

Wolvercote Sound Barrier Petition presented to Council on 20th July 2015

Thank you Lord Mayor and Councillors for hearing me out on another environmental issue in Lower Wolvercote. This issue was supported / accompanied by a petition to County in April 2015.

On behalf of the residents and over 290 households of Wolvercote we presented this petition to the Cabinet of the County Council to lobby the Highways agency and Government and prioritise an acoustic sound barrier for a length up to 1 mile long; primarily the raised section of the A34 that borders Lower Wolvercote from the Peartree junction to the Thames bridge.

It is a petition that demonstrates the serious concern that affected residents have about the invasive noise that we face on a daily and nightly basis. It is a concern that some campaigns within Britain have described as Torture.

It is a petition that should remind the Council that it is not the first time this issue has been raised as a serious concern. The longer it is not resolved, the higher the financial cost and detrimental public health effect to Oxford residents will be.

The A34 is a busy road night and day. It is also up to 80 ft above Wolvercote roads, so noise travels far. Resurfacing with 'quieter tarmac' was done in the last 4 years at a considerable cost (up to £16m based on an estimate from Hansard). The comparative cost of acoustic fencing for the same stretch would be probably less than £700,000 (or more than 20 x less per mile than the resurfacing). Assisting residents to get doubleglazing will also not address the problem.

The A34 is also a very noisy road (and more so with a southerly wind direction). Sound measurements taken on different Wolvercote roads showed continuous noise levels up to 92db (the same level as a lawnmower continuously running immediately outside our houses).

Public Health officers would confirm that exposure to noise levels in excess of 85db over 8 hours are internationally recognised as damaging to health and hearing (especially for children).

According to the WHO, EU and the UK Government recommendations, noise outside a dwelling is seen as acceptable up to a maximum of 45dB. We regularly face noise levels in our homes and gardens that are subjectively more than 85% louder on a logarithmic scale. A34 noise levels must not continue to be ignored.

The EU brought in legislation in 2004 that prescribes checks and measurements for busy roads, and investment in sound barriers for noise levels over 68db (standard in mainland Europe). Yet neither the Government nor Defra have complied with this legislation in Oxfordshire.

The effect of noise should not be underestimated. Recent articles in the national press and the BMJ suggest that road noise causes an increase of up to 4,000 deaths annually. A 5db increase in road noise has been shown to equate a 4% increase in death rates and strokes. The EU estimates 1.6m disability life years are lost due to road noise. The effects of prolonged road noise are increased cardiovascular disease, stress, strokes, ulcers and premature pregnancies, sleep, anxiety and breathing disorders, all of which unnecessarily increase the local public health burden.

Any specialised company would confirm that Acoustic sound barriers can reduce noise levels by up to 80%. Councils also have a legal duty under the Land Compensation Act 1973 and the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 to provide noise protection or insulation where noise exceeds prescribed levels.

Councillor Mike Gotch unsuccessfully lobbied the Government for acoustic sound barriers 5 years ago. Now the residents of Wolvercote (as well as other Oxford residents and visitors to the area) that face this barrage day or night, appeal to the Council, Government and Highways Agency to resolve this avoidable assault on our quality of life and our health.

Any cost to the budget could be substantially reduced if officers and members of council include a Section 106 clause to any planning consent for substantial funding for a sound barrier to protect the Mill site housing or Northern gateway Development which both border the A34 in Wolvercote (see attached map). I would also request that a CIL contribution is included to the total cost of protecting Lower Wolvercote.

We suggest that initial funding from the city council could be matched by funding from the county council and central government to cover the total cost.

We will not let the issue drop and have already presented this petition from over 290 households to the County Council in the expectation that Councillor Bob Price and both Councils will not drop it either as the Mill site and Northern Gateway developments progress.

Our Councillors, MP Nicola Blackwood and MEP Catherine Bearder are all aware of the petition and the new Highways England CEO has been written to and invited to visit the area.

We therefore present the petition to you from over 725 voters to act on, support and address as a priority.

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The Petition reads:

To Oxford County and City Council,

We the undersigned, call on you to rectify the noise levels we have to face on a daily (and nightly) basis on the raised part of the A34 north of Oxford and thereby improve our quality of life.

We hereby request you lobby the Highways Agency and support the installation of a sound barrier or acoustic fence (as has been installed as standard on so many other noisy roads next to residential areas in Oxfordshire, the UK and in Europe) on the Eastern side of the raised section of the A34 from the Peartree Roundabout to just past the Thames bridge.

Map of Raised section of A34 passing SW / NE of Wolvercote and Mill Site

