

BELGRAVIA RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

POLICY FOR BASEMENTS IN BELGRAVIA

BACKGROUND

The building of basements in Belgravia is one of the more difficult issues recently to have faced the BRA.

There is a complex balance to be struck between the rights of owners to maximise space and the rights of their neighbours for quiet enjoyment of their properties

There are also environmental and other issues which need to be considered, such as impact on the overall housing stock in the Belgravia area.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

Basement extensions should be permitted subject to rigorous review of (1) the history of the owners in planning matters; (2) the development process; and (3) the overall impact on the environment and housing stock of the development.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The creation of basements gives rise to a number of unique environmental issues.

- (i) The water table can be severely impacted by basement excavations. This is particularly the case where developments go down more than one level under a building in a terrace.
- (ii) Subterranean excavations other than under buildings should not lead to the destruction or re-positioning of healthy listed trees (including trees with a preservation order).

IMPACT ON NEIGHBOURS

The two main areas are: (i) disturbance and (ii) damage to the fabric of the buildings of neighbours.

- (i) **Disturbance** - Noise, dust and the disruption of traffic are all part of the rich tapestry of life in Belgravia. However, the extent of disruption, dust and noise from basement excavations is enormous. It must be minimised by the measures suggested in paragraph 1 of "Conclusions" below.
- (ii) **Damage to the fabric of buildings** - Basement excavations give rise to unique issues of heave (the process by which London clay can push up neighbouring properties) and issues of lateral forces acting on terraced properties which can cause them to collapse. The risk of damage must be minimised by the measures suggested in paragraph 2 of "Conclusions" below.
- (iii) **Damage to neighbouring properties** - Excavation and underpinning can be industrial and cause vibrations, leading to damage to adjacent properties.

HOUSING STOCK

Any community should be comprised of a mix of housing stock so that particular sectors of it are not accidentally excluded. For example, it would be inappropriate if all of Belgravia were

comprised of flats and five bedroom houses. We would minimise this risk by the measures proposed in paragraph 3 of “Conclusions” below.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Minimising disturbance

- (a) Contractor to be approved by Grosvenor and Westminster as compliant with Considerate Contractors Scheme.
- (b) Careful review of proponent of development for previous breach of:
 - (i) Listed building requirements;
 - (ii) Lease or freehold scheme conditions with Grosvenor;
 - (iii) Planning conditions for Westminster or any other authority; and
 - (iv) Civil or criminal law while proponent engaged in previous building.

2. Minimising damage to the fabric of the buildings

Currently, Westminster requires a full structural report to be done before granting planning permission. We would require that permission be from a structural engineer approved by Westminster and, where appropriate, by Grosvenor (i.e. on the Grosvenor Estate).

3. Impact on housing stock

The proponent of the development should prepare a report on the anticipated impact on Belgravia housing stock by an Estate Agent approved by Westminster and, where appropriate, by Grosvenor (i.e. on the Grosvenor Estate).

4. Environmental measures

- (i) if the proposed excavation is for more than one level a report should be drawn up by an approved specialist illustrating the impact on the water table generally and for neighbouring properties.
- (ii) healthy trees should not be destroyed as part of such a project.

5. Additional measures

Westminster and Grosvenor should consider imposing additional conditions relating to:

- (i) how many developments are proceeding at the same time in the same street - perhaps no more than 2 or 3 should be permitted.
- (ii) financial compensation for neighbours for inconvenience of say £5,000.
- (iii) limitation of time period permitted for execution of the works.

EFFECTIVE DATE FOR THIS POLICY

For all planning applications which have not received conditional or final planning permission from Westminster by 18th March 2008.