

STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY AND GOOD PR OVERCOME TRADITIONAL NOISE LIMITS FOR MUSIC VENUE

J Harvie-Clark	Apex Acoustics, Design Works, William Street, Felling, Gateshead, UK
J Hill	Apex Acoustics, Design Works, William Street, Felling, Gateshead, UK
G Venus	Apex Acoustics, Design Works, William Street, Felling, Gateshead, UK
P Rogers	Sustainable Acoustics, Meadow View Business Park, Lower Upham, UK
F Aletta	University College London, 14 Upper Woburn Place, London, UK
J Kang	University College London, 14 Upper Woburn Place, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This case study explores the coexistence between a residential development and an adjacent live music venue in Newcastle's Ouseburn Valley. Music noise from the Tyne Bar is accepted by nearby residents with very few complaints, despite the music noise levels exceeding traditional noise limit guidelines. Using mixed methods including noise measurements, modelling, interviews, and grounded theory, the study reveals several socio-cultural factors enabling this tolerance. Key findings indicate the residents' strong sense of community and cultural affiliation with the venue, and the Tyne Bar's active engagement with the community. Residents closer to the venue perceive the noise as an inevitable trade-off of the location. Strategies are proposed to integrate newcomers into the sonic environment and enable a sense of control over the music sound. This case study challenges strictly noise-centric guidelines, highlighting the need for holistic frameworks integrating objective limits with subjective experiences shaped by residents' sense of place, identity, and community relationships. These subjective experiences can be systematically understood through a soundscape approach, and actively managed along with the music sound level to achieve better outcomes for all stakeholders.

1 INTRODUCTION

Urban planning authorities face complex balancing acts in nurturing cultural vibrancy while protecting residential amenity. This tension frequently arises when music venues operate in close proximity to residential developments, with many cities struggling to facilitate mutually prosperous coexistence [1]. Traditionally in the UK, complaints trigger interventions that have prioritised reduced noise levels over cultural essence. However, this case study suggests that vibrant venues need not adversely impact residents if additional frameworks emphasising engagement and cultural character are embraced and can be relied upon.

This paper investigates a harmonious coexistence between a lively pub hosting regular outdoor live music events and nearby dwellings, despite conventional noise limits being significantly exceeded. Located within Newcastle upon Tyne's Ouseburn Valley, an area renowned for its grassroots music scene, this study explores the Tyne Bar alongside the neighbouring Malings estate. Formal complaints from residents about the Tyne Bar's music remain minimal, presenting an opportunity to examine the socio-cultural and psychosocial dynamics enabling this tolerance.

A mixed-methods approach encompassing noise measurements, noise modelling and assessment, stakeholder interviews and grounded theory analysis of resident responses unveils multilayered insights. Findings suggest that a strong sense of community, proactive and open engagement from the venue management with the community, and cultural congruence between the residents and venue can engender acceptance of exposures that would exceed traditional impact thresholds. The proactive venue engagement emerges as pivotal in reinforcing community affiliations.

This case study points towards an additional framework, beyond simple sound-level-centric guidelines, that prioritises cultural essence without compromising health, and directs future policy and design strategies for harmonious development. It challenges noise-centric perspectives, proposing more holistic models integrating subjective cultural factors alongside objective limits. This study reveals profound potential for balanced co-prosperity; recent developments in nuisance cases demonstrate how a greater reliance could be placed on psychosocial factors to preserve intrinsic community character.

The data collection was carried out by Geoff Venus for his IOA Diploma project, for which he also carried out an assessment of the data. Further analysis and assessment has been undertaken by the remaining authors to develop this paper.

1.1 The Ouseburn Valley

Newcastle upon Tyne's Ouseburn Valley offers a compelling site for investigating the coexistence between vibrancy and residential amenity. This post-industrial area holds deep-rooted significance as a crucible of Geordie grassroots music, home to venues such as The Cluny that has launched many bands, including Dire Straits. There are two venues that hold regular (at least weekly, in the summer) outdoor music events, and at least six venues with regular indoor music events. There are also band practice rooms that are used outside normal office hours, which can be heard around the Valley.

