

Property Clinic

Your queries answered

What can we do about constant hum from neighbours' heat pump?

Q We have been living in our very quiet neighbourhood for almost 20 years and have never had noise issues until now. Our new neighbours renovated the house next door to us and installed a heat pump, which is very noisy and is causing us a lot of distress. The houses are detached and about 2.5 metres apart. The heat pump is installed in the side passage of our neighbour's house, right next to the boundary fence, so about 1.2 metres from the side wall of our house.

The noise is a penetrating hum that can be heard throughout our house. We hear it when we're watching television in the evening, cooking and eating meals in the kitchen, and lying in bed at night and on weekend mornings. The noise also comes through the air vents in our walls into the home office at that side of the house, making it difficult to concentrate. It also means that we can't sleep with the windows open on that side of the house. It's no longer possible to enjoy our peaceful home.

They have promised to get it seen to, but we've been complaining for eight months now and nothing has changed. Based on what little we know about heat pumps, we believe that they're not typically that noisy and that the issue with this one is either with the motor or the way it has been installed or where it's been installed. We are also concerned that it may be faulty and pose a potential fire hazard, being so close to our house.

We would like some advice on how we can get this issue resolved as our neighbours do not seem to be actively addressing it.

A Unfortunately, this is quite a complex situation you find yourself in. It is often difficult to accept change, particularly when it affects the enjoyment of our home. That said, people are entitled to make improvements to their properties, and it is likely that works of this nature will be a big part of the future as we pursue more efficient heating systems and more sustainable living.

However, there are certain restrictions and protections in place in the form of planning legislation and building regulations, and people undertaking development work must ensure they are complying with these.

Firstly, and depending on the nature of the proposed works, planning permission may well have been required. If planning permission was required, then the planners will be aware of the potential impact of the works on the neighbouring properties. As a result, they are likely to impose certain restrictions on the party carrying out the work, such as the installation of heat pumps, to reflect not only potential noise but also the visual impact on the adjoining properties.

However, in the context of an existing house which is being refurbished or upgraded, it is likely that the works, including the installation of a heat pump, would actually come within the category of exempted development and thus planning permission may not have been required at all.

There is, however, a second and more onerous control in place in the form of building regulations, which cover all the technical aspects of a building. The relevant aspects here are fire and sound, which are covered by parts B and E respec-



■ 'The noise also comes through the air vents in our walls into the home office at the side of the house.' PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

tively of the regulations.

The main issue here is the noise emanating from the heat pump. The reality is that it's inevitable that the heat pump will generate a certain level of noise, usually in the form of a humming sound, as described in your query. This is something heat pump manufacturers are aware of.

In the first instance, the manufacturers and installers are very keen to avoid potential complaints from their own customers and usually take all reasonable precautions to minimise any potential noise disturbance. There is, in fact, an obligation that noise levels at the nearest party boundary must not exceed 43db (A) (A-weighted decibels are used when human hearing is affected; they are used for sound levels, noise pollution and equipment noise levels). As a result, it's unusual for units to not meet the required standard.

There will, however, inevitably be the odd faulty machine which may be noisier than intended, so that needs to be checked. To my mind the more likely cause of noise issues relates to the way the heat pump has

been erected. If this is off level, overtightened or not correctly mounted, then this can give rise to additional noise and vibrations which can reverberate through the ground and walls.

Most people are reasonable and will not want to install equipment which creates nuisance for their neighbours and will want to get to the bottom of the problem as quickly as possible. While I note that you have alerted the neighbours to the issue some time ago, I think the seriousness of the problem and the effect it is having on you and your family needs to be made very clear to them.

The neighbours should then go out of their way to ensure that the equipment, as installed, is in full compliance with the planning permission (if relevant) and with the building regulations. In order to do this, they will need confirmation that the equipment has been designed and installed in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. In particular it should be possible to have the noise level checked and confirmed as not exceeding 43db (A).

If it transpires that there is a fault in the unit or in the way in which it has been installed, this should come to light through this process and hopefully the neighbours will take the necessary steps to address

Got a query?

Send your queries to propertyquestions@irishtimes.com or to

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this. However, if it turns out that there is major non-compliance, then the neighbours will have to take steps to ensure compliance, and this may involve having to move the heat pump to an alternative location.

