SHARPS REDMORE

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Report

Wellington House, Uxbridge, UB8 2XW

Office to Residential under Permitted Development

Prepared by
Gary King MIOA MCIEH

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Head Office
Sharps Redmore
The White House, London Road,
Copdock, Ipswich, IP8 3JH
T 01473 730073
E contact@sharpsredmore.co.uk
W sharpsredmore.co.uk

Regional Locations
South England (Head Office),
North England, Wales, Scotland

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This report has been prepared with all reasonable skill, care and diligence commensurate with an acoustic consultancy practice under the terms and brief agreed with our client at that time. Sharps Redmore provides no duty or responsibility whatsoever to any third party who relies upon its content, recommendations or conclusions.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Sharps Redmore has been instructed with respect to a change of use under permitted development to the existing office building known as Wellington House, Cowley Road, Uxbridge, UB8 2XW. The site location is shown below:

FIGURE 1: Site Location

1.2 The site is an office building located within the administrative area of London Borough of Hillingdon (LBH) and is currently vacant, however prior approval has been given by LBH to convert the site to residential use with a further prior approval (Application Ref: 21755/APP/2023/680 for a two storey extension comprising of 16 residential units). This application was accompanied by a noise assessment prepared by RPS which in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (GPDO) considered the impact of noise from commercial activity on the proposed change of use to residential.

1.3 Prior approval is being sought through the permitted development process for an amended scheme which will include a two storey extension to the building. In line with the requirements of the GPDO the purpose of this report is to consider the impact of noise from commercial premises on the proposed development.

1.4 The relevant assessment criteria for any commercial sound sources identified are broadly set out in Section 2, and the site is described in more detail along with survey results within Section 3 of this report. The report conclusions are presented in Section 4.

2.0 Assessment Criteria

2.1 The legislative context for this assessment is The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015, and more recently The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) Order 2016 *(The Order).*

2.2 Noise from commercial premises was originally included in the 2016 amendments to the GPDO principally as a result of campaigns on behalf of licenced premises and two specific documents: the 'London Grassroots Music Venues Rescue Plan' and the 'Bristol Live Music Census Report'. Both reports and the campaigns cite that the permitted conversion of offices into residential properties (Class C3) have resulted in noise sensitive receptors (i.e. residents) being introduced into areas where there are long established music venues or other sources of noise. This, in turn, has given rise to noise complaints from the new residents and the LPA imposing additional constraints on the music venue or noise source.

2.3 It is therefore clear from the above that when considering applications for prior approval that the primary and only reason why noise is included is to prevent unreasonable restrictions on the existing commercial premises which may occur as a result of the permitted change of use. Therefore, for prior approval under GPDO the purpose of a noise assessment is to consider only the impact of commercial noise on the change of use to residential.

2.4 Further guidance is contained with thin National Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph 028 Reference ID:13-028-20140306) which provides the following advice with respect to the approach and level of details perhaps needed for prior approval:

"The statutory requirements relating to prior approval are much less prescriptive than those relating to planning applications. This is deliberate, as prior approval is a light-touch process which applies where the principle of the development has already been established. Where no specific procedure is provided in the General Permitted Development Order, local planning authorities have discretion on what processes they put in place. It is important that a local planning authority does not impose unnecessarily onerous requirements on developers, and does not seek to replicate the planning application system."

2.5 In the absence of specific guidance, it is considered that the principles of National Planning Policy and requirements within Local Planning Policies with respect to noise are relevant.

National Policy

2.6 Though the prior approval system is intended as a light touch process and not to replicate the planning system, the aims of national planning policy with respect to noise are relevant and therefore should be considered for new development.

2.7 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), revised in 2023, sets out the Government's economic, environmental and social planning policies for England and "these policies articulate the Government's vision of sustainable development." In relation to noise it states:

"Planning policies and decisions should also ensure that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of

pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so they should:

a) mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise from new development – and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and the quality of life;

b) Identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason."

2.8 Further advice on noise is contained within paragraph 193 of the NPPF which states that *"planning policies and decisions should ensure that new development can be integrated effectively with existing businesses and community facilities (such as places as workship, pubs, music venues and sports clubs). Existing businesses and facilities should not have unreasonable restrictions placed on them as a result of development permitted after they were established. Where the operation of an existing business or community facility could have a significant adverse effect on new development (including changes of use) in its vicinity, the applicant (or 'agent of change') should be required to provide suitable mitigation before the development has been completed."*

2.9 The NPPF reinforces the March 2010 DEFRA publication, "Noise Policy Statement for England" (NPSE), which states three policy aims, as follows:

"*Through the effective management and control of environmental, neighbour and neighbourhood noise within the context of Government policy on sustainable development:*

- *avoid significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life;*
- *mitigate and minimise adverse impacts on health and quality of life; and*
- *where possible, contribute to the improvement of health and quality of life*."