The Valley's heritage as a hub for artists and musicians lends a distinctive sonic character, with a wide range of venues. Periodic festivals also attract other performers as well as revellers and live performances, intrinsically aligning the area with cultural celebration. Consequently, music constitutes a quintessential component for many inhabitants as well as visitors. The area was rated the sixth coolest neighbourhood in the UK, according to Timeout magazine in 2022 [2], and was rated 29th coolest in the world in 2021.

Recent decades have witnessed extensive regeneration with new housing developments like The Malings (2017), which won many architectural awards including the supreme winner at the 2016 Housing Design Awards [3]. This site is located about 50 m from the well-established pub, The Tyne Bar (1895). Intriguingly, noise complaints remain scarce, despite the outdoor music stage at the Tyne Bar. This apparent juxtaposition presents an ideal scenario to investigate the experience of the residents of The Malings, the proprietor of The Tyne Bar and other associated parties.

Uncovering the sociocultural mechanisms governing this resilience offers broader lessons for cities aiming to balance residential development and yet preserve creative and vibrant communities. The Ouseburn Valley constitutes an ideal case study site to investigate innovative frameworks beyond noise-centric guidelines. The richness of its cultural lineage paired with recent urban growth provides the perfect backdrop to examine the complex dynamics between people and sound. This paper distils pivotal insights from the Valley's evolving soundscape. Interviews with stakeholders are presented first, followed by the more traditional evaluation and assessment of the music sound impact.

2 INTERVIEWS

2.1 Guided one-to-one interviews with Maling Residents

Interviews were arranged with current residents at The Malings and conducted with the guidance of ISO/TS 12913-2 [4]. Engagement was initiated by the distribution of e-mails to residents via the Chair of The Malings Residents Group, introducing the work. This resulted in a relatively small sample size, with only three residents from a total of 76 dwellings expressing an interest in participating. There was a degree of diversity across the three respondents with regards to age, duration of residency and location relative to The Tyne Bar.

2.2 Resident A

Resident A is a 58-year-old male with 5 years of residency. They are a leaseholder and the interview reveals several important perspectives regarding community dynamics, attitudes towards venue sound, and soundscape management strategies.

Firstly, Resident A explained the nuances in terminology – distinguishing between the Residents Association, Management Company and informal resident groups. This highlights the need to precisely understand the stakeholders and complexity of relationships when conducting soundscape research or proposing interventions. It also illustrates the value of identifying well-connected residents like Resident A who grasp the community structure, and perceive its strength and many facets.

Resident A deliberately selected their dwelling to avoid noise impacts, indicating an informed choice and degree of acceptance, yet choosing a dwelling far enough away from The Tyne Bar that music sound would be less disruptive. They did note that other residents with non-openable windows are likely more affected, emphasising the need to consider differing resident exposure and sensibilities.

Resident A suspects that noise complaints often act as a proxy for other grievances, rather than simply sonic disturbance. This reveals the perceived strength of psychosocial non-acoustic factors. If true, this reveals complications in soundscape management, as underlying issues may persist unchecked even if noise is addressed. In terms of communication, Resident A finds online resident groups unconstructive, but identifies “connector” figures who productively liaise between stakeholders. Cultivating such collaborative residents could enable more effective local solutions. However, Resident A also warns that opinionated “ringleaders” often dominate discussions in which they would prefer to see a more balanced engagement.

Resident A praises the vibrancy of the area and emphasises the potential adverse effects when residents prioritise order over community harmony. This highlights the challenge of aligning individual noise sensitivities with broader community needs in shared acoustic environments. Resident A points to the minimal noise complaints as evidence of a communal tolerance, emphasising the importance of fostering this acceptance through open dialogue and shared understanding.

Regarding the Tyne Bar, Resident A experiences music noise impact only during infrequent outdoor events, suggesting limited personal exposure. Resident A also doesn't believe many residents regularly patronise the Tyne Bar, proposing intriguing socio-cultural disconnects between the venue and community.

