she has a burglar alarm on her house, it goes off continually because she won’t let her kids in, it’s horrendous. The house next door to them she’s always having parties”

- And she was plagued by barking dogs at the back of her property. “At the back I’ve got a very long garden, all you can hear is barking dogs. All around the back they seem to have dogs”
WHAT NOISE PROBLEM DO THEY SUFFER FROM?

- The other noise sufferer was largely disturbed by her immediate next door neighbour on one side. The antagonism had been originally provoked by a dispute about a rear driveway and had gone on from there. “There was a problem with the front as well because the front gardens were staggered…one thing led to another, we went to our solicitor, they went to theirs…things went on and on…they had conversations with the other neighbours in the summer about how they were going to get blokes over to sort us out and make us move”

- The noise disturbance was daily and frequent from the neighbour’s dog, their baby crying, their friend’s children “it’s just constant all the time, up and down the stairs all the time, banging the doors all the time” switching light switches on and off “they get the switch and flick it on and off, on and off” and constant DIY “the massive banging they were doing before was they were fitting a new kitchen. But they do DIY nearly every day…even Christmas Day they were doing something in there”
DEFINING ‘NEIGHBOURHOOD NOISE’

In addition to the problems personally suffered, all were asked what they considered to be ‘Neighbourhood Noise’. Their answers were, in order:

- Music
- Dogs
- Doors banging
- Cars Revving
- 2 mentions of: Building Work, DIY, Shouting, Children,
- Single mentions of: Fireworks, TV, Car Alarms

Fireworks less top of mind than previously (following recent legislation?)
HOW DO SUFFERERS FEEL?

- All respondents were asked to draw how they felt when suffering their particular noise problem. The overall themes within their drawings included, in order:

  - **Frustration** “It’s more frustration than anger”
  - **Tension building up (probably leading to final ‘explosion/outburst’)** “Gritted teeth and a time bomb...I’ll lose it one day” “I said I can’t take it anymore”
  - **Trying to block out the noise** “My hands to my ears, please stop!”
  - **Anger** “Banging my head against a brick wall, anger rising”
  - **Stress** “Get hot and stressed, blood pressure rises”
  - **Craving rest/sleep** “Just let me sleep, I’ll get a migraine”
  - **Tearing hair out** “Pulling my hair out in despair”
  - **Sadness** “Sadness and despondency”
  - **Explosion (had enough)** “Like thunder” “It will get to the point of I’ve had enough now”

Very similar feelings to previous study
SUFFERERS’ PSYCHODRAWINGS (RENTED)

NOISE SUFFERER

ANGER, PAIN, DESPAIR,
FRUSTRATION BUILD UP
NOISE SUFFERER

SUFFERERS’ PSYCHODRAWINGS (OWNERS)

SAME FEELINGS NO MATTER WHAT THEIR HOUSING CIRCUMSTANCE
WHAT DO THEY THINK OF THE NOISE MAKERS?

- All were asked to ‘get inside the noisemakers heads’ in a bid to determine what they felt the noisemaker would be thinking when making the noise that caused them to suffer.
- Almost all felt that noisemakers were oblivious to the suffering of others:
  - ‘Don’t care’ attitude “Just couldn’t give a hoot”
  - Oblivious “Totally oblivious to me”; “He’s no idea when he gets into a rage with her that he’s annoying me”
  - Inconsiderate - but unknowingly so “Just inconsiderate, not making noise maliciously, just don’t realise what they are doing”
- A few did feel that their neighbours were setting out to deliberately annoy/provoke them - out of 7 who felt this, 5 were in rented/council accommodation “He knows he’s p***ing me off but he couldn’t care less”; “They must know, surely everyone knows you can’t play music at that late time”; “I wonder if she’ll hear us, let’s make it louder today just to annoy her”

SLIGHTLY HIGHER PERCEPTION OF ‘DELIBERATE’ NOISE MAKING THAN IN PREVIOUS STUDY
ARE ANY TYPES OF NOISE ACCEPTABLE?

- Certain types of noise were deemed to be acceptable up to a point:
- **Background music/TV/Radio** was seen to be a by-product of living in close proximity to each other. "In a perfect world you wouldn’t hear anything, but in a semi or a flat you hear people’s noise - quiet telly noise can’t be helped"
- **One off parties/DIY** were OK provided that they were just that “We all have to do DIY at some point”
- **Pre-warned parties/DIY** “I knock on my neighbour’s door and say we’re having a party tonight, it may be a bit louder”
- **Babies crying** “Crying babies, you can’t really do anything about that”
DOES ACCEPTABILITY VARY AT CERTAIN TIMES?

