

Wine bar

As customers boogied to the loud beat of the wind bar music the cutlery and plates were rocking and rolling in their racks in the flat above. The floor was vibrating to the sound and after complaints the bar owner was ordered to pay a total of £10,000 in fines, costs and compensation. Darren Smith a director of Chasselle's in Woodland Way, Kingswood, was ordered to stump up after he was found to be in breach of a noise abatement order imposed by Epsom and Ewell Council.

Richard Martin, for the Council, told Redhill Magistrates that the order was served on Smith in June last year. But the occupant of the flat above, Miss Jo Hill,

complained that the noise levels continued. She kept a diary to show that after 10pm in the evenings the sound was turned up.

The premises were then visited by Rebecca Mathis, a council officer who took readings of noise levels at Miss Hill's flat. She reported that the words of songs could be identified and she could name the singer. "Vibrations could be felt in the living room. Watching TV was difficult. A plate rack was rattling and kitchen utensils were moving and there were waves on water in a glass on the kitchen top," said Mr Martin. Smith, who had been found guilty of being in breach of the order on June 21, June 22,

August 16 and August 17 last year at a trial last month, said he had spent £100,000 on the premises. "I wanted to put soundproof

boarding on the ceiling but the landlord would not let me," he said. Smith was fined £1,000 on each of the four charges and was ordered to pay £2,000

compensation to Miss Hill and costs of £4,159

We all know that...

Guess what? A recent psychological study has shown that workers are more productive when listening to stimulating music, and the effect has been quantified. The older generation in the UK will immediately reflect "We all know that ... It's what we did during the war. Music while you work!"

In the stress of war they didn't ask for proof, but used common sense and got on with it. Factory workers performed tedious, repetitive tasks, whilst buoyant music lifted them cheerfully above the monotony. They were happier, and productivity was higher.

We all know that ... most school kids like to have music in the background whilst struggling with homework.

We all know that ... excessive noise, especially at night at home, eventually makes you ill. Helplessness in coping with chronic disturbance becomes unbearable. But, the opinion expressed by some legislators is that there is no proof that noise is a direct cause of illness. Press them to enlarge on this

and there may be a bland response such as: "If noise causes someone to have a heart attack a few week earlier than they would have otherwise had one, that is not significant. Six months or a year earlier would be, but there is no proof."

It is not always remembered that many noise criteria are set at a level which means that a sizable group – perhaps 15-20% of the people exposed, will be seriously annoyed by noise at the criterion level. This is a deliberate choice by those who make the rules. They come from the direction of "What can we expect most people to put up with?" rather than "What is the best we can do?" And of course, not-to-be-exceeded-criteria soon become design aims.

Ask why the levels cannot be reduced and the reply may be "It costs too much. How many hospitals are you willing to close to find the money?"

Now that brings on a thought. How many hospital beds would be saved by reducing noise? We don't know that ... but it could make an interesting study.

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