

seven places

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Bristol City Council is conducting a consultation about environmental noise in the city. Green campaigner **Glenn Vowles** says it's time to turn the volume down



The deafening reality

Bristol has "green capital" ambitions. But a truly green city would have a more tranquil, less noisy environment – so there is work to be done.

We are increasingly living with unacceptable and unhealthy levels of noise — unwanted, disturbing, harmful sounds — as common experience, as Bristol City Council's own excellent work on noise mapping shows.

Noise interferes with and can impair hearing, affects general quality of life, hampers concentration and work efficiency and can cause accidents.

It causes behavioural changes, causing irritability and annoyance.

It boosts stress levels and nervous disorders through disturbing relaxation and sleep. Residents in noisier areas tend to have higher incidence of taking pills for blood pressure, stomach complaints, and sleeping.

Noise also causes "acoustic fatigue" in buildings, resulting in stress cracks and damage. Health and safety regulations say workers should not be continually exposed to noises above a certain level during their day, and exposure at high levels should be strictly time-limited and/or ear protection issued.

Just a few cars on the road can make a noise as loud as normal conversation. Steady traffic can interrupt normal conversation.

In heavy traffic, you need to shout to be heard.

When traffic is busiest and the heaviest lorries travel at speed on uneven roads, industrial noise levels can be reached — and that can be frightening if you are on a narrow pavement.

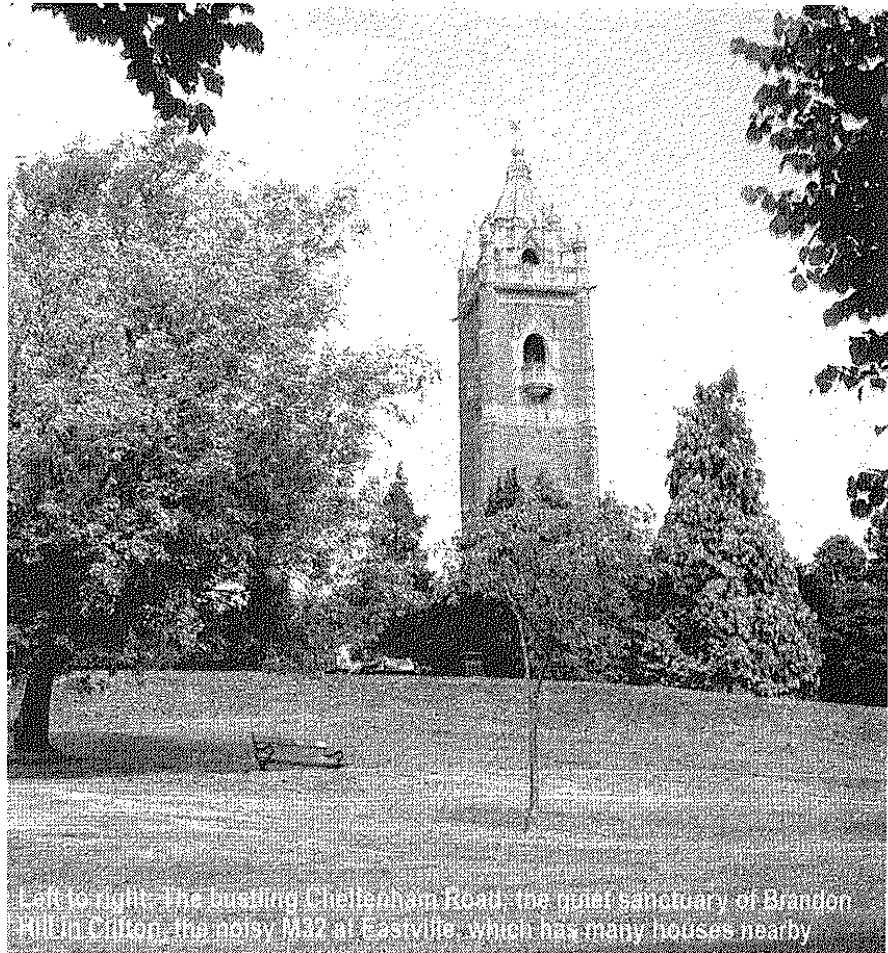
If we are to have a truly better quality of life we need to get away from noisy streets.