Overall, Resident A provides a measured perspective, accepting some noise as intrinsic while recognising its variable impact on others.

2.3 Resident B

Resident B is a 50-year-old female resident with seven years of residency. Of the three residents they reside nearest to the Tyne Bar and the interview revealed several salient points regarding community dynamics, noise management, and soundscape design in the Ouseburn Valley.

Firstly, Resident B's decades-long residency in Newcastle and familiarity with the Ouseburn Valley's musical heritage and vibrancy reveals an inherent appreciation for the cultural essence of this community. Their nostalgic recollections of spending time at venues like The Tyne Bar as a student illustrate a strong personal connection to the area's history of creativity. This innate affection appears foundational to Resident B's high tolerance and positive reception of sounds from The Tyne Bar. For individuals without such personal bonds, gaining acceptance or tolerance towards the community's particular sound characteristics might not come naturally or easily.

Resident B purposefully selected a home with direct line of sight to The Tyne Bar so that they could immerse themselves with the music should they wish, conversely, they mention the ability to "shut my windows" if noise is unwanted.

Resident B notes the existence of a "community fund" and resident meetings to voice concerns, emphasising how an "organic" sense of unity likely tempers complaints despite loud music. Expanding upon the notion of open communication, Resident B outlines the vital role individuals such as the appointed resident "connector" play in filtering noise concerns, liaising with venue owners, and disseminating information. While care must be taken not to overburden these key figures, this also reveals the depth of community dynamics at play.

From an acoustic design perspective, Resident B also provides passing observations on how factors like the venue's orientation, nearby reflective surfaces, and sound containment drastically impact the local noise profile and noise propagation. Resident B highlighted an incident where excessive noise from speakers initially directed towards The Malings was mitigated by altering the orientation of the speakers away, and the erection of a barrier. The Tyne Bar's response to community concerns has strengthened its position.

While Resident B represents a category of culturally invested residents more tolerant of venue noise, they do note a preference for greater diversity of music genre from The Tyne Bar.

2.4 Resident C

Resident C is a 21-year-old female with less than two years of residency. Unlike Residents A and B they had very limited prior knowledge of the Ouseburn Valley's musical heritage and vibrancy before moving to the area. While Resident C also suspects noise complaints often act as proxies for deeper issues, echoing a sentiment previously expressed by Resident A, they don't elaborate on what these root causes may be. There may also be value in exploring whether newer residents have different underlying grievances than long-settled locals.

Resident C notes the presence of a pronounced community spirit among the residents. Yet, their connection with the designated liaison is minimal, a fact they believe is due to their status as a newer member of the community. This has made it challenging for them to establish the kind of rapport where they would feel at ease discussing potential issues, especially concerning noise.

Resident C's experience with The Tyne Bar's music is distinct from other participants. They report experiencing intermittent music, as opposed to consistent noise levels during events, which is likely attributed to the location of their dwelling which is actively shielded on both sides. This distinction underscores the importance of detailed acoustic measurements to understand the varied acoustic environment experienced by different residents.

Resident C provides more detailed observations on how they understand the area's topography and structures impact sound propagation across the site. They note music sound traversing the contours and reflecting off certain buildings, whereas other structures provide acoustic shielding. This granular perspective highlights the potential for optimising the soundscape through intentional urban design elements.

As a final pertinent point, Resident C did not personally express any grievances about noise per se, believing they had developed a high tolerance to noise after living in a capital city for many years. Nevertheless, they were aware of neighbours voicing concerns, and they had heard that some residents had even made formal complaints about other local music venues, which they believe might be due to a perceived lack of active engagement from those other establishments, contrasting sharply with the approach taken by The Tyne Bar.

2.5 Interview with Newcastle City Council, Environmental Health Officer [EHO]

An interview was conducted with the EHO who was responsible within the local authority for overseeing the planning phase of The Malings development, and who responds to noise complaints if they arise. The primary objective of this interview was to understand the critical thinking and methodological approach behind the EHO's planning approval recommendations and to comprehend the dynamic interactions and relationships among key stakeholders, particularly within the context of noise management between The Malings and Tyne Bar. This examination illuminated the critical balance between maintaining residential peace, ensuring community wellbeing, and supporting the continued operation of the business.

