

Technical Advice Note 11: Air Quality, Noise and Soundscape and Supporting Document 1: Soundscape Design

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Questions

Q.1 Do you agree with the advice contained in Chapters 1 and 2 of the new TAN? Please explain where you disagree with the advice given.

The ANC is delighted to respond to this consultation on ground-breaking proposals, which we welcome. This will change the way that sound is considered in the built environment, for the better, and thereby meets the aspiration “to achieve better health outcomes...” and in setting the parameters for beginning to understand how to achieve more sustainable environments for the future.

Section 1.3 of the draft guidance indicates that the scope of the guidance may not fully extend to “agricultural air pollution, wind turbine noise, minerals operations or waste operations and the effects of airborne (air and noise) pollution on wildlife”, since these are “not considered...in any detail”. The guidance also states that “Where other TANs or MTANs (Minerals Technical Advice Notes) cover specific uses in detail it is also appropriate to consider the policy guidance in this TAN. This TAN does not replace or supersede existing TANs or MTANs.” (emphasis added). This sentence appears to suggest that the revised TAN 11 should be given weight alongside the existing TANs/MTANs covering issues not addressed ‘in detail’ by TAN 11. It’s unclear whether this is the meaning intended from this section, as the apparent acknowledgement of areas not sufficiently covered by the revised TAN 11 (indicating these should not be considered ‘in scope’) seems to conflict with the later advice to consider TAN 11 alongside the existing TANs. This ambiguity would benefit from clarification. More fundamentally, however, if the underlying intention is for the revised TAN 11 to be given weight in relation to these specific issues, this raises several potentially problematic areas. In particular, natural resource utilisation, including mineral extraction operations and wind energy generation, may present significant obstacles to application of soundscape design approaches. Natural resource utilisation is often highly location-constrained, and typically constrained to rural areas. Where such areas do not already accommodate such uses, the inherent juxtaposition of the sound sources and the existing soundscapes could present significant challenges in applying soundscape design approaches that would not necessarily be straightforward to resolve, in view of the draft guidance. These challenges could have implications for the availability of land otherwise potentially suitable for natural resource utilisation. There are also wider policy aspects to consider, since the Welsh Government has designated specific uses (including natural resource utilisation) in specific areas of Wales, for example in the 2021 Future Wales 2040: The National Plan, which currently represents national strategic spatial planning policy. These difficulties should be addressed with clarity if the Welsh Government intends for the guidance to be applied in this way alongside these policies. Furthermore, if the TAN 11 is to be given weight in decisions on developments raising these issues, specific examples of application would be very important to include. If the intention is not for the revised TAN 11 to be given weight on these aspects, this should be stated far more clearly, with any ambiguity removed from the final guidance.

Regard and additional weight might be helpful to emphasise where interventions that would improve soundscape quality may also provide Biodiversity net gain. This may also apply to a greening approach for margins and barriers, when dealing with noise pollution, and could more overly be identified as a way forward to be encouraged within the guidance.

Q.2 Do you agree with the advice contained in Chapter 3 of the new TAN? Please explain where you disagree with the advice given, including where you consider there to be gaps or omissions.

The extent to which a soundscape approach should be undertaken rests, pivotally, on the assessment of potential 'for better placemaking through soundscape design', as described in Section 3 para. 2. This guidance should be made clearer and more robust if possible - crucially, would two separate parties demonstrably come to the same conclusion as to the extent of soundscape design that would be appropriate, in which case what should happen then? Considering that one party (i.e. developers wishing to save cost and reduce risk) has a strong financial interest in the outcome of this assessment of potential (since it may greatly affect both the scope of design work, and the design implementation itself). We suggest that the guidance that informs the decision process in such deadlocks should be more explicit and robust.

It should also be acknowledged that creative solutions or interventions may incur which would add additional cost for developers, but could be set against net long term environmental and societal benefits of promoting creative acoustic design that may improve the health and wellbeing of communities - this cost benefit exercise must be captured and highlighted. The results of soundscape/ acoustic assessments, and the decision process leading to consequential actions, must be replicable and traceable - though it is important to consider a degree of flexibility which allows for diversity of results between projects.

Section 3 of the draft guidance indicates that a strategic-level assessment of potential may be undertaken by a local authority when drafting a Local Plan. What would be the weight of this strategic assessment of potential (undertaken by a planning authority) when compared with a concept/design-stage assessment of potential (undertaken by a developer)? If there is disagreement between the assessments of potential (strategic vs concept/design-stage), how will this be resolved? The guidance for making these judgements is not considered to be sufficiently detailed to result in consistency as it currently stands. A framework for making judgements of potential should be fleshed out with more detail and more suitable, practical examples.

Q.3 Do you agree with the advice contained in Chapter 4 of the new TAN? Please explain where you disagree with the advice given, including where you consider there to be gaps or omissions.

The "Suitably qualified" definition for a SE is so inclusive that it may mean anything. In each case, noise mitigation is a major aspect - that does need an acoustic consultant. Hence the team should also include an acoustic consultant, if the SE is not also an acoustic consultant, otherwise the team would not have the necessary expertise to determine if they can actually deal with the issues that arise from a noise control perspective.

Q.4 Do you agree with the advice contained in Chapter 5 of the new TAN? Please explain where you disagree with the advice given, including where you consider there to be gaps or omissions

N/A

Q.5 We have included two appendices to the TAN on The Role of Green Infrastructure in Air Quality and Soundscape, and Data and Information for Plan Making.

Do you have any specific comments on either or both of these?