In a quiet spot, often a green space such as the wooded area at the top of Arnos Park, the atmosphere is calming. You can hear leaves rustling in the wind and occasional bird song.



You can hear yourself think and it's healthy. In and around Perrett's Park can be similarly relaxing and you can enjoy fantastic views across Bristol with sights such as the Clifton Suspension Bridge in the distance. But the stillness is too often broken by vehicles — vans cutting through from Wells Road to St John's Lane and motorbikes circling the area. Sylvia Avenue is a long, straight stretch and speeding is all too frequent. This is a route to school and to playgrounds for kids, so it's a good

spot for an enforced 20mph zone to make it safer and quieter. Safe and quiet is exactly what Three Lamps Junction is not. The noisy environment oppresses you as huge lorries, vans and cars rattle over the bumpy roads and thunder past. If we are to significantly increase the numbers of people walking to work in central Bristol along Bath and Wells Road, we need to make it safer and quieter by cutting and enforcing speeds, cutting congestion, better maintaining roads and better meeting walker and cyclist needs. Action on noise pollution should be



Left to right: The bustling Cheltenham Road; the quiet sanctuary of Brandon Hill; Clifton; the noisy M32 at Eastville, which has many houses nearby

much higher on Bristol's political agenda. Unlike Bristol, London adopted a noise strategy several years ago — the first in the country — and provides a pretty good model for us to learn from. London has started tackling this urban blight and we need to quell it here. It's good news that there is a Bristol City Council consultation on traffic noise — the main environmental noise source here — running until the spring. There is also an interactive map where people can add notes on their favourite quiet areas and indicate where and how places could be

quieter. Photos and video can be added, too. You can support work to make Bristol quieter by adding observations about places you frequent. The more people who contribute to the consultation and map, the better. The idea is to build a map of valued quieter spots, such as green spaces in the city. The noise consultation will feed into a noise action plan for the city and help to develop a noise strategy for Bristol. It's worth noting that actions needed to lower noise pollution are often the same as those that create safer

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Glenn Vowles in Arnos Park. Opposite page, Glenn at Three Lamps Junction



... the tranquil ideal



Seven ways to reduce noise levels

So how can the modern menace of noise be tackled? Here are seven suggestions from Glenn Vowles' submission to Bristol City Council:

● Reduce noise through better planning and design, acknowledging that growth in Bristol's population, housing, air travel and traffic presents

great challenges;

● Establish a Bristol award scheme to promote excellence in relation to design and noise;

● Encourage quieter transport like walking, cycling and electric vehicles;

● Build noise reduction into day-to-day traffic management and integrate

noise considerations across all council policies — cutting speeds, reducing congestion, reducing stop-start driving where appropriate, smoothing traffic flow, improved allocation of street space;

● Create quieter spaces such as open, green spaces, home zones, 20mph zones and

pedestrian-only areas;

● Seek funding for developing targeted traffic noise reduction projects and for experimentation with fuel cell buses and hybrid-electric buses;

● Maximise use of noise-reducing surfaces across all roads where they would be effective (primarily faster roads).

streets, contribute to tackling air pollution and climate impact — for example, speed reduction, encouraging walking and cycling and using shared space principles, provided they account for the needs of disabled people. This is the way to go to achieve better health, well-being and quality of life.