- Most felt that **Daytime noise - both during the week and the weekend** - was more acceptable “Unless you’re on shifts”; “We’re probably a bit louder ourselves at the weekend”

- Just over half felt that they were more tolerant in **Summertime** “You tolerate noise in the summertime more, I wouldn’t say you accept it but you do tolerate it”

- **Xmas/New Year** was almost a ‘free for all’ “Once you get a couple of bottles down you at Christmas, you don’t really care”

- Almost all had a ‘built in watershed’ of **10-11pm**, before which time they would be more tolerant of noise (those with children were more tolerant before **8pm**)

- A handful of parents felt that noise was more acceptable if:
  - It was **not during term time**
  - It did **not wake up their children** “If the kids sleep through it then that’s ok”

Mirrors previous study

Acceptable noise is DEPENDENT ON TIME/CIRCUMSTANCE
WHAT TYPE OF NOISES ARE UNACCEPTABLE AND WHEN?

There were key criteria as to what constituted unacceptable noise:

- **Noise that prevented sleep** "If you can’t get to sleep"
- **Noise that caused them to wake up (or their children)** "Waking the kids up is totally unacceptable"
- **Continual Noise** "Anything, music, dogs – anything that goes on"
- **Late at night/early (Sunday) a.m. noise (DIY, radio, parties etc)** "When it’s like 2am you think that’s totally unacceptable because you know that is not how normal people live"; "Before 8am on a Sunday"; "DIY jobs after 11pm that’s just selfish"
- **When they had to change behaviour to compensate (e.g. had to turn up their stereo)** "When it interferes with what you’re doing, whatever they’re doing is louder than what you’re doing"
- **Bass-note music** "That bass...goes right in your head"

Similar to previous study → Noise that impinges on their normal lives is unacceptable (especially if they can’t sleep, can’t relax)
NOISE SUFFERER

Findings

Complaining About The Noise
WHAT PREVENTS THEM COMPLAINING ABOUT NOISE?

There were two key interlinked barriers:

- **Not upsetting the ‘status quo.’** “I don’t like atmospheres”; “It could escalate...I don’t want to be in that position, I have to live there”; “I just don’t want verbal or physical confrontation”; “I like his parents, so I couldn’t complain about his noise”

- **Fear of reprisals/action** “You feel threatened to say anything so you just tolerate it”; “You have to live next to them, they might end up throwing a brick through your window when you’re not there”

- The fear was somewhat increased by **the media** “You see these programmes...‘Neighbours from Hell’ and you don’t want to push it in case...”; “A taxi driver got killed yesterday just trying to get his correct fare”

- A couple were ‘held back’ by their partners “He says ‘live and let live’”

- A couple with children felt that they too were quite noisy when younger “You’ve got to consider the fact that I’ve got 2 kids and the rest of the street probably knew that I had them”

- 2 also mentioned that they would be old and hard of hearing one day

Mostly a fear of the unknown if they complain
WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO COMPLAIN?

Most had suffered in silence

- A few tried to chat about the problem with their neighbour in a light-hearted manner *"I’ve casually spoken to him and said ‘what are you doing’...oh I’m changing the doors’; “I’ve spoken to them and said ‘oh you’ve got some good records’...I think they got the general drift”*

- A couple had banged on walls or turned their stereo up *“We will bang a door or shout next to the wall and it usually stops”*; *“I directed my speakers at the wall...she got the hint after 5 seconds and turned the noise down”*

- One person had an ongoing ‘war’ with her neighbours, which led to considerable upset - she was now trying to keep the peace as she wanted to sell the house *“Banging doors all the time, flicking light switches...we had to replace our locks to feel more secure...I won’t say anything now, just hoping to move”*
  - She had contacted Environmental Health, but to no avail *“We asked them, they said at the end of the day you can’t say they are doing it on purpose...I said how can they not be?”*
The ethnographic respondent who had endured the neighbour dispute had been to Citizen’s Advice and complained to the Environmental Health but to no avail. “I’d have to do a diary, it would have to be a hell of a lot of information there before they could say it was a nuisance. Nobody came out or wrote a letter.”