Although not specifically queried, there is also a potential concern from a fire safety perspective. There are restrictions on the traditional oil-fired appliances in terms of proximity to a party boundary. We are also aware that there are similar restrictions applicable to heat pumps in the UK. However, we are not aware of any similar restrictions arising under the Irish building regulations, even having raised this with a leading manufacturer/supplier of heat pumps. Nonetheless, in the absence of clarity on an item of this nature, it is prudent to take reasonable precautions to safeguard against the potential damage arising to a neighbouring property in the event of a unit going on fire, and appropriate consideration should be given to this.

The solution may be a more rounded one involving a wall and some of the sound mitigation measures outlined below, or indeed relocation of the heat pump all together.

By sitting down with your neighbour, it should be possible to reach a mutually beneficial solution by which the unit is fully in compliance with all relevant regulations and where the noise generated by it is greatly reduced or, to all intents and purposes, eliminated for you.

It's worth noting – not just for you but for others in similar situations – that with regard to sound levels, the building regulation obligations set a relatively low bar and that even a compliant installation can be a source of nuisance. In such a scenario, there are additional measures which homeowners can take to reduce the noise of their units while not going to huge expenses. These would include partially enclosing the unit – it can't be fully enclosed – or providing additional sound baffles or absorption mats around it.

If this is still not achieving the desired reduction in noise, there are additional issues that you could look at with your own property, such as improving the wall vents. If your vents are old, you could look at replacing them with more modern ones which incorporate sound baffles, and this would help reduce incoming noise.

The difficulty in these situations is that you are not in full control and that you are largely dependent on the co-operation of your neighbours to take reasonable steps to mitigate the noise issue you are experiencing.

Noise disturbance is a very common problem for people who install heat pumps. But at least they are heating their homes. In this scenario, you are suffering all the pain and none of the gain.

If your neighbours prove to be co-operative, it should be possible with the advice and steer of your local chartered building surveyor to bring this matter to a satisfactory resolution. However, if they do not prove receptive, you may be forced to seek legal advice in order to advance the matter.

Val O'Brien is a chartered building surveyor and member of the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland



Co Dublin €1.2m

Maeve Binchy's childhood home in Glenageary



Beechgrove, Glenageary Road Lower, Glenageary, Co Dublin

Description: Five-bedroom Victorian home in sought-after location retains many original features
Agent: Owen Reilly

ELIZABETH BIRDTHISTLE

As one of Ireland's best-loved writers, the late Maeve Binchy is remembered each year at the Echoes Festival in Dalkey, Co Dublin. The most recent iteration of the festival in October celebrated the "total absence of malice" in Binchy's work. Running since 2017 and organised by Dalkey Castle and Heritage Centre, the festival is hosted in the seaside village where the late writer lived until her death in 2012.

However the novelist, play-

wright and Irish Times columnist was originally from Glenageary, where her family lived at Beechgrove, a semi-detached period home just off Glenageary Road Lower, which has just been launched to the market.

Binchy published 16 novels during her career – her first was *Light a Penny Candle*, which spent 53 weeks on the bestseller list in 1982 – alongside short-story collections, novels, plays and non-fiction books.

Having been translated into more than 40 languages, accolades for her wit and insight into rural Irish life earned her a 1999 British Book Award for lifetime achievement and a People of the Year award in 2000. In addition, Binchy is commemorated with the annual UCD Maeve Binchy Travel Award and the Maeve Binchy Garden at Dalkey Library.

"I know there is always a danger that you look back too sympathetically – rose-coloured spectacles and all that – but my

childhood was a great joy," Binchy told author John Quinn for an interview collection entitled *A Portrait of the Artist of a Young Girl*.

Binchy's parents, Maureen and William, purchased Beechgrove in 1937 and lived there until the family moved to Dalkey in 1951. Set well back from the road, the Victorian house shares a driveway with its neighbour, but the avenue divides early and there's lots of privacy and space hidden behind the tall mature trees that surround the site.

Laid out over three levels, the house extends to a considerable 270sq m (2,906sq ft) and retains many original details, such as well-proportioned rooms with tall ceilings, original flooring and period fireplaces. It has a particularly impressive drawing room located off the front hallway, with a fine bay window.

This is echoed upstairs in the principal bedroom, a spacious room with an impressive ceiling and open fireplace.

There are five double bedrooms in total, three on the first floor with a further two on the second level, while two reception rooms and a kitchen/breakfast room occupy garden level.