The EHO drew attention to the fact that the long-term residency of individuals at The Malings is likely to contribute to fewer noise complaints. They believe residents gradually acclimatise to their acoustic surroundings and establish community relationships over time. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that there is an inherent complexity in technically assessing music sound, highlighting the lack of a standardised assessment metric and the necessity of subjectively gauging "unreasonableness," especially when dealing with low frequency (bass) sounds.

The EHO confirmed that one of the conditions within the Planning decision notice required all materials provided to estate agents to explicitly detail the local noise environment, particularly highlighting nearby music venues such as The Tyne Bar. This approach was designed to ensure full transparency for potential residents, with particular emphasis on those sensitive to noise to allow them to make well-informed decisions about their potential future living conditions. The intention was to prevent residents from unwittingly facing undesirable noise exposure and, by establishing clear acoustic expectations from the outset, to help mitigate the likelihood of future noise-related dissatisfaction and complaints.

The EHO discussed employing a detailed soundscape assessment, utilising qualitative data from resident feedback, to effectively navigate and possibly mitigate noise complaints. This approach could ensure that assessments and resolutions related to statutory noise nuisances are not solely grounded in quantitative data but are also reflective of, and responsive to, the actual experiences and collective perspective of the resident population. This approach recognises that determining 'unreasonableness' is not solely a matter of numerical sound levels but is also significantly influenced by resident perceptions, experiences, and the prevailing sociocultural dynamics within the community.

2.6 Interview with Ouseburn Trustees

The interview with two Trustees from the Ouseburn Trust was intended to enable a greater understanding of the noise issues within the Valley from the Trust's perspective, and to facilitate an introduction to the Malings community group. The trustees emphasised the importance of community cohesion and collaboration in effectively addressing noise disturbances. They helped establish a line of contact with the Chair of the Malings Residents Group, enabling the distribution of posters to all Malings residents describing this work. These posters invited residents to participate in the guided interviews by clearly explaining the intention of the study.

2.7 Interview with Proprietor of The Tyne Bar

The proprietor of The Tyne Bar reported that due to the potential adverse impact on residents of the dwellings at The Malings, external live music events at The Tyne Bar now occur only on weekend afternoons, typically between 4 pm and 6 pm. No external live music events occur during the evening period. Before The Malings was constructed, The Tyne Bar held around six or seven summer events, primarily dance events featuring DJs, with an average attendance of about 500 people and bands playing outside. Initially, attendees would informally block the road outside the pub to accommodate the crowds. Eventually, permission for an official road closure was granted. Alongside these events, live bands played outdoors during weekends under the bridge. The Tyne Bar also held "live band days", where multiple bands of different genres would play throughout the day, starting from 1 pm and continuing into the night.

When The Malings development was first proposed, there were several objections. The proprietor of The Tyne Bar, along with other nearby commercial businesses, personally expressed their concerns. The Tyne Bar proprietor didn't directly collaborate with the developer during the design phase of The Malings. There was no discussion about mitigating the noise from The Tyne Bar, which would traditionally be the responsibility of the Environmental Health Officer to assess suitability.

The Tyne Bar proprietor suggested that they are not naturally a collaborative person; they retrospectively wonder if a more collaborative approach might have been beneficial for all parties concerned. They believe in assertiveness, ensuring residents don't perceive them as overly submissive. The Tyne Bar proprietor notes that there is a delicate balance to maintain in their interactions with the residents. This is in stark contrast to the perspective of the local EHO, who celebrates the proprietor's openness and collaboration with residents.

Once construction of The Malings was complete, the developer proposed giving residents a £10 voucher that could be redeemed at the Tyne Bar. Despite this, complaints began within months of the completion of the development. This led to The Tyne Bar proprietor adjusting their events, reducing capacity and modifying rules for outdoor band performances. A residents' association was formed shortly after the Malings construction. The Tyne Bar Proprietor attended a few of their meetings, emphasising the long-standing presence of The Tyne Bar with music since 1994. They communicated their willingness to compromise, but also underscored that residents would have to accept The Tyne Bar's presence. To address any anonymous complaints, the proprietor distributed flyers in The Malings, requesting residents to reconsider official complaints, and also sought support on social media platforms.