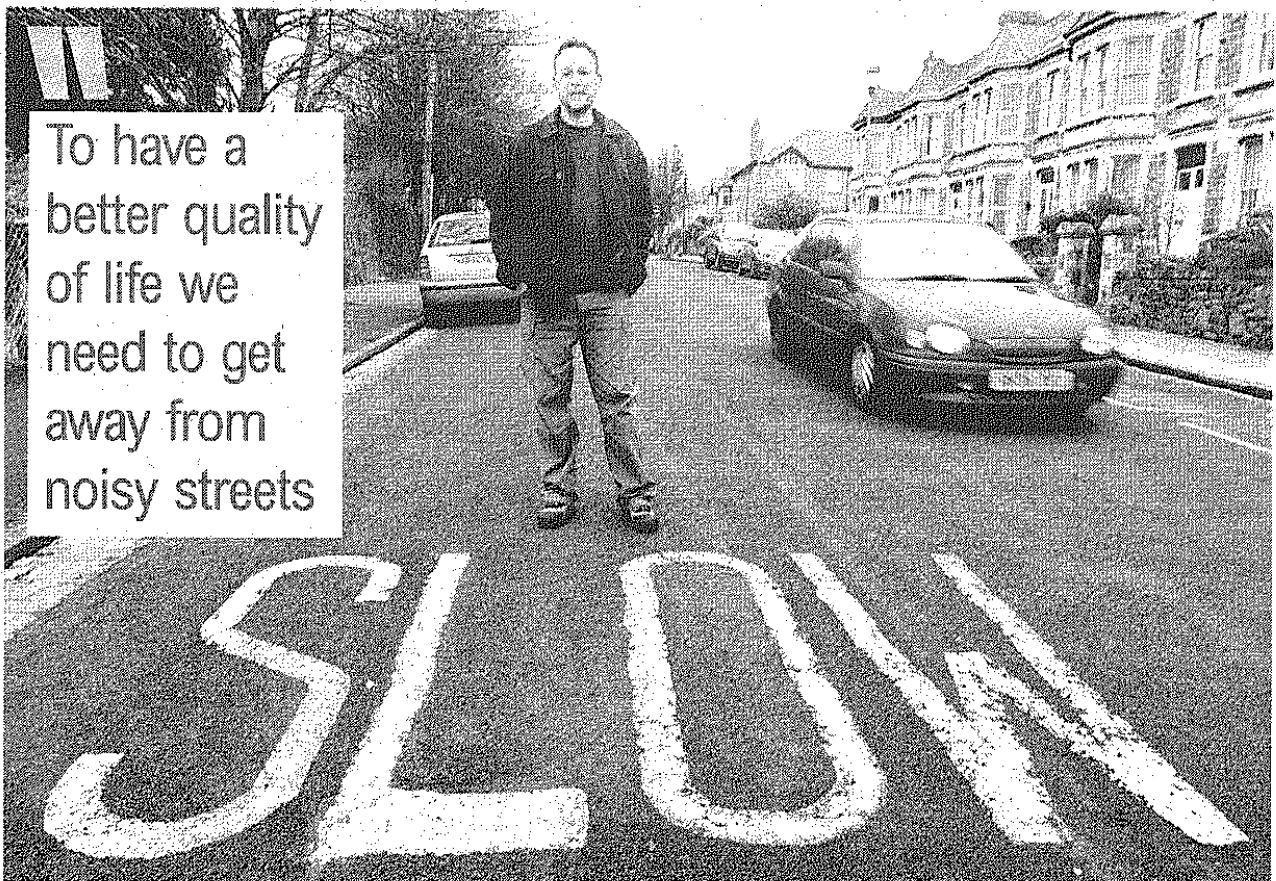
Bristol City Council states that it "does not have legal powers to deal with traffic noise" (or noise from aircraft or rowdy behaviour, for that matter). But there are things that can be done. London's strategy contains some 100 policies designed to tackle

"ambient" or "environmental" noise in buildings as well as from traffic, aircraft and other sources.

Glenn Vowles is a green campaigner and Open University associate lecturer in environment — <http://vowlesthegreen.blogspot.com>

To take part in Bristol City Council's traffic noise consultation, visit www.askbristol.com/theme.php?id=20

For the interactive noise map, visit www.bristolstreets.co.uk/#tmQuiet/z15/r/mply51.44938/x-2.59479



To have a better quality of life we need to get away from noisy streets