She wasn’t complaining to her neighbours about their noise partly because of their earlier threatening behaviour over the boundary dispute. “I thought it’s just not worth it.” But even she conceded that her silence wasn’t bringing results. “obviously by keeping quiet it’s not doing anything and they know they’re being a nuisance”

Another respondent made her feelings known in a light sarcastic way every now and then “on the odd occasion I say to the son ‘Jeff give it a break on a night, have it a bit quieter’ it’s ‘oh yes, sorry’. I don’t say it nastily” whilst with her other neighbours she tended to keep quiet “I just sit back and pray they’re going to grow out of it, or move”; “it depends on my mood, some days I tut and get back into my telly and other days I’m like I’m going to bloody kill them in a minute”
WHAT WOULD DRIVE THEM TO COMPLAIN?

• Many felt that repetitive noise with no respite could drive them to complain “If it was all the time, you couldn’t go to sleep and it drove you crazy”; “If it’s day in, day out”

• If their own lives were ‘controlled’ by the actions of the noise makers “It’s like they are in control of our lives…I don’t know how much more to take”

• If they felt that the noise was deliberately aimed at them “If it’s deliberate, I’d blow my top”

• If they were driven to this point, then they would want either:
  – The neighbour to realise and stop/reduce the noise “If he said ‘fair cop guvnor’ and turned it down”
  – The ‘system’ to ensure that the neighbour HAD to do something “A friend of mine was renowned for being noisy and he had a monitor put in his house - everytime the music went over a certain level the electricity was shut off - that was done by the council”
Channels of Complaint
Almost all were aware of this option

- Four had contacted the department at some point (one for their current problem)
- The main barrier was the need to collect ‘evidence’
  - Diary taking was seen as arduous and not immediate enough “You have to do diaries - it’s so arduous”; “Too much hassle, a load of paperwork, phone calls to make and things to send off, not bothered to do all that”
  - The idea of ‘spying’ on neighbours was not liked “If the neighbours find out you’re keeping diaries and things like that it alienates you”; “People take videos of neighbours misbehaving but I wouldn’t want to do that”
- A few were unsure of the exact process “I phoned up the council, they told me to call Environmental Health”; “Do they come and record the noise or do you?”
WHAT WOULD THEY WANT THE OUTCOME TO BE?

- A couple stated that they had been told by the department not to expect much “They said to be honest you won’t get very far with it”
- Ideally, they wanted:
  - Quick action “They can get a warrant and seize equipment but you’re talking 18 months wait”; “It takes such a long time to get there”
  - Powerful action “If they evict tenants”
  - Fines “I’ve seen some good results when I was a court usher...people being fined”
- None felt that approaching their MP would have any effect “They have bigger fish to fry”

Although the power appears to be there, the time taken for action and proof of it is lacking
WHAT OTHER CHANNELS ARE THERE?

- All mentioned that the **Police could** be contacted - but few had any faith that they would actually do much. *"They wouldn’t interfere unless it was a domestic"*; *"When I was younger, if there was a party you could phone the police and they’d come and say ‘can you turn it down’ - they don’t have the time to do that anymore”*

- 2 had contacted the police, to little avail. *"4 years ago I went to the police because of my mum’s flat, the police said you had to contact Environmental Health and keep a record – I never took it further”*; *"They just don’t want to know”*

- A few tenants felt that they may contact their **landlords** but that again this would probably lead nowhere – or be time-consuming. *"They’d not be bothered, or they’d get you to keep diaries”*

> There is a feeling that it is an impossible situation - they want help but don’t expect to get much/any
OPINIONS OF THE IDEAS

“A special leaflet designed for the purpose of putting through your neighbour’s letterbox, with a polite message about the noise”

- This received a mixed response
- A few felt that it may be enough to politely ‘jog’ a neighbour into realising they were at fault “Maybe they hadn’t realised they were making a noise”; “It’d make me stop and think”

- It was, however only felt to be effective towards “reasonable people” in other words, those who would not over-react
- There were concerns about the anonymity, as it would be easy for a neighbour to ‘work out’ who sent it. “They’d know it’s you”; “I’d look at all my neighbours and wonder who sent it”
- Many felt that it could easily be seen as junk mail – and would simply be ignored “Then again, how many people READ leaflets that come through their door?”
- A few liked the idea of not having to confront the neighbour face to face “It’s ok because you don’t have to talk to them”
“A special leaflet designed for the purpose of putting through your neighbour’s letterbox, with a polite message about the noise”

(continued)

- Only a few suggested improvements to the concept:
- **A letter to everyone** – thereby targeting the ‘real perpetrators’ anonymously. “You’d have to put it through everybody’s letterbox, because if just one person got it they’d know they were being picked on”
- A more **detailed letter**, indicating what the problem was. “Have a few tick boxes on it or something like that, so that you could specify what the noise problem was”
There were more negative than positive responses to this concept.