Outside, the property enjoys a southwesterly aspect to the rear, and has a long side garden, offering lots of potential for green-fingered enthusiasts.

It is located within easy reach of a number of bus routes and road networks in addition to the Dart, with Glenageary and Sandycove stations nearby, as well as good range of sought-after schools and educational institutions.

Its Ber is D2, which new owners may want to improve, and the kitchen would benefit from modernisation, but the bones of a lovely home in a sought-after location will likely attract potential buyers.

Beechgrove, which has been rented out for some time, has now been brought to market by Owen Reilly, seeking €1.2 million.

Sort It

Denise O'Connor



How to create a home bar for the festive season

The holiday season is just around the corner, and what better way to elevate your hosting game than by creating a home bar? Whether you're planning intimate gatherings or large family celebrations, a well-designed home bar can be both a stylish feature and a functional spot for festive fun. From elaborate built-in bars to simple drinks trolleys, there's an option for every home and budget. Here's how to plan your perfect home bar and get ready to wow your guests.

Assess your space

Before diving into the design, it's essential to carefully plan your home bar to make the most of your space and budget.

Start by assessing your space. Identify under-used areas in your home, such as a kitchen corner, dining room alcove, or even the space under the stairs. Ensure the location is easily accessible and doesn't disrupt the flow of your home.

Next, consider how often you'll use your home bar. Do you love to entertain regularly or host just a few times a year? If it's something you'll use frequently, a more permanent feature like a built-in bar or custom cabinetry might be worth the investment.

For occasional entertaining, a flexible option like a drinks trolley or a console table bar may be a better fit, offering functionality and the ability to tuck it away when not in use.

Finally, set a budget. Built-in bars might require plumbing and electrical work, so be prepared for higher costs. For more affordable options, drinks trolleys or console set-ups are excellent

choices, with most of the expense going toward styling and accessories.

Once you've determined your budget, it will be much easier to prioritise features and create the biggest impact with what you have to spend.

Built-in options

When it comes to home bars, one size doesn't fit all. The best option for you depends on your space, lifestyle and how much you want to invest.

A built-in bar with a mini fridge, sink and bar stools is the ultimate set-up for serious entertainers.

This option works best if you have a dedicated room or space to transform into a bar area, such as a den, open-plan living space, or even a garage. If your budget allows, adding a sink and fridge will make it a super functional addition to your home.

Make sure to add a mix of closed cupboards for storage and open shelving for display. Opt for water-resistant surfaces to ensure durability. Materials like wood, marble, or brass will elevate the look. Integrated lighting is a great way to introduce an added layer of luxury.

To make more of a statement, consider a bold patterned backsplash or a mirrored finish – both can create instant impact and enhance the overall design.

If you don't have the luxury of lots of space, a custom piece can be designed to fit snugly into an unused corner or alcove. Consider integrating your bar into your kitchen cabinetry for a discreet, space-saving solution.

Features like pull-out shelves, pocket doors or hidden compartments can make it both sleek and functional. To create a cohesive look, match



“You don't need much space to create a functional bar – just a little creativity. You might be surprised how easily furniture you already own can double as the perfect bar”

the bar cabinetry to your kitchen, or choose a contrasting finish to make it a stand-out feature. Be sure to include space for essentials like wine racks, glasses and mixers.

A standalone bar cabinet is perfect for those who want a statement piece that adds character to their home. You can invest in a custom-designed piece tailored to your needs, with compartments for bottles, glassware, and bar tools. There are plenty of ready-made versions available to choose from, too. This option is portable, making it a great long-term investment.

Budget friendly

For a budget-friendly and flexible option, consider a drinks trolley or repurpose a console table to create a stylish bar. Both can be easily styled to look chic and festive while offering the convenience of being moved where-

er the party takes you. Use trays to organise spirits and mixers and style with festive touches like fairy lights, cocktail recipe cards, or holiday-themed napkins. Add decorative touches like candles, small plants, or a festive garland to elevate the look.

You don't need much space to create a functional bar – just a little creativity. You might be surprised how easily furniture you already own can double as the perfect home bar.

Creating a home bar is a fun way to elevate your entertaining this holiday season. Whether you choose a luxurious built-in bar or a chic drinks trolley, the secret lies in making it functional, stylish and a reflection of your taste. With the perfect set-up, you'll have a dedicated space to raise a glass with friends and family in style.