

## **HOW TO BE A GOOD NEIGHBOUR**

### **CONSIDER YOUR SURROUNDINGS**

Many of the dwellings we live in today were built when the loudest noise was likely to come from a crystal radio set! Party walls, and floors and ceilings in flats were not built with items like automatic washing machines, vacuum cleaners, surround sound TV and modern stereo systems in mind. Consequently, in many cases there is very little insulation in place to stop noise from travelling from one dwelling into adjacent ones. If you live in such a situation you should be prepared to reduce the volume level of your TV and stereo to something more appropriate to your surroundings. Likewise, use your domestic appliances at a reasonable time of the day avoiding vacuuming very early in the morning and late at night or running your washing machine or tumble drier through the night.

### **CONSIDER YOUR NEIGHBOUR**

Current nuisance law is intended to protect people from a significant interference with their use and enjoyment of their property. Playing loud music, letting your dog bark incessantly or burning your garden waste when your neighbour has washing out drying may do just that. In addition, your actions may cause greater interference depending on your neighbour's circumstances. They may, for example, have a different lifestyle that clashes with yours, particularly if you enjoy burning the candle at both ends! Your neighbour may be elderly, or infirm, and housebound, unable to go out to escape from your loud music, or even a shift worker who needs to get some sleep during the morning. Perhaps even a family with young children who cannot sleep because of the noise you are making and find it frightening and upsetting, especially if their parents become angry. Show some common sense and courtesy by respecting your neighbour's circumstances, and behave towards them as you would expect them to behave towards you.

### **YOU DON'T NEED TO CREEP AROUND LIKE A MOUSE**

The law is not intended to be totally restrictive, and recognizes that in certain circumstances our actions may well impinge upon our neighbours. In fact case law has ruled that the ordinary domestic use of a dwelling is incapable of amounting to a nuisance to other residents. For example, in many properties with shared walls a certain amount of unpleasant noise is going to come across at some point such as DIY work, and other noise occurring as part of everyday lives. Similarly, there is currently nothing in the law to prevent isolated occurrences such as a one-off garden bonfire that is smoky or one-off party or celebration that is noisy. However, even in these examples, and also in other cases where our behaviour might affect other residents, it is incumbent on us all to take reasonable steps to minimize the impact that our actions might have on other residents. For there to be a possible breach of the law there has to be something unusual or excessive in the way that a property is used, or something unreasonable and/or malicious and/or excessive being done by a person at that property that is affecting another resident at their property for a nuisance to be considered. If you are concerned that something you are intending to do might cause a nuisance, and want to avoid any repercussions, contact the council for guidance beforehand.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MINIMISE THE IMPACT OF YOUR ACTIONS ON YOUR NEIGHBOURS**

It is easy to overlook how our behaviour might be impacting on our neighbours, especially if our neighbours feel inhibited in any way from mentioning their concerns to us. And remember that the inconvenience of disturbed sleep, having to re-wash clothes or hearing

your music throughout their house, is only one of the consequences that your actions may cause your neighbours. More often than not day-in day-out repetition can lead to stress and misery that can result in serious ill-health. Most of what we can do to be more considerate to our neighbours is simple common sense steps that it is easy to overlook in our modern rushed lives, but it can make a big difference to the quality of our neighbour's lives and their health. In some cases of course you may not be behaving inconsiderately, but the inadequacies of the insulation in your dwelling may not be sufficient to prevent your TV or music from causing a problem to your neighbours. In this situation, it is often a case of moderating your volume to suit the circumstances, or using a pair of headphones if you want to listen to your music or TV louder.

Here are a few other things to consider, but remember that in some dwellings such as flats the impact of certain behaviour will be more intrusive.

### AROUND THE HOUSE...

Noise and vibration transmits easily through walls and floors so try the following,

- Close doors quietly rather than slamming them shut
- Don't share your business by arguing and shouting in loud voices
- Stop your children from running around your dwelling and particularly up and down the stairs
- If you don't have any carpets down, wear slippers to absorb the noise from your footsteps
- Don't run washing machines or tumble driers through the night. Don't vacuum early in the morning or late at night.

### ...AND IN THE GARDEN

- Follow the Council's guidance if you intend having a garden bonfire. This is available on the Council's website, or requesting a copy from the Environmental Protection team on 01509 634636
- Avoid mowing your lawn too early in the morning
- If you have a BBQ, try and site it where the smoke and odours won't affect your neighbours too much. If you are playing any music outside as well, keep the volume down, especially late in the evening.

### LOUD MUSIC AND TV NOISE

Unfortunately not everyone likes the same music or TV programme as we do so,

- Turn down the volume, especially late in the evening and during the night and early morning
- Don't play your music too loud when outside in your garden
- Reduce the bass levels on music where this is a particular characteristic. Low frequency bass noise can carry further than most sounds, often causing vibrations in other dwellings
- Don't mount your speakers on a party wall, or have them close to the wall. If you can, raise them off the floor by using speaker stands, or placing them on rubber mats to absorb any vibration.
- Consider using headphones if appropriate!

## DIY NOISE

Power tools, drilling and hammering are particularly disturbing, but their use is often unavoidable so,

- Follow these guidelines suggested by the Council and restrict noisy activities to,
  - Saturday 9am to 5pm
  - Sunday 10am – 2pm
  - Weekdays 9am – 7pm
- Let your neighbour know what you are doing in advance.

## ALARMS

- Make sure your house alarm complies with the current code of practice, and has a 20 minute cut-off. Have it regularly serviced to guard against false or intermittent activation. Arrange to leave your house key with family or friends just in case there is a malfunction while you are away. Notify the Police and Council, or close neighbours, of your nominated key holders.
- Cancel the alarm on clocks alarm/radios if you are going away for some time.
- Make sure your car alarm is also regularly serviced to work properly, and make provision for any false activation if you are away for some time

## PARTIES

We all have one from time to time, and need to give some thought in the preparation to how we can minimise the disturbance caused to neighbours, particularly if they are elderly or have young children, so tell your neighbour about your plans, well in advance, and what you are going to do to control noise such as,

- Turn down the music volume at a set time, perhaps 11.30pm and then off completely at midnight
- Control other noise after midnight
- Deciding what time the party will finally end
- Asking your guests to be quiet when they leave your property
- Controlling noise from music and people if the party is outside in your garden
- Responding to reasonable requests from your neighbours to keep noise levels down

## THE DOG

Barking is normal dog behaviour, but all too often it can get out of hand causing significant noise problems. There are many reasons why dogs bark, and if your dog is disturbing your neighbours with constant barking or whining you should be prepared to look at taking steps to control its behaviour. Advice can be obtained from various internet websites, a vet or the RSPCA. The Council also has details on dog training classes, and may be able to put you in contact with other organisations that can help.

There will always be occasions when we do something on our property that intrudes upon our neighbour. This is an inescapable consequence of modern life and the type of society we live in. However, we need to strike a balance where we can go about living our own lives, but at the same time be courteous and sensitive to our neighbours' needs. Applying some thought to the consequences of our actions and behaviour beforehand can help to reduce the risk of upsetting our neighbours and prevent trivial situations from developing into long term disputes that have repercussions for both sides.

As well as considering some of the suggestions and precautions listed above, we can also help maintain a friendly relationship with our neighbours by,

- Listening to any problems they may have and discussing them to find ways of finding a solution.
- Contacting other agencies such as the Council's Environmental Protection team, for advice on issues that cannot be resolved.
- Keeping your neighbour informed of any impending work, or parties that will intrude on other residents.