Many felt that it could be open to abuse, in that **prank/hoax/malicious calls** could be made “How many would phone up for a laugh”; “If somebody has a gripe then what stops them sending this to wind someone up”; “Open to pranks”.

Several felt that **anonymity** would be hard to maintain “If you’ve complained to them 2-3 times in the past then when they receive a letter they’ll know it’s you”; “They could have a good guess”.

A handful felt that it could be effective in a highly populated area (eg block of flats, busy housing estate) “You may get away with it in a block of flats, then it’d be hard to pinpoint you”.

There was an underlying **fear of reprisal** “An aggressive person might think ‘RIGHT who sent THIS’ - and it could complicate matters”.

“A freephone number which you can ring anonymously and which ends with a letter being sent to your neighbour, without your name on it”
OPINIONS OF THE IDEAS

(cont)

- Amongst the younger rented group, there was also a feeling that by ‘going behind someone’s back’ they were somehow being ‘sneaky’ or ‘underhand’, making them almost as bad as a noise maker

  “It’s a bit like the benefit fraud thing, you’d feel like you were sneaking on someone”; “It’s a bit of an old git thing to do”

The Website Option (as above but a website instead of freephone)

- Was also poorly received, for the same reasons
- Additionally, there were other criticisms
- It discriminated against those without a PC “Not everyone has a PC or net access”
- They could print their own letter without having to go through a third party “There’s no need, you could print your own out on a PC”
OPINIONS OF THE IDEAS

• This idea was quite well-received, as few knew of all the channels open to them “Knowing how to complain, that would be very very useful for me”

• However, many immediately ‘added’ to the concept, and as a result, the ‘improved’ leaflet was seen to be a very useful and effective means, not only of informing but also warning. Their suggestions included:

  - Delivered to every UK Household “Put it through everyone’s door”
  - If so, then ‘normal’ people may be forced to think “You may think ‘gosh I better be more careful with my noise in future in case it’s me’”; “May make the nice ones who didn’t realise they were noisy think twice”
  - Available in libraries, Citizens Advice, Council Tax letter “Helps to avoid it being like junk mail”
**OPINIONS OF THE IDEAS**

“A leaflet with all the relevant numbers and official contacts open to you (eg the police, council etc). Which one you then call/write to is up to you”

- **Detail of who to contact - and the CONSEQUENCES of making antisocial noise** “What you can/can’t complain about”; “What penalties there are”; “Make you aware of the consequences”

- **Factual information** “Have it say something like ‘every year your Local Authority receives x thousand complaints about noise - are you one of them?’”

- **Backed up by TV/Radio campaign** “Make people aware that the leaflet is coming, like they did with the new version of the ‘protect and survive’ manual”

A national leaflet campaign - if not THE WHOLE answer, then at least a step in the right direction?
THEIR SUGGESTIONS

- ‘Drink Driving’ type long-term campaign “They have a drink driving campaign, have a ‘noisy neighbour’ one”; “10 years ago with dogs...now it’s a real social wrong. Noise could be done in the same way”

- TV ads “Show someone drilling at 7am on a Sunday, and then say ‘why not do it later on?’”; “Say ‘the music watershed has now passed, it’s 10pm, remember others’”

- Radio ads “Play clips of everyday noise, stereos, dogs - with an end caption saying ‘don’t be a noisy neighbour’”

- Guaranteed penalties “Two letters and you end up in court”

- Packaging “Have it on the CD packets, say ‘your music might not please everybody’”

- Market Research “Say ‘the council are doing a survey on noise, please fill in all these details...’”

- ‘TV licence’ type monitoring “Have some sort of noise monitoring body letter sent round, saying ‘we’ve picked up your noise’”

Slightly more ‘indirect’ means than previously - trying to prevent the problem at source as opposed to forcing action
NOISE SUFFERER

SEGMENTS IDENTIFIED

‘But we’re mates’

‘Let’s be reasonable’

‘Don’t want a drama’

GENERAL DESPAIR

‘Resigned Victims’

‘Nothing worked for me’

‘The Vigilante’

‘WANT TO TAKE SERIOUS ACTION’

‘I want to do something but I don’t know how’

“Nothing gets done”

“I just want to keep quiet and sell, move on”

“One day I’ll blow”

“Rather than confronting a neighbour, if you did it through the right channels you stand a better chance”