2.9 Together, the first two aims require that no significant adverse impact should occur and that, where a noise level which falls between a level which represents the lowest observable adverse effect and a level which represents a significant observed adverse effect, then according to the explanatory notes in the statement:

"*… all reasonable steps should be taken to mitigate and minimise adverse effects on health and quality of life whilst also taking into consideration the guiding principles of sustainable development. This does not mean that such effects cannot occur*."

2.16 The Permitted Development Order, in terms of noise, is restricted to the assessment of impacts of noise from commercial premises on the intended occupiers of the development. Transport sources are not considered under the permitted development process although regard will be taken for local aims further to guidance in the National Planning Practice Guidance.

3.0 Site Description and Survey Details

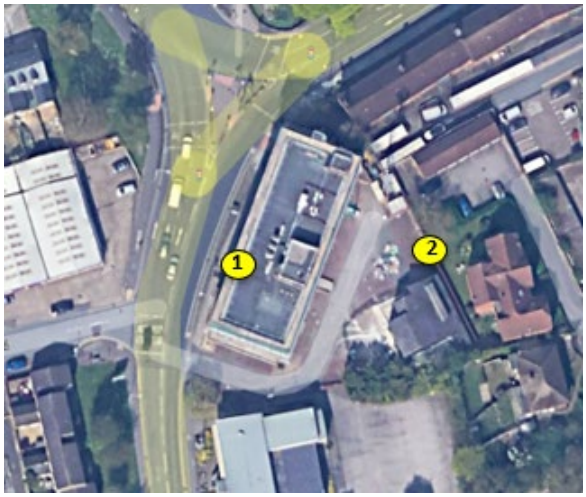
3.1 The starting point for this assessment is to identify possible commercial or industrial premises in the immediate area surrounding the proposal.

3.2 The site is located on land off Cowley Road (A408) and to the south of the A408 and A4020 junction. The site is primarily residential with the nearest commercial premises being the Kwik Fit car repair centre which is located approximately 30 metres to the west. From on-line information SR understands 8.30am to 6pm (Monday to Saturday) and 10am and 4pm on Sunday. Other commercial premises in the area include the Salvation Army Church which is to the south of the site. In terms of commercial activity, there are no changes since the original prior approval was permitted.

Measurement Details

3.3 To determine existing noise levels a noise survey was carried out between 12 and 14th March 2024. Measurements have been two sound level measurements as shown in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Monitoring Locations



- NL1 – Microphone located outside window on the second floor of the building overlooking Cowley Road.
- NL2 – Noise levels measured at the rear boundary of the site.

3.4 At both locations unattended measurements were taken to establish existing ambient L_{AeqT}, background, $L_{A90\ T}$ and maximum L_{Afmax} noise levels. Measurements were taken at 1 minute intervals using a Norsonic type 1 sound level meter which was calibrated before and after the survey with no drift in accuracy noted. Weather conditions during the survey were generally dry with light winds and were suitable for taking sound level measurements. The results of the survey are shown in Figure 2 and 3 below:

