

PROPOSALS TO MANAGE NEIGHBOURHOOD NOISE

**BY THE COMMUNITY ADVISORY PANEL ON
NEIGHBOURHOOD NOISE**

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FOREWORD

We have all experienced noise disturbances in our daily lives. In most cases, the noises can be tolerated, or addressed through communication with our neighbours. However, there are serious cases where noise disturbances have impacted the residents' physical and mental health in very harmful ways. Noise disturbances can also be the subject of conflicts between neighbours and affect relationships in the community.

The Community Advisory Panel (CAP) on Neighbourhood Noise was convened in April 2022 by the Municipal Services Office (MSO) and the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY). The Panel was asked to establish what is considered acceptable or unacceptable noise, and community norms that residents should adopt to manage noise disturbances. These norms should reflect a shared understanding of what good civic behaviour should be, so that they can be used as a reference in community mediation.

Over the past six months, the Panel has embarked on extensive rounds of focus group discussions, surveys and meetings with stakeholders and residents to better understand the views and experiences of the community. More than 4,400 members of the public participated in our engagements. A study trip was also made to Seoul to gain a deeper understanding of how the city has managed noise issues. Drawing from the inputs gathered, the Panel is now putting forth a set of community norms and recommendations to the Government through the Municipal Services Office to manage neighbourhood noise. These proposals take into the consideration the different needs and perspectives that were raised in the engagements. In particular, we empathise with the challenges and issues faced by those who stepped forward to share their experiences. We believe that our proposals will help to build a more harmonious, kinder and considerate community for residents.

The CAP is confident that the Government will consider and implement our proposals. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with the relevant agencies on our suggestions.

Thank you.



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NEIGHBOURHOOD NOISE AND THE FORMATION OF CAP

Neighbourhood Noise

- 1 Neighbourhood noise can be broken down into two main categories:
 - a. Noise from Neighbours. This refers to noise from neighbouring units, such as from gatherings, furniture dragging and DIY renovation.
 - b. Congregational Noise. This refers to noises created from people gathering in residential common areas, such as void decks, playgrounds and exercise areas.
- 2 Neighbourhood noise is inevitable in a densely populated country like Singapore. However, loud or sustained noises generated can affect our work, study and rest time in our homes. In extreme cases with prolonged exposure, it can affect our physical and mental health.

How is Neighbourhood Noise currently managed in Singapore

- 3 Singapore has adopted a facilitative approach in managing noise disputes between neighbours. Residents depend on “common sense” and “reasonableness” when it comes to addressing neighbourhood noise concerns. They are encouraged to resolve their disputes among themselves as there is no dedicated authority in charge of neighbourhood noise. The relevant stakeholders, such as the Housing Development Board (HDB), Town Councils and grassroots leaders (GRLs) will step in, if needed, to help mediate and facilitate conversations to resolve the dispute. Should disputes remain unresolved, residents have the option to take up mediation at the Community Mediation Centre (CMC) or file a claim with the Community Disputes Resolution Tribunal (CDRT) as the last resort.
- 4 The Government has also embarked on public education to promote positive social norms, such as adhering to quiet hours and actions that residents should take to minimize noise disturbance. For example, HDB has collaborated with the Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM) on the ‘Then How’ series to encourage neighbourliness in the new normal. Various public education campaigns have encouraged neighbours to show greater consideration for one another by keeping the noise level low after 10.30pm, and to show mutual understanding and empathy towards their neighbours. For cases involving congregational noise, town councils will take actions where feasible, such as putting up advisories, educational posters, or switching off the lights at common facilities at night to deter people from using them.

5 The Panel has taken into consideration the key challenge that noise is subjective and transient, as well as the current approach by the Government to manage neighbourhood noise when putting forth our proposals.

KEY FINDINGS

6 The Panel has studied the views and suggestions provided by close to 4,400 residents in Singapore during the public engagements.

7 The CAP tapped on the following platforms to seek views and feedback from the members of the public:

- a) An i) online survey on neighbourhood noise by MSO and ii) a general face-to-face survey by MCCY¹ that included questions related to quiet hours held between June to September, involving a total of close to 3,900 responses from both surveys.
- b) Focus Group Discussions on neighbourhood noise involving more than 480 members of public

What constitutes acceptable or unacceptable noise levels when living in a community?

