

ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON UPON THAMES

DOMESTIC NOISE.....

and Lifestyle Conflict around Student Accommodation

Everyone's living activities create noise to a greater or lesser extent. Personal preference in music, television, social or working activities and level of occupancy of a dwelling can cause tension and conflict between neighbours with different lifestyles. Unfortunately the short term occupancy of property by free spirited students perhaps living away from home for the first time is a regular source of complaint to Kingston Council's Environmental Health Service so here are some tips to help you to be a good neighbour and welcomed by long term residents living around you.

First and foremost when you move into new accommodation introduce yourselves to your neighbours. If you can establish friendly and regular communications they will be more understanding of your lifestyle and you will appreciate their concerns. In localities where student accommodation is in the majority you may find that your neighbours are also students but it may not follow that your lifestyle as say a fresher coincides with their need to study for final exams! Once you have got to know your neighbours, think about the following as you enjoy your stay in Kingston.

Noise At Night

When returning home late at night from pubs and clubs ensure that noise is kept to a minimum. It is easy to unintentionally disturb the sleep of your neighbours. Avoid raised voices, slamming doors and keep the volume of TVs, music or computer games low. If you decide to invite friends back to your home make special allowances for the likely impact socialising late at night may have upon your neighbours.

Stereo & TV

Set the volume at a reasonable level or use headphones. Be especially aware that bass notes can carry easily and set the bass control to a low level.

Move the TV & speakers away from your neighbours' walls and raise them from the floor if possible. Be particularly careful of the volume late at night and try to avoid falling asleep in front of the TV!

Parties

If you're planning a party, your neighbours are likely to be more understanding if you warn them well in advance. Specify an end time and keep to it. Remember that unwanted sound will have greater impact later at night when other background noise is reduced.

Be especially careful about noise in gardens or rooms with open windows. Fireworks can be a real nuisance and terrify young children and animals. At the end of the evening, be sure that your guests are considerate to your neighbours and leave quietly.

Cars & Motorcycles

Make sure your car stereo is not being inflicted upon the whole neighbourhood especially if you are parked or waiting for someone. If your car has an alarm, ensure that it is correctly maintained and adjusted so that it is not set off unnecessarily. If you leave your car for longer than a day with the alarm system set, it is a good idea to arrange for a "keyholder" to be available who can turn it off if it is set off accidentally.

Musicians

If you play a musical instrument consider the times when you practice and negotiate with your neighbours to arrive at mutually suitable times.

Poor Sound Insulation

If you are aware of your neighbours' activities, they will probably also be aware of yours. If the sound insulation is poor, noise will easily be able to travel through floors and walls. If you have people living below you should take extra care to minimise impact noise from footfalls, for instance by not wearing hard shoes indoors. Avoid slamming doors.

Washing Machines

Refrain from using noisy household appliances like washing machines at times when your neighbours could be resting or trying to sleep.

COMPLAINTS FROM NEIGHBOURS

If a neighbour complains to you about the noise you are making be sympathetic to their concerns and take all reasonable steps to address their complaints. If you feel your neighbour's complaints are unreasonable contact the Environmental Health Service for advice.

BE WARNED!!!

The EPA 1990 gives everyone the right to complain to the Council about noise disturbance and the Environmental Health Service has a duty to investigate noise complaints especially those that occur regularly. Should the Environmental Health Service gain evidence that a Statutory Nuisance exists, an Abatement Notice will be served upon **ALL** persons responsible. This would normally include all occupants of the premises. The Notice would require the person(s) upon whom it has been served, to prohibit the recurrence of the nuisance. **Failure to comply with the requirements of such a Notice is a criminal offence and upon summary conviction Magistrates may impose a fine of up to £5000. The Council ultimately has the power to seize the equipment, which is or has been used to cause the noise nuisance. This could include televisions, hi-fi equipment and radios together with video/audio tapes, compact discs, records and DVDs.**

BUT YOU MAY BE A VICTIM OF NOISE DISTURBANCE!

If you are suffering from noise disturbance consider approaching your neighbour to explain politely that you are being troubled by noise. You may find this difficult, but often people are unaware that they are causing a problem. Most will be glad to do what they can to reduce noise. However, approach the matter carefully if you think your neighbour might react angrily to a complaint.

If the problem continues you could contact the Environmental Health Service for advice. Should you lodge a formal complaint you will be required to complete and submit logsheets which detail the times at which you are disturbed. Your neighbours will be advised of the complaint but your identity will be kept confidential. Certain issues however, such as complaints about impact noise can indicate the location of the complainant. Other sources for advice include the Student Life Office at your University and your Landlord or Managing Agent.

Finally....

If you would like advice about noisy neighbours or complaints that you may have already received from your neighbours please contact the Environmental Health Service on 020 8547 5536, email environmental.health@rbk.kingston.gov.uk