GENERAL DESPAIR

Resigned Victims

Nothing worked for me

“Nothing gets done”

“I just want to keep quiet and sell, move on”

The Vigilante

“I want to do something but I don’t know how”

“Rather than confronting a neighbour, if you did it through the right channels you stand a better chance”

GENERAL DESPAIR

Resigned Victims

Nothing worked for me

“The Vigilante”

“I want to do something but I don’t know how”

“Rather than confronting a neighbour, if you did it through the right channels you stand a better chance”
LOCAL AUTHORITY DEPTH INTERVIEWS
METHOD AND SAMPLE

- 6 depth interviews were conducted (2 face-to-face and 4 on the telephone)
  - Leeds City Council
  - Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council
  - High Peak Borough Council
  - Stoke on Trent County Council
  - Southend-on-sea Borough Council
  - Noise Abatement Society
- All were selected for their expertise with regards to tackling the problem of noise nuisance and Leeds and Stoke had taken part in a trial with EnCams
- Interviews took place during December 2004 and January 2005
- All research was conducted by Simon Strutt and Carolyn Bird
DEFINING NOISE NUISANCE

• It was acknowledged that there is no standard definition of noise nuisance, although the main constituents were thought to be the type of noise, the length of time, the level of the noise and the time of day or night it occurred. "An officer has to say 'if I lived in that house as a normal person would it be a nuisance for me?'"

• All thought that the main noise nuisance was caused by music and dogs, followed by alarms, TV/radios, domestic arguments and shouting, fireworks, off-road bikes, and parties.

• The problem with music was the low frequency noise "you just hear that bang, bang, bang" whilst the main problem with dogs was their owners leaving them alone all day while they were out at work.

• Several mentioned that noise problems were exacerbated by modern housing insulation. "The telly has not been unreasonably loud, it’s just the insulation makes it clearly audible"; "with walls so thin you can actually hear everything your neighbour does including the night-time activities"
REASONS WHY PEOPLE MAKE NOISE

• The majority of our sample thought that noise makers were unthinking, unaware and focused solely on their own pleasure. “They make a noise for their own pleasure, but their pleasure becomes somebody else’s annoyance”; “Most people are reasonable and don’t want to disturb their neighbours”; “I mean a lot of the youngsters just enjoy the music”; “I think a lot of it is accidental”

• Although most noise was thought to be made unintentionally, most agreed that a small proportion of the population were making noise intentionally. “There are a distinct group of people that don’t care for anybody and they’re going to do what they’re going to do and if it causes anybody a problem, they just don’t care”; “I think a small proportion do it regardless of the consequences. They know it’s likely to annoy people but they’re not bothered”; “Some of them obviously are inconsiderate and just turn up the stereos”

• This included a few who were making noise as part of a vindictive attack on their neighbour “in reality it’s a neighbour dispute”
BARRIERS TO COMPLAINING

• The consequences of suffering from noise nuisance were thought to be terrible. "If you live in a semi or terrace house and you can hear the noise from next door it’s like somebody is entering your property. When it’s there it drives you crackers and when it’s not there you’re waiting for it. So it’s a very invasive frightening situation”

• However, despite this most sufferers did not complain. “I think in this day and age, the biggest majority sit and suffer in silence because they are frightened of reprisals, of intimidation. Many, many people ring up and say 'can I do it anonymously?'”

• This was most apparent amongst older people. “A lot of people who traditionally do suffer in silence tend to be the older people, 50’s – 60’s who don’t want to cause any trouble. I think they have a traditional view that they don’t want to raise their head above the parapet or cause problems for people”; “We tend to find that more and more younger people are becoming more and more vociferous about noise”
CURRENT LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHEMES

- The local authorities we spoke to were chosen because of their commitment to tackling noise nuisance.
- In the majority of cases, there was a very comprehensive system in place:

  - Letter to maker and sufferer
  - On-site visit
  - Noise monitoring equipment, noise diaries
  - Negotiate with noise maker
  - Serve a notice
  - Warrant and seize equipment
  - Prosecute. Fine or evict

**24 hour noise telephone line**
CURRENT LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHEMES

- Despite some variations in the actual procedure employed by the various local authorities, there were some key stages that all agreed were important.