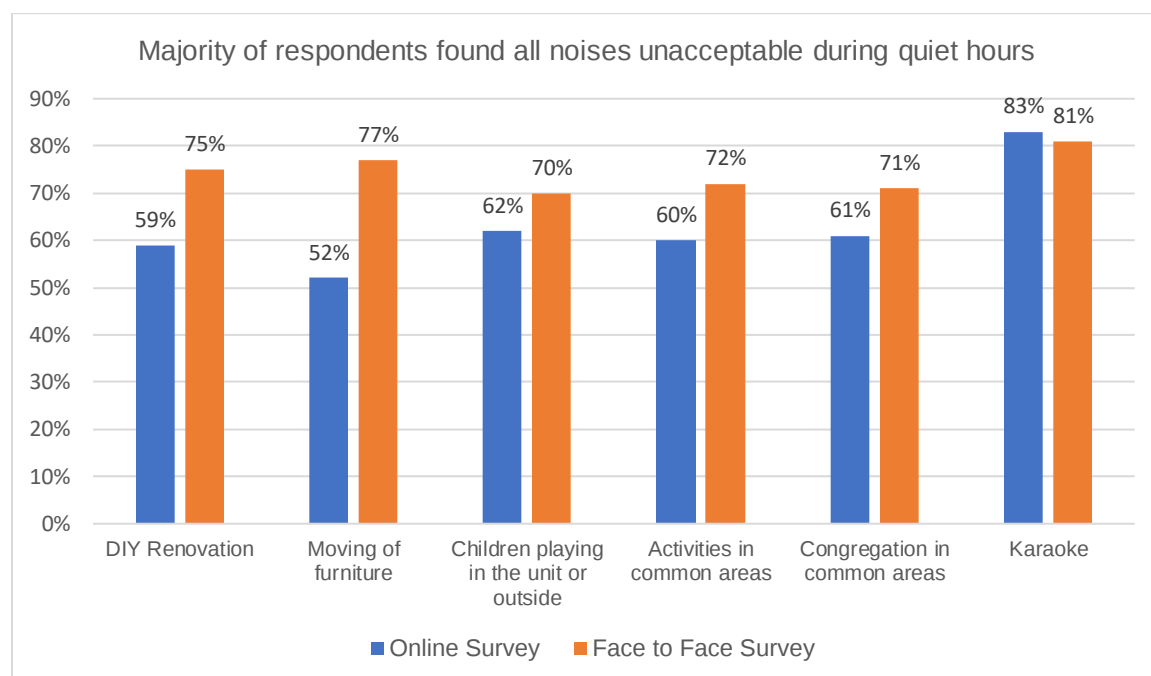
8 Through our engagements, Singaporeans have shared with us that acceptable noise is noise that is unintentional or cannot be controlled. This includes noise generated from activities that are necessary in our daily living and when their neighbours have taken active steps to reduce the disturbance. However, there is no strong consensus on the recommended duration of these noises. The acceptable duration of noise outside quiet hours ranges from 30 mins to more than 60 mins, depending on the type of noise. Based on findings from both surveys, the largest proportions of people, for example, chose 30 mins as an acceptable duration of noise for DIY renovation and moving of furniture, whereas the largest proportion of people indicated more than 60 mins for noises from children playing in the unit or outside and noises from common areas. It was also noted that the frequency that the noise occurs would also affect how it is perceived.

9 We have defined unacceptable noise as noise that is intentionally created to disturb neighbours. This includes situations where neighbours do not try to reduce the noise they generate, or conduct noisy activities during quiet hours. More than 50% of respondents for both surveys indicated that all noise types are unacceptable during quiet hours. Refer to Figure 1 below on surveys findings. Many people engaged through our focus group discussions felt

¹ The MCCY Social Pulse Survey is a door-to-door survey on a wide range of social and community issues within MCCY's domains.

that there must be strong enforcement action taken against offenders who intentionally create unacceptable noise.

Figure 1: Respondents who found noise unacceptable during quiet hours



What can we do as a community to manage noise levels and foster harmonious living?

10 Through our engagements, there is consensus among residents to take action to manage noise levels. When asked, survey respondents said they adopt a number of ways to minimize noise disturbances (see Table 1).