N/A

Q.6 Do you agree with the advice contained in Supporting Document 1: Soundscape Design? Please explain where you disagree with the advice given, including where you consider there to be gaps or omissions.

N/A

Q.7 The TAN seeks to mainstream issues hitherto seen as technical matters and as a result contains a plethora of detail which may be better presented in diagrammatic or more visual forms. Do you have any comments or views on how this should be achieved and the 'user friendliness' of the document improved?

The same information is repeated identically in both TAN11 and the supporting documents -e.g. TAN11 Table 2 is the same as Supporting Doc 1 Table 1, which might make referencing confusing, and could cause problems when this needs updating.

We suggest that information does not need to be repeated between the two documents but located in the most appropriate place, and cross-referenced.

What does the colour coding mean in these documents? A colour coding key may assist.

We also suggest:

- 1) putting the axis label "soundscape design potential" at the top, rather than the bottom of the table.
- 2) dividing the table into two tables, for developments that are noise-producing and those that are noise-sensitive: Clearly some developments would be covered by both tables, but the opportunity for better placemaking through soundscape design may be different for the sound sensitive or the sound producing aspects.

Q.8 If in future years the Welsh Government were to issue additional Supporting Documents for this TAN, what topics should they focus on?

Both the examples provided are quite similar, and both address situations that apparently have a high potential for 'better placemaking' from a soundscape approach. In reality, it seems likely that the vast majority of typical developments would probably be assigned a 'medium' potential, and the guidance therefore should tackle the navigation of these (perhaps more challenging) 'grey areas'. Examples where there is "medium potential" for better placemaking through soundscape design should be included.

Q.9 What challenges and barriers need to be overcome, before the new TAN 11 can be implemented in full by planning authorities and developers? What (non-financial) support could the Welsh Government and other organisations provide, to help practitioners to overcome those challenges and barriers?

The group wondered whether this guidance needs people to try implementing it, to see how they respond. Could it be implemented on public sector projects, for example, or in a specific geographic area?

There is the risk that this guidance may hinder development, since adoption of the approaches may involve increased financial investment from developers. Hence, it may be weaponised by LPAs or other objectors against developments that they wish to preclude from progressing (which may be for reasons unrelated to soundscape or acoustics).

It will be interesting to see how the soundscape process will address and deal with conflict, when local people become NIMBYs.

It could be prudent (if it has not already been done) to undertake a strategic impact assessment of the guidance, involving forecasting of its implementation on the costs and benefits of developments, and how this may affect the investment risk associated with planning applications, and developer decision-making.

Q.10 We would like to know your views on the effects that TAN 11 and Supporting Document 1: Soundscape Design would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

N/A

Q.11 Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

N/A

Q.12 We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Comments on examples

The level of detail in these examples, and the absence of 'decision point' information, may leave the reader feeling that they lack realism. They may be improved by detailing the step by step processes, illustrating how the processes were implemented and how this might assist to guide a similar approach.

For example, there is no information given on the assessment of 'potential for better placemaking through soundscape design', which (as noted above) is clearly a pivotal point in the process, one that would be quite likely (in the absence of more detailed, robust guidance) to cause substantial friction between the motivations and aspirations of different stakeholders. In both examples, it may be inferred that a high potential was identified (given the approaches taken), which suggests that (as discussed further below), the examples are too limited in variety, implying that further examples should be generated.

Details could also be added on other aspects, such as what did the (perceptual or quantitative) data indicate, and what interventions were considered based on that data. This may be the most challenging aspect of soundscape design - based on an assessment, how significant do the changes need to be to enable a sufficiently different outcome? Because real interventions can be very significant - relating to the layout of a site, aspect of residential facades - as are indicated in these examples that are quoted:

- Route pedestrian walkways to/from entertainment areas away from sensitive residential areas
- Locate vehicular transportation routes and stops away from sensitive residential areas

The problem of how to use soundscape data to determine an appropriate solution is perhaps beyond the scope of this consultation, and it is hoped that ISO 12913-4 will provide some assistance with this aspect.

In the examples, the call-out boxes are a bit like the tool boxes of interventions that might be suitable, but the range of significance of each is incomparable. A much greater weight of evidence would likely be required to drive the design down a more significant compromise to other aspects of the development, but the nature of compromise of any design and the design process itself is not really acknowledged in these examples.

The interventions could be ranked by significance for their potential effect and outcomes. The degree to which the designer should look to adopt the most significant interventions would depend on the severity of the conditions.

E.g. remodelling the massing of the built form (redirecting transport or pedestrian routes)- a very significant intervention with very significant potential to improve conditions. Also, a smaller intervention in this manner might help a little bit.

Surface materials of buildings - it would be a very unusual situation to imagine that this would have a significant effect.

There is one example of a soundscape approach being used for a residential design project, CoHUT in Newcastle upon Tyne, but the outcomes were much more muted than those claimed in these examples. The soundscape design process only commenced during Stage 3, so it was much later in the project than Section 7 of the Supporting Document 1 suggests is appropriate. It is agreed that early engagement is essential if the soundscape approach is to have significant impact on the design.

Summary

Overall, we believe that the whole document could benefit from the marriage of practicality with the vision. This may be necessary in future revisions when practitioners have attempted to follow this guidance, and there are more examples for successful implementation of the guidance. The foreword: "A composer can choose..." is very poetic, and may undervalue the difficult choices, design compromises and cost that this guidance may invoke. It is encouraged that this be framed as the creative process of design; appreciating that flexibility and creativity does give the opportunity to challenge the norm.

Submit your response

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