- Firstly, the out-of-hours telephone line, especially because most noise nuisance occurred at night and not during office hours. This was manned in a variety of ways (call centre, group 4, council volunteers) and was thought to be very successful. “You become a counsellor, you listen to people’s problems and somebody at last listens to these people that the problem they have is genuine”; “the outcome is important but it’s almost second to the fact that they’ve got it off their chest, they’ve telephoned somebody at 2 o’clock in the morning, somebody has gone out, somebody has tried to resolve the matter”; “some people just want someone to talk to, if they can get it off their chest with the confidence that someone will deal with it then they’re happy”
CURRENT LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHEMES

- Secondly, the letters sent out to noise sufferer and maker were often highly effective. "The vast majority of people we engage with don’t require anything more than our informal letter in order to bring about a reasonable resolution"

- Thirdly, whatever action was taken, if it was undertaken quickly, then the chances of success were much greater. So, having made the ‘phone call, the letter needed to arrive within a couple of days. If the noise continued and recording equipment was needed, then that also had to be implemented quickly. If not, there was less chance of a successful outcome. "The problem then starts in that they’re asked to fill out noise diaries, they’re asked to keep records, produce evidence and that can go on for up to 3 years in some cases, and it’s too long"; "it’s difficult, it can take 18 months to 2 years for the matter to actually come in front of the Magistrates from actually taking it on"; "We’ve only got one piece of noise monitoring equipment, so people tend to have to wait for it. They might have to wait up to 4, 5 weeks for it"
CURRENT LOCAL AUTHORITY SCHEMES

- And several mentioned that it was preferable to find a solution before getting as far as prosecution. “We don’t like prosecution, we don’t necessarily think it’s the answer, and where we’ve got particularly difficult cases we do tend to use mediators to try and find common ground”

Many problems can be resolved by listening to sufferers And sending out letters to noise makers

This would suggest that many noise makers are ‘reasonable’

Prosecution can be time-consuming and drawn out

But for hard-core noise makers it’s the only solution

We need different strategies for the different segments of noise makers
COMMUNICATION OF SCHEMES

- Local authorities were utilising a number of different channels to communicate their noise nuisance schemes including Noise Action Day and Noise Action Week, leaflets in libraries and other public buildings, the Council’s web-site, tenant’s newsletters, seminars, the local paper, local radio, TV, schools, on salary slips, beer mats in student bars and a noise nuisance credit card amongst others.

- However, one or two admitted that there was probably more they could be doing. “To be totally honest we’re conscious that we perhaps are not brilliant at selling the anti-noise message.”

- They were in favour of a national campaign, although that route was not without its difficulties. “The problem if it’s a national campaign you’ve got different Local Authorities operating in different ways.”

- And because of this, they were in favour of a largely generic message. “The message I would want is people don’t have to suffer, if you’ve got a problem please contact the authority who will speak to you and try and help you”; “noise is anti-social and give it a guilt complex affect with it, make a noise and you should be thoroughly embarrassed”; “noise causes death, noise makes you have sleep deprivation and sleep deprivation is a killer”
CONCLUSIONS OF STAGE 1
NOISE MAKERS: ATTITUDE MAP

- **Aware of their own noise**
  - Live and Let Live
  - Tit for Tat
  - ‘I’ve Got a Right’
- **Unaware of their own noise**
  - Neighbours From Hell
  - ‘What Can I Do?’
  - Persecuted

- **Poor relationship with neighbour**
  - ‘What’s Aloud?’
  - Just Having Fun
- **Good relationship with neighbour**
NOISE SUFFERERS: ATTITUDE MAP

GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH NEIGHBOUR

- 'But we’re mates’
- ‘Let’s be reasonable’

POOR RELATIONSHIP WITH NEIGHBOUR

- 'Resigned Victims’
- 'Don’t want a drama’

UNLIKELY TO TAKE ACTION

- 'I want to do something but I don’t know how’
- ‘Nothing worked for me’

LIKELY TO TAKE ACTION

- ‘The Vigilante’

‘But we’re mates’

‘Let’s be reasonable’

‘Resigned Victims’

‘Don’t want a drama’

‘I want to do something but I don’t know how’

‘Nothing worked for me’

‘The Vigilante’
POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- **Raising awareness**
  - How loud are you?
  - What's acceptable?

- **Encouraging tolerance especially in high density housing**
  - The right to live as you want to
  - Whilst thinking of others

- **Constructive dialogue with neighbour**
  - How to ‘complain’ in the right way
  - Tackling the problem early on

- **Taking it further (communication)**
  - Where to go, who to talk to
  - Getting a fast response through the ‘official’ channels
  - Building relationships
  - Empathy

- **Penalties**
  - When you’ve tried everything else