Table 1: Respondents of online survey who have taken action to reduce noise

Approaches which received consensus	% of respondents who adopted this approach often or all the time ²
Movement-Related Noise	
Lift furniture if possible when moving it	87%
Use door stoppers to prevent accidental slamming of doors	80%

² Results were obtained from the online Form.sg survey, which was open to the public and received 1,847 responses. Respondents were asked how often they had adopted these approaches from a scale of "Not at all" to "All the time".

Use furniture sliders or items to absorb the noise if the furniture is too heavy to be lifted	62%
Activity-Related Noise	
Lower TV volume and avoid playing musical instruments, especially during quiet hours	89%
Ensure that your children do not make too much noise while playing	88% (among those who indicated this was applicable to them.)
Avoid using loud appliances at night	80%
Close windows and door to prevent noise from affecting others	66%
Pet-Related Noise	
Train your pet dog to avoid excessive barking	94% (among those who indicated this was applicable to them.)
Move pets indoors to an enclosed room if necessary	84% (among those who indicated this was applicable to them.)
Drape or cover your birdcage in the evenings to allow them to rest and avoid excessive chirping	80% (among those who indicated this was applicable to them.)

11 Many people in our focus group discussions agreed that it is important for us to establish and build a strong relationship with neighbours as it helps in resolving noise disputes. They felt that the first step of managing noise disputes should be communication with neighbours. However, more than half of the online survey respondents indicated that they do not regularly communicate with neighbours.

CAP'S PROPOSALS TO THE GOVERNMENT

Recommended Community Norms to Manage Neighbourhood Noise

12 The Panel would like to make recommendations in three areas. First, we recommend that informal discussion with neighbours to resolve disputes should be the preferred first option. Second, we recommend extending the current quiet hours, which are from 10.30 pm to 7 am, to between 10 pm to 8 am. Third, we recommend ways to strengthen residents' adherence to these quiet hours, and considerate behaviours that should be practiced at all times.

A. We should proactively build a relationship with neighbours from the onset, which would help us reach a mutual understanding in a friendly manner.

13 The majority of our focus group participants advocated the need to communicate with neighbours to resolve disputes. We should attempt to address the issue amicably among ourselves instead of immediately resorting to interventions from authorities. Going to the authorities should not be the first option, so that we preserve community relations. As we heard from some of the experiences shared at the focus group discussion, reporting the concerns to the authorities at the first instance might sour relationship among neighbours.

14 Residents in Singapore, however, tend to avoid confrontation with neighbours. Regular communication with neighbours would help to resolve disputes, and we should normalise the behaviour of friendly engagement between neighbours to address disputes. The Panel emphasises the need to build strong relationships with neighbours early, which makes it easier for residents to broach concerns to their neighbours, leading to a better outcome when subsequently communicating with neighbours about a noise disturbance.

Figure 2: Proposed steps for conflict resolution between neighbours



B. We should extend our quiet hours from the current 10.30 pm to 7 am, to 10 pm to 8 am. Residents should be considerate and observe the extended quiet hours.

15 Quiet hours are an existing norm in Singapore. Most people agree that noisy activities during this period are unacceptable. More than 80% of survey respondents indicated that they are aware of the current quiet hours between 10.30 pm to 7 am.

16 Given the changing expectations and lifestyle of the community, the Panel sought views from the public on their thoughts regarding the timings for the quiet hours. Although there were split views among the general public respondents of the MCCY face-to-face survey about the need to extend quiet hours, it was noticeable that a clear majority of the respondents to the MSO online survey called for an extension of quiet hours. This call to extend quiet hours was also raised by most of the participants of the focus group discussions. This could be because the participants of the MSO survey and focus group discussions were also members of the public who may have been affected by noise disturbance.

Views from focus group discussions supporting the extension of quiet hours

"I am a taxi driver and start work early the next day, so I need more time for rest."

"As a retiree, I tend to sleep earlier. Noises at night would also affect me as I am a light sleeper."

"We deserve a good break after work. Residents also want some quiet time before bed to wind down and do other activities, such as reading."

"A later end time for quiet hours would cater to those who work from home or choose to commute during off-peak hours, so a little more rest time would be appreciated."

"There are some people working night shifts, so we should be considerate and let them have more rest."

17 On balance, CAP has considered the overall needs of the community and the strong views from those affected by noise, and proposes an extension of the quiet hours from 10 pm to 8 am.