Figure 2: Survey Results NL1

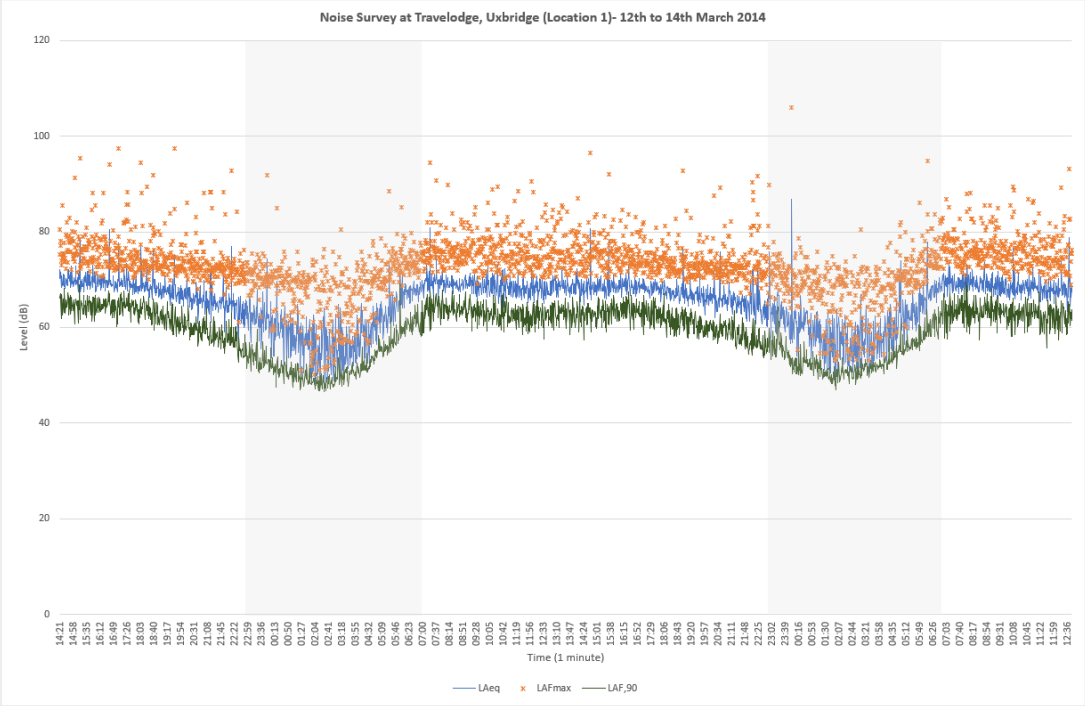
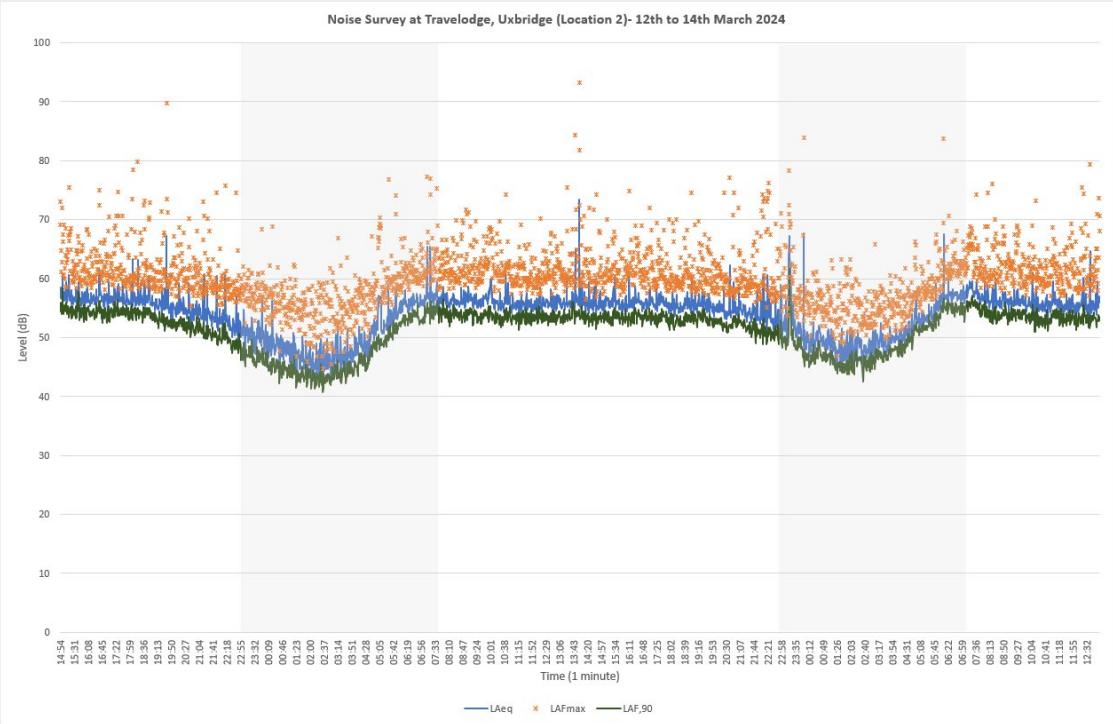


Figure 3: Survey Results NL2



3.5 Based on the survey data the daytime (0700 – 2300 hrs) and night time (2300 – 0700 hrs) sound levels have been determined as follows:

Table 1: Survey Results

Location	Daytime (0700 – 2300 hrs)	Night time (2300 – 0700 hrs)	
	$L_{Aeq16hr}$	L_{Aeq8hr}	L_{Afmax}
NL1	69	65	75
NL2	56	54	63

3.6 Daytime noise levels measured at both locations were consistent with those measured by RPS in relation to the original prior approval.

3.7 The above survey was supplemented by attended measurements carried out during the day when the Kwik Fit garage was open and late evening period to determine the character of the existing noise climate. Noise levels at both locations were dominated by road traffic and it was noted that when the garage was open, with all doors open, noise from commercial activity was inaudible and had no impact on the overall noise levels.