The proprietor observed that several residents valued the proximity to The Tyne Bar, often enjoying live music from their roof gardens. The Tyne Bar has actively been involved in community initiatives, such as organising meetings for community clean ups, and providing free bacon sandwiches and coffee as a gesture of goodwill. Despite initial concerns about post-lockdown noise sensitivity, The Tyne Bar hasn't received complaints since their schedule was reduced. The Tyne Bar proprietor and their team monitor noise levels during performances, ensuring that they adhere to pre-determined levels.

The Tyne Bar proprietor refrains from holding consecutive outdoor events except on special occasions, and the nature of events has been altered to avoid attracting unruly crowds. This has included fencing off certain areas and being selective about the type of alcohol sold. Relations between The Tyne Bar and Malings residents also benefitted from issues residents had with another venue, which created disturbance and litter problems during lockdown, casting The Tyne Bar in a more favourable light.

A resident expressed appreciation for The Tyne Bar's cultural offerings, emphasising that the cultural intent of a venue significantly influences local residents' attitude and tolerance.

Contrary to some assumptions, the proprietor believes residential developments like The Malings don't necessarily increase pub patronage. Instead they might pose threats due to potential complaints. However, The Tyne Bar has continually adapted to meet new challenges. For instance, when live music events were reduced, they introduced food offerings, making the venue more family-friendly.

The last notable complaint The Tyne Bar received was in early summer 2019 from an individual who was not a direct neighbour. The proprietor extended an invitation to address the concerns over lunch but it was declined. They have publicly offered such lunch meetings to any complainant, aiming to provide the Tyne Bar's perspective on any issues.

The proprietor is keen on maintaining the cleanliness and order of The Tyne Bar's surroundings. They once placed banners indicating zones where outdoor drinking was prohibited. Despite assumptions that residents initiated this, it was the proprietor's proactive measure to protect the Malings residents. The proprietor believes that this emphasis on environmental care positively affects residents' perception of the Tyne Bar's activities. The proprietor has cultivated a good working relationship with the Environmental Health Officer and remains open to suggestions on enhancing the relationship between the Bar and the residents.

3 MEASUREMENTS AND NOISE MODELLING

Sound level measurements were conducted on two separate occasions to capture live music performances from both the external area and from inside The Tyne Bar. The measurement position is shown in Figure 1 and has direct line of sight to the outdoor stage at The Tyne Bar, which is beneath the adjacent road bridge. The microphone was located 3.5 m above the ground and more than 1.5 m away from other reflective surfaces.

Throughout the measurements weather conditions were dry and average wind speeds were no greater than 5 m/s. Measurements were conducted from 16:25 hours on the 5th August 2023 and from 16:05 hours on the 24th September 2023.

Music noise was dominant when present. For the indoor music event, windows and doors to the bar were fully open and the band played rock music with notably bass-heavy sound. The outdoor band leaned towards blues rock with less prominent bass, and had less emphasis on volume compared with the band playing inside. The choice of location – outdoor or indoor – was influenced only by the weather.



Figure 1: Location of Tyne Bar (red), Malings (yellow) and measurement position (blue)

Table 1: Measurement results

<i>Noise Source</i>	<i>Background $L_{A90, T}$</i>	<i>Music Noise Level $L_{Aeq, T}$</i>
<i>Outdoor live music</i>	56	69
<i>Indoor live music</i>	53	65

When a band plays outside at the Tyne Bar, the music generally dominates the Malings estate and also the more recently built Lower Steenberg's Yard development.