18 The Panel also considered the need for a different set of quiet hours during weekends and public holidays. However, there is no strong support for the need for different quiet hours. There were also mixed views gathered from the focus group discussions. While some of the

participants indicated that they preferred to stay up and sleep later on weekends, others pointed to the potential confusion and operational challenges of a different set of quiet hours over weekends. Hence, the Panel proposes to have a consistent set of quiet hours from 10 pm to 8 am throughout the week.

C. We should practice considerate behaviours for our community to create a peaceful and harmonious living environment.

19 While the notion of quiet hours is widely accepted in Singapore, some residents have not been adhering to them. The Panel suggests that agencies should conduct educational campaigns and implement initiatives to inform and seek compliance from the public to observe the quiet hours, especially if the revised quiet hours are adopted. Agencies should also consider stronger measures against individuals who do not adhere to the quiet hours.

20 In addition, the Panel would like to emphasize that residents should practice civic mindedness even outside of quiet hours. The timings outside of quiet hours should not be seen as “noisy” hours, where residents where residents can disregard one another's needs and make excessive noise. We must continue to be considerate to one another and lower their volume during daily activities as much as possible.

21 Most residents in Singapore are already taking proactive actions to manage the noise they create. We should ensure that we do the same, and practice these in our daily lives. Some examples of the considerate behaviours for specific situations are tabled below. This is a non-exhaustive list.

Table 2: List of considerate behaviours to manage noise

Considerate Behaviours to manage noise
Movement-Related
Lift your furniture, if possible, when moving it. If it is too heavy to be lifted, use items such as furniture sliders to absorb the noise.
Use door stoppers to prevent accidental slamming of doors
Use exercise mats if you are working out at home
Activity-Related
Lower your TV volume and avoid playing musical instruments at night
Avoid using loud appliances such as blenders or vacuum cleaners at night

If your child is playing, monitor their noise levels and ask them to quieten down when necessary
Close your windows and doors to prevent noise from affecting others
Renovation-Related
Keep DIY works to the daytime, and within a 30 min window
Use items to soundproof the room or absorb the noise where the renovation is taking place
Pets-Related
Move your pets to an enclosed room if they are making noise
Train your pets to avoid excessive noises from them. If needed, seek professional assistance to train them
Reduce external stimulus for your pets. For bird owners, cover up their cages in the evenings to allow your birds to rest and avoid excessive chirping

22 As suggested by many participants in the engagements, public education to create awareness on these behaviours is critical. Future campaigns should focus on the specific actions to take for each noise type to educate the public on the importance of adopting such behaviours. Relevant agencies and organisations such as HDB, Town Councils and grassroots should continue to play a part to provide platforms for residents, in particular the newer residents, to build relationships with each other, and educate them on the norms in their estate. This could be done as part of the key collection exercise with HDB officers when new flat owners collect their keys for their new home or block party-type events for residents to get to know each other and learn about the community norms.

23 The Government could also consider giving out an educational kit for residents, which includes noise-reducing items such as furniture sliders or exercise mats, to create awareness on the various interventions they could adopt to reduce noise disturbance.

Case Studies from Focus Group Discussions

A neighbour's children upstairs were dropping balls, dragging things and playing loudly early in the morning at 5-6 am. The participant's sleep was adversely affected as he was forced to wake up early.

The participant went upstairs to provide feedback to his neighbour, but they were initially unreceptive towards him. However, he eventually got to know the grandfather in the

neighbour's family, and frequently interacted with him under the block. The participant became friends with the grandfather and was able to bring up the issue to him. After forging a friendly relationship with the neighbour's grandfather, the participant realised the neighbours reduced their frequency of making the noise. His neighbour even came down to inform him beforehand about an upcoming renovation work to seek his understanding.

A participant's neighbour was conducting frequent renovation, as it was a relatively new estate. However, the renovation was affecting the participant's young child who needed to nap in the afternoons. The participant approached her neighbour and asked about their renovation schedule plans. She asked her neighbour to avoid the afternoon hours when her child would be napping. The neighbour was understanding and complied with the proposed arrangement.

A neighbour's family living upstairs was singing karaoke from morning to night during the circuit breaker period, which affected the participant.

The participant managed to identify the neighbour and passed them a note. In his note, he acknowledged that the neighbours had the freedom to sing but wished for them to also be considerate to others. For example, people may need quiet time to study especially during exam seasons. The participant also suggested for the neighbour to consider closing their doors and windows while singing, to reduce the noise travelling to other households.

