

The workmen doing up next door are driving us to distraction

The builders were back on site after only a few days of lockdown, and with them came the noise. The drilling is the worst, says *Catherine Pepinster*



Construction work is going full steam ahead during the pandemic and can be challenging for neighbours in lockdown
SUKANYA SITTHIKONGSAK/GETTY IMAGES

Ah, the joys of suburban lockdown. Waking up to birdsong no longer drowned out by traffic. Being able to have a midmorning coffee in the garden. Plenty of time for spring-cleaning, including

sparkling window panes. If only. Instead of these pleasures we have a daily torture of drilling, banging and a film of dust covering our windows and patio.

I met my new neighbours

just once before lockdown, when they toured their house with builders. A skip appeared and the banging began. They, meanwhile, stayed in the tranquillity of their rented flat elsewhere. Lockdown came,



the builders went. But they were back after a few days, and with them the thumping and knocking from 8.30am until 4.30pm.

The pneumatic drill is the worst, often making me leap out of my chair, convinced that the drill has come right through the wall. At times when I have phone calls to make and Zoom meetings to attend, I have to retreat to the top-floor loo or the ground-floor utility room — the spaces without any adjoining wall to next door.

On the very worst day of decibel-busting drilling, my husband — who is also working at home — said he'd had enough. I called the neighbours and pleaded with them. I pointed out that we could hardly take our laptops to a coffee shop or Kew Gardens for a break. "We're paying a mortgage on the house and rent for the flat," I was told. There would be no let-up. The brutal underlying message: your mental wellbeing does not matter as much as our bank balance.

I begged for a drilling time limit each day. They

reluctantly agreed. That lasted for a couple of days. Another time I was told, as if it gave them carte blanche, that the husband worked for the NHS. You don't find me clapping on a Thursday night with much enthusiasm.

When I complained that the workers aren't observing social distancing, given the way they lounge together outdoors for a fag, I was told that they do in the house, one builder per floor. So that bit of healthcare wisdom is why the noise is everywhere.

Then there is the spitting. Breaks include builders making that revolting noise

that indicates a ball of saliva is being collected in the throat, followed by its ejection.

Lovely, during a pandemic of a contagious bug. According to Mr NHS and his missus, when I complained: "That sound isn't them spitting, it's the cement mixer."

Our only consolation, as we take our daily suburban lockdown walk, is that We Are Not Alone. Basements, loft extensions, total refurb jobs: they're being endured across the neighbourhood. One corner of the economy is carrying on regardless.

Share your lockdown laments at [@STHome](https://twitter.com/STHome) and [timesonline.co.uk](https://www.thetimesonline.co.uk)

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