

Who will tell the whole truth...?

Truth, in its purest and most exact form, is a victim in controversial developments, including those in which environmental noise is a problem. Consultants have a duty to do the best for their clients, just as lawyers have, whatever they might think about a case. But there is sometimes an uncomfortable feeling that, whilst realities may not be distorted to any great extreme, there is some suppression of uncomfortable facts, those which don't help the argument. Areas of ignorance are also obscured.

One of the more difficult areas of environmental noise prediction is long distance propagation. The developers of the UK Calculation of Road Traffic Noise took this into account when restricting information on attenuation with distance to 300m from the road, or perhaps they just hoped that there would not be any regulatory problems beyond that. Then along come the wind turbine developers, who are only interested in distances greater than 300m and have a lot to say about measurement and assessment of wind turbine noise, but are more reticent about prediction. They depend on in-house or commercial prediction software, largely based on point source propagation with a few attenuation add-ons, and with little indication of uncertainties, except to say that their methods may give the worst case. Does the convenient result of 40dBA really mean 40dBA, or somewhere between 35dBA and 45dBA? We need to know what reliance can be placed on predictions which are for propagation through the complex atmospheric microclimate lying within a few hundred meters of the ground, a microclimate which changes daily and has been shown to upset calculations. Predictions are not just for the ideal day, but for the whole, changeable year.

There is lots we know, much we can't be sure of and some which is so variable it is impossible to be confident about. If it was required that a range of uncertainties is attached to predicted levels, there would be more thought, more caution and perhaps, fewer noisy developments.

noise
notes

KEEP NOISE DOWN OR YOU'RE OUT

A nuisance neighbour has been warned to curb her anti-social behaviour - or risk losing her home. Home Housing's application for a tenancy demotion order against Kris Marie Riley, of Charles Street, Boldon colliery, has been granted. The order, made by South Shields County Court, means she loses some rights as an assured tenant and reduces the security of her tenure. If she breaches the terms of the order in the next year, she can be served a notice requesting her to give up possession of her home. A spokesman for Home's tenancy enforcement team said: "We hope this will send a clear message that we will not tolerate anti-social behaviour on our estates. We will not hesitate to use the courts to ensure our law-abiding residents can live in their homes in peace." The order was made in response to "low-level persistent noise disorder", including loud music, frequent parties and rowdy behaviour.

ZURICH

Slashing flights at Zurich airport to reduce noise pollution would seriously dent the economy, cost thousands of jobs and "ruin" tourism, according to a report. The Swiss Business Federation, economiesuisse, also fears foreign firms could be put off coming to Switzerland if local voters accept to restrict flights to 250,000 a year. The Zurich airport is the country's biggest. The Federation outlined its case against the initiative in a report on the value of air transport to the Swiss economy, just published. Canton Zurich voters will go to the polls early this year to decide on the issue of flight restrictions at Switzerland's busiest airport. Noise pollution has been a hot topic ever since many aircraft were re-routed from flight paths over southern Germany in 2003. A recent government report predicts air passenger numbers will double by 2030, leading to calls for Zurich airport to adapt to meet the expected demand. Annual take-offs and landings would have to increase from nearly 270,000 movements to 450,000. Economiesuisse projects that restricting movements to 250,000 would cost the economy up to \$6 billion in 2020 if these growth predictions prove correct. And the Swiss International Airports Association (SIM) warns that over 17,000 jobs, both directly and indirectly linked to air transport, could be lost based on the current formula that every million passengers create 1,000 positions. The argument against increased air traffic, however, is gathering pace in Zurich. A report by business magazine Cash estimated that the city's property could lose up to \$6.47 billion in value as a result of the southern airport approach. And Zurich airport operators Unique expect to be landed with a noise pollution compensation bill of around \$0.97 billion.