Three days after receiving the note, his neighbours made the changes accordingly. To date, his neighbours close their doors and windows whenever they are singing.

[Recommendations to Review the Approach in Managing Neighbourhood Noise](#)

24 While the norms on what defines acceptable and unacceptable noise and the actions that residents should adopt to address neighbourhood noise are important to shape residents' behaviour to foster a more harmonious living environment, the Panel recognises that norms alone are insufficient to tackle the issue.

25 In particular, acts of "weaponising noise" i.e. creating noise intentionally to irritate neighbours, is unacceptable, and we should take strong action and have laws to deter it. The

Panel is of the view that **the Government needs to establish a dedicated process supported with the right powers to address the issue effectively.** Many of the focus group participants indicated difficulties in approaching the right agency for assistance, and in some cases, they were directed from one agency to another, resulting in frustration in the process and losing faith in our system in getting their issues resolved. The current process for managing neighbourhood noise was deemed ineffective in helping our residents resolve noise concerns on the ground.

Learning from Seoul's Approach in Managing Inter-floor Noise

Among the overseas cities researched, Seoul has the most relevant insights to CAP work. There are similarities between Singapore and Seoul, as both are densely populated cities with a large proportion of residents living in high-rise apartments. Seoul has faced noise issues in their multi-unit housing, and has taken steps and invested substantial resources to set up a separate system to mitigate it. As such, the Panel made a trip to Seoul together with the Municipal Services Office, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, and Ministry of Law to study their approach in managing inter-floor noise.

Korea has prescribed noise thresholds according to the types of noise (either shock-associated noise, or airborne noise) in their legislation to provide the levers for the Government to enforce against recalcitrant offenders.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government has developed a protocol to deal with inter-floor noise complaints within multi-family housing complexes. The protocol includes the establishment of inter-floor noise management committees within multi-family housing complexes, conducting mediation and on-site visits, as well as the establishment of the Environmental Dispute Adjustment Committee pursuant to the Environmental Dispute Adjustment Act.

The Korean Government has also dedicated resources to provide telephone counselling services for residents suffering from conflicts with their neighbours over noise. As part of their consulting services, they arrange meetings, led by their experts, to mitigate conflict between stakeholders. They also provide noise measurement services to the inter-floor noise management committees and issue free noise control items (e.g. slippers and furniture socks) to the alleged noise-makers. In offensive or recalcitrant cases, a fine is imposed on the perpetrators.

The Panel also visited a research facility known as Raemian Goyo-an Lab owned by Samsung, where visitors get to experience inter-floor noise, and understand the impact of human behaviour and different building materials on noise disturbance.

A. Designate an agency empowered with legal levers to respond to and enforce against unacceptable noise

26 Drawing from our learnings from the study trip to Seoul, the Panel would like to recommend **designating an agency to take clear ownership of neighbourhood noise issues**. Considering that we have been depending on moral suasion and/or mediation and that there is a lack of legal levers for the Government to effectively manage egregious cases involving recalcitrant offenders, the agency would need to be **empowered by legislation to respond and enforce against unacceptable behaviour on neighbourhood noise effectively and efficiently**. There is strong support from the public for enforcement against noise disturbances, especially for disturbances that keep repeating despite best efforts from affected parties to reach out and resolve concerns. Some participants pointed out that, today, noise issues are not resolved as there is no clear enforcement guidelines or penalties for neighbour noise. In some cases, the offenders would pause their activities when approached by authorities, only to resume them once the authorities left.

27 It would be useful for a designated authority to investigate and assess the situation to determine if enforcement measures are needed. Some penalties suggested by our focus group participants include fines or corrective work orders imposed on inconsiderate neighbours.

B. Review the process of mediation and collecting of evidence to better manage community disputes over neighbourhood noise

28 The Panel would like to recommend that the Government review the process in managing community disputes over neighbourhood noise. During our engagements, participants shared that their neighbours had refused to explore mediation. Some of them managed to go through the CMC or CDRT to resolve their disputes, but there were others who shared their challenges faced in collecting evidence to support and validate their claim for the dispute. The Government should consider **making mediation mandatory and review the process to make it easier for residents to collect evidence, with greater clarity on the evidence required, in the process of resolving their disputes**.

