

Southwark Council Environmental Protection Team – Requirements for Noise Assessments during COVID-19 Restrictions

The IOA and ANC have released some guidance on acoustic assessment during COVID-19 restrictions. This can be downloaded at: <https://www.ioa.org.uk/news/guidance-practicality-and-reliability-baseline-sound-level-surveying-and-related-matters-during>

Acoustic consultants should comply with Government COVID-19 restrictions regarding social distancing and non-essential travel. Where it is necessary and possible to safely gain acoustically meaningful assessment data, consultants should continue to undertake environmental surveys. An example of where this may be acoustically meaningful would be assessment of extraction plant from an existing take-away which is still operating as normal.

Where it is not possible to get valid measured data, consultants should consider using a combination of the following methods:

For transportation noise source assessments:

- Search LBS planning portal to find recent assessments in the immediate area and use previous consultant's measured source data from these (accounting for any expected differences). <https://planning.southwark.gov.uk/online-applications/>
- Search LBS planning portal to find recent assessments in closely comparable areas (e.g. along a different stretch of the same road or railway line or a different road or railway line known to have similar traffic flows and vehicle mixes)
- Where measured traffic data is available, calculate noise level from traffic data (for example using CRN and CRTN methodologies).
Southwark's highway traffic counts are available at <https://geo.southwark.gov.uk/connect/analyst/mobile/#/main?mapcfg=Southwark%20Highways>, click on the "TRAFFIC COUNT" folder. (Using Google Chrome)
- Consider whether DEFRA noise mapping data may be useful

For commercial noise sources (BS4142):

- Plant noise can usually be predicted from manufacturer's data where available. Assumptions may have to be made in relation to noise character effects.
- Liaise with site operators to gain an understanding of likely noise sources and operations.
- For existing commercial sites with a variety of noise sources, search LBS planning portal to find recent assessments of similar commercial sites/processes and use this data to predict impact at proposed residents (accounting for any expected differences)
- Use consultant's own data from previous similar sites, plant or processes to predict impact (only where the source data can be provided and justified)

For background sound levels:

- Search LBS planning portal to find recent assessments in the immediate area and use background data from these (accounting for any expected differences).
- Search LBS planning portal to find recent assessments in closely comparable areas and use background data from these (accounting for any expected differences)
- Where comparable background is unavailable or likely to be strongly influenced by localised sources, robust assumptions may have to be made and detailed in the report.

General Principles:

Assessments should use the best available data. Some past data may be too old to be useful or outdated as a result in changes to surrounding land uses. Professional competence should be employed when deciding what data is meaningful. Assumptions should allow a conservative worst-case assessment. Consultants can contact the Environmental Protection Team to discuss any concerns before the assessment is submitted (environmental.protection@southwark.gov.uk).

In every case the assessment should include full details of any assumptions, comment on uncertainty and comment on the confidence that the assessor has in the result.

As long as the data sources in the assessment are clear and the assessment is open about the uncertainty, we will accept the assessments for the purpose of considering the suitability of planning proposals in principle.

However, where it has not been possible to get meaningful measured data we will recommend a planning condition that requires a future validation assessment once the environment has returned to normal.

In rare cases it may be considered that using a validation condition leaves too great a risk of consent being granted for an unsustainable development. In such cases we will recommend that the application is deferred until such time as a suitable assessment can be conducted and submitted for consideration before a decision in principle is made on the application.

For planning enforcement cases, noise assessment will need to reflect the usual ambient noise and level of operation. This is likely to mean assessment must wait until the environment returns to normal.