

At last, we have made a real step forward, one to which many of you contributed.

In June and July, we distributed questionnaires asking you your experiences and ideas about motorway noise, to help us prepare evidence to support the submission of 'M40 Traffic Noise J3 to J8' to Central Government jointly by WDC and SODC. The volume of responses and the information in them required us to co-opt an extra dozen local people to help with data collection, analysis and reporting. We thank all who contributed to it.

We believe it is the largest survey on the impacts of noise on a rural population that has been undertaken in this country, and one of the largest anywhere. John Thompson talked about the results at the AGM. Since we published a paper on our website (www.m40-chilterns.org.uk), it has been summarised in the national publication 'Noise Bulletin', and in Chiltern News, the newsletter of the Chiltern Society. We also used it in our response to a national consultation by DEFRA on Environmental Noise.

Our primary goal, in undertaking the survey, was a successful submission under the Sustainable Communities Act (2007) to the Secretary of State for Communities, John Denham. The process of generating the submission required that the case be presented at forums locally, so that the local authorities could assess the breadth of support. WDC then invited representatives of local communities to a meeting chaired by Mrs Karen Satterford, Chief Executive of WDC, at Lane End, followed by a presentation to WDC Cabinet.

On 23rd December, we learned that the submission has indeed been shortlisted and will be submitted by the Local Government Association (LGA) to the Secretary of State early in the New Year. 301 submissions were received from over 100 authorities. 55% survived the short listing process, undertaken by the LGA with full transparency to government. Ours is one of 19 involving transport, and the only one involving noise in rural communities.

Throughout the work summarised above, WDC encouraged a partnership approach. They felt confident in undertaking the submission because our 4 years of experience provided a level of technical understanding and popular support that could not otherwise be generated, quickly. We thank our Parish Councils for their belief in us during these past years, and hope they share our pleasure in this step towards a quieter M40.

We regard it as a significant step, as the considerable weight of the LGA, which represents 500 local authorities nationally, is solidly behind WDC and SODC. From soundings that I have made, it is clear that all three major parties support the Act, as a radically new way of involving local people and communities in government. Progress of the submissions will undoubtedly be reported and discussed during the forthcoming election campaign.

I can't tell you the next steps, as this batch of submissions is the first ever to be submitted under the Act. The LGA has requested meetings with Government during January and February, and expressed its goal that as many as possible should be addressed before the election. I feel sure we have a long way to go, but at last we have reached our first real milestone. We will report further in due course, and hope we may ask for your further support if necessary.

Thank you for your patience with this long campaign.
Best wishes for 2010

Ken Edwards
Chairman. M40 CEG