4.0 Assessment and Conclusions

4.1 A sound assessment has been made with respect to commercial premises in the proximity Wellington House, Cowley Road, Uxbridge and a permitted development application to change the use to residential under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2016 as amended.

4.2 The commercial premises within the immediate vicinity of the proposal have been identified for their potential to emit noise. Assessment has subsequently been made to determine whether these sources are likely to require consideration in terms of noise mitigation measures in any final design of the residential proposals.

4.3 Residential dwellings already exist in proximity to commercial premises. Following an attended site survey, it is noted that noise from existing commercial sources, including the Kwik Fit garage opposite the site was inaudible and the existing noise climate is dominated by road traffic.

4.4 As stated in National Planning Practice Guidance, "*prior approval is a light-touch process which applies where the principle of the development has already been established*". In this case, it is considered that the proposal could be permitted to change to residential end use (Planning Use Class C3) with no mitigation measures being necessary with respect to commercial sound.

4.5 The change of use to residential and creation of new residential apartments on upper two storeys of the development will not cause unreasonable restrictions on the continued use of the commercial premises in the area, in line with the policy aims of 193 of the National

Acoustic Terminology

A1 Noise, defined as unwanted sound, is measured in units of decibels, dB. The range of audible sounds is from 0 dB to 140 dB. Two equal sources of sound, if added together will result in an increase in level of 3 dB, i.e. 50 dB + 50 dB = 53 dB. Increases in continuous sound are perceived in the following manner:

1 dB increase - barely perceptible

3 dB increase - just noticeable

10 dB increase - perceived as twice as loud

A2 Frequency (or pitch) of sound is measured in units of Hertz. 1 Hertz (Hz) = 1 cycle/second. The range of frequencies audible to the human ear is around 20Hz to 18000Hz (or 18kHz). The capability of a person to hear higher frequencies will reduce with age. The ear is more sensitive to medium frequency than high or low frequencies.

A3 To take account of the varying sensitivity of people to different frequencies a weighting scale has been universally adopted called "A-weighting". The measuring equipment has the ability automatically to weight (or filter) a sound to this A scale so that the sound level it measures best correlates to the subjective response of a person. The unit of measurement thus becomes dBA (decibel, A-weighted).

A4 The second important characteristic of sound is amplitude or level. Two units are used to express level, a) sound power level - L_w and b) sound pressure level - L_p. Sound power level is an inherent property of a source whilst sound pressure level is dependent on surroundings/distance/directivity, etc. The sound level that is measured on a meter is the sound pressure level, L_p.

A5 External sound levels are rarely steady but rise or fall in response to the activity in the area - cars, voices, planes, birdsong, etc. A person's subjective response to different noises has been found to vary dependent on the type and temporal distribution of a particular type of noise. A set of statistical indices have been developed for the subjective response to these different noise sources.

A6 The main noise indices in use in the UK are:

L_{A90}: The sound level (in dBA) exceeded for 90% of the time. This level gives an indication of the sound level during the quieter periods of time in any given sample. It is used to describe the "background sound level" of an area.

L_{Aeq}: The equivalent continuous sound level in dBA. This unit may be described as "the notional steady noise level that would provide, over a period, the same energy as the intermittent noise". In other words, the energy average level. This unit is now used to measure a wide variety of different types of noise of an industrial or commercial nature, as well as aircraft and trains.

L_{A10}: The sound level (in dBA) exceeded for 10% of the time. This level gives an indication of the sound level during the noisier periods of time in any given sample. It has been used over many years to measure and assess road traffic noise.

L_{AMAX} The maximum level of sound measured in any given period. This unit is used to measure and assess transient noises, i.e. gun shots, individual vehicles, etc.

A7 The sound energy of a transient event may be described by a term SEL - Sound Exposure Level. This is the L_{Aeq} level normalised to one second. That is the constant level in dBA which lasting for one second has the same amount of acoustic energy as a given A weighted noise event lasting for a period of time. The use of this unit allows the prediction of the L_{Aeq} level over any period and for any number of events using the equation;

$$L_{AeqT} = SEL + 10 \log n - 10 \log T \text{ dB}.$$

Where

n = Number of events in time period T.

T = Total sample period in seconds.

A8 In the open, known as free field, sound attenuates at a rate of 6 dB per each doubling of distance. This is known as geometric spreading or sometimes referred to as the Inverse Square Law. As noise is measured on a Logarithmic scale, this attenuation in distance = 20 Log (ratio of distances), e.g. for a noise level of 60 dB at ten metres, the corresponding level at 160 metres is:

$$60 - 20 \text{ Log } {}^{160}/_{10} = 60 - 24 = 36 \text{ dB}$$