3.1 Assessment with current guidance

There is no statutory guidance for assessing sound from venues affecting residential accommodation in England. The Institute of Acoustics has for many years attempted to publish guidelines for this assessment, most recently in 2016 [5]. This guide proposes a range of criteria depending on the risk rating, taking account of factors such as frequency of events, timing of events, proximity of residential, venue sound insulation performance and confidence in management. It is intended for indoor venues

rather than outdoor venues. The music sound levels here would exceed the ranges of proposed criteria of this draft guide, although that guide has never been published as a completed guide.

4 DISCUSSION

Following a quantitative assessment of music noise levels from The Tyne Bar, noise impacting on residential façades at The Malings are well above typical guideline levels. However, the Tyne Bar receives widespread support from local residents and an apparent lack of formal complaints. Potential contextual areas that may act as mitigating factors are considered on the basis of the interviews carried out.

4.1 Strength of community

The Malings was designed and built with a strong emphasis on placemaking and community cohesion, and the success of this endeavour is evident in the reports from residents. Despite the lessening of formal activity through The Malings residents' association, there is clearly still a strong community spirit and a high level of cultural contribution from The Tyne Bar to the neighbourhood. The Malings was explicitly designed and built, and continues to be managed, with the purpose of providing a strong sense of place and community, winning housing awards.

4.2 Cultural congruence

It is apparent that The Tyne Bar enjoys a high level of cultural congruence and thereby respect from the residents. For many residents, The Tyne Bar is not merely a business or venue but a pivotal community nexus. Its presence is valued by the residents as an intrinsic part of the cultural landscape which they value. Residents perceive The Tyne Bar's live music as an important cultural resource. Given that residents regard The Tyne Bar as a cornerstone of their community, there is an inherent understanding and tolerance towards intrusion from live music.

4.3 Active venue engagement

The Tyne bar sets a notable standard with its approach to community integration, balancing its business operations with the pursuit of community harmony. The proprietor's personal attendance at residents' meetings stands out. In urban development research, the mere presence of key stakeholders in community dialogues signifies a genuine commitment to understanding and addressing local concerns. Far from being a simple formality, these meetings serve as an open platform for dialogue, underpinning an environment of trust and mutual respect.

The initiative to provide vouchers to residents is a compelling strategy by the housing developer. These vouchers functioned as cultural invites which may foster appreciation and acquainted residents with the venue's cultural presence. Emphasis on creating a family-friendly atmosphere is evident in the Tyne Bar's operational choices. Decisions to serve premium drinks combined with the dedication to maintaining the cleanliness of its surroundings demonstrate a commitment to supporting community values.

4.4 Managing expectations

The management of residents expectations plays a critical role in the dynamic between them and the venue. If individuals move into a space with the understanding that there will be certain environmental factors at play, and they are equipped with the tools or knowledge to manage these factors, their level of disturbance dissatisfaction is likely reduced. By setting realistic expectations and providing a means to exert control, establishments or planners can significantly mitigate potential complaints.

5 FINAL COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The outcomes of the interviews held and case study into the interactions between The Tyne Bar and The Malings have led to some interesting, and perhaps unexpected results. All residents at The Malings were invited to participate and whilst only a select few responded, they generally had positive things to say about the contribution of The Tyne Bar to the community. It might be expected that such an invitation would be taken by any disaffected residents as an opportunity to raise grievances, which did not seem to happen.

Similarly, the response of the proprietor appears to be more welcoming of The Malings development than one might expect. Given the issues arising on opening of the development and what appears, on the face of it, to be quite significant and widespread constraints to the preceding operational model, it would not seem unreasonable to expect the proprietor to put across views more rooted in frustration and a more defensive approach.

Instead, it seems over time that the two parties have reached a manner in which they can co-exist in a way that is satisfactory to both. There are other cases across the country where such co-existence has not been possible and it is probably fair to say usually the music venue takes the brunt of the pain here. The “Agent of Change” principle was introduced in Planning legislation in 2018 in an attempt to avoid this problem for music venues [1, 6].

Further work into reviewing case studies at other locations following a similar format may provide additional insight into whether some of the measures analysed here have been implemented elsewhere, successfully or otherwise. The lessons learnt here may be utilised in other places as a means to enable co-existence of residential accommodation in vibrant, cultural locations.

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