29 Following our study trip, the panel is of the view that building up mediation capabilities is key in resolving community disputes at the local level. Many of the disputes in South Korea are settled at the local level through the inter-floor noise management committees, where some of the members have experience in mediation. Mediation services to serve residents' needs are made widely available at the local, municipal and state levels in Korea. In Singapore's context, there are some block representatives at the grassroots level that help to address residents' concerns and are often the first points of contact should residents fail to resolve issues among themselves. The Panel is of the view that building mediation capabilities, in particular among these grassroot leaders, could help make the management of neighbourhood noise disputes more effective.

C. Adopting a quantitative noise threshold in the form of a decibel limit to assess egregious cases of neighbourhood noise

30 The Panel would like to recommend that the Government consider **adopting quantitative noise thresholds in the form of a decibel limit to help agencies in the assessment of egregious cases of neighbourhood noise**. While there is no consensus from the community on how factors such as timing, duration, and frequency affect how noise is perceived, the Panel noted that about 60 per cent of the online survey respondents indicated that it would be useful to first introduce a decibel limit to manage neighbourhood noise. Establishing quantitative thresholds provides an objective assessment when the noise disturbance remains unresolved between neighbours and further investigation is needed to validate claims from both parties.

31 While there are existing regulations with stipulated noise limits to control noise levels from construction sites and factory premises in Singapore, the Panel is of the view that these limits should not be applied to neighbourhood noise generated by residents, because of the different contexts. The permitted noise levels from construction sites and factory premises if they are located near or in residential areas range from 55 – 75 decibels over 5 minutes. These noise limits are too high in the context of inter-floor noise compared to overseas cities' standards. For example, the noise thresholds prescribed by South Korea for inter-floor noises in multi-unit housing range from 38 – 57 decibels, depending on the type, time of day and duration of noise.

32 The Panel would like to propose a **separate study to develop decibel limits for specific noise situations in Singapore, given the current HDB's flat design**. While there are World Health Organisation's (WHO) health-based guidelines on community/residential

noise to serve as reference, it would be useful for Singapore to develop its own catalogue of decibel levels for different activities, and to then own our own set of noise thresholds, which is unique to our urban living environment. The research would help to build up Singapore's catalog of noise measurements to use for advisories / enforcement for the various situations and define the appropriate decibel limit for our living environment. These limits could also be of reference to guide the level of noise generated from the operations of businesses such as coffeeshops, gyms and home-based businesses situated in residential areas. It would also pave the way should Singapore be keen to move towards legislating decibel limits for neighbourhood noise.

33 Similar to the Raemian Goyo-an Lab owned by Samsung in Seoul, which is opened to the public as part of Samsung's Corporate Social Responsibility, the research study could be opened to the public for people to experience and understand inter-floor noise, and to educate them to adopt a more objective lens when assessing noise nuisance.

Others

34 This report focuses on the common neighbourhood noise issues brought up by the majority of the participants during our engagements. The Panel also noted that there were other feedback and suggestions that were outside the scope of CAP's work on norms regarding neighbourhood noise. These included ideas on the design of the built environment, guidelines on businesses or operating hours of facilities within residential areas. Nonetheless, the Panel has raised them separately with the relevant agencies.

CONCLUSION

35 The report proposes the community norms and recommendations that the CAP would like to submit to the Government to manage neighbourhood noise. While many have highlighted the need for enforcement actions against recalcitrant offenders, community norms remain crucial as they establish a common understanding among residents of what is acceptable or unacceptable, and provide a baseline for enforcement actions. As members of the community, we should continue to adopt the principle of being considerate towards each other that is emphasised in our proposed norms, and avoid an over-reliance on laws to address neighbour disputes.

36 While much of the norms and recommendations focus on public housing, they should apply across Singapore, be it in condominiums, mixed developments or private houses.

37 CAP would like to thank the members of the public who have contributed to this report by sharing their experiences with us. Many different perspectives were raised during the engagements. While the Panel is unable to cover the needs of every individual, particularly those who are still experiencing noise disturbances, we hope that our recommendations will address the crux of the noise issue and lead to a better overall outcome for the community.

38 We would also like to thank the stakeholders and agencies who have supported the work of the Panel with their time and knowledge.

39 CAP trusts that the Government will consider our proposals seriously. We would like to highlight that many of these norms and recommendations will require time to be integrated into our daily lives, and might not be able to resolve issues immediately. Moving forward, the Panel is happy to continue working with the Government to refine these recommendations and promote the norms to the community.