

BASEMENTS

COMMENTS BY VICTORIA ROAD AREA RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

The Victoria Road Area Residents' Association has experienced a large amount of major construction work in the last five years during which the rate of new basement applications has accelerated.

De Vere Gardens Development

This development is as large as two football pitches – the redevelopment of two major hotels. The project has blighted our area for four years – demolition started in September 2010 – and completion is not expected before Easter 2015. Our area had, and on Sundays has, an ambient noise level of below 50dBA. Apart from coaches delivering guests to De Vere Gardens it was a quiet neighbour.

The develop has involved complete demolition, but saving 50% of the facades, excavating three levels of basements, piling and tanking the basement, huge amount of concrete pouring for foundations and floor slabs before the project reached street level. This took two years it resulted in:

- extremely high levels of noise, vibration and dust (covered by S61 Agreement);
- a huge amount of parking suspensions and extreme traffic congestion on Victoria Road, the main road into our area (covered by a CTMP)

We held weekly meetings with MacAlpines during the first two years to monitor noise, vibration and dust and traffic and parking issues, to mediate between residents and the contractor and to trouble shoot and propose solutions to their problems. The meetings then went to fortnightly and now monthly intervals. We have learnt a lot about the problems of managing construction sites and take a proactive approach to each project to minimise the worst impacts. The early S61 agreement allowed a maximum 75dB average over a 10-hour period – this “average” allowed peaks of over 80dB averages for a few hours. These levels of noise are totally unbearable. On the later stages we successfully pressed for 72dB average for 10 hours. Even this was not enough.

Parking suspensions and traffic congestion has been horrendous despite the use of traffic marshalls – to give an idea of the scale of parking suspensions, the total income to the Council from these suspensions has been £2.25million to date.

Basements

The problems with basement projects relate to:

- **the length of the projects**, although not solely due the basements, but the demolition, excavation, removal of waste and concrete pouring due entirely to the basement is a very large part of the project and without doubt the most problematic for neighbours;
- **noise** – only a few really large projects require S61 agreements, others have S.60 agreements. Since these are not covered by a planning condition, control of noise nuisance relies on enforcement action. There need to be better controls. For example a major basement/refurbishment project in Albert Place had no mains electricity for the first month or so of the project which meant we had a generator in the garden running solidly for over a month, 08.00 – 18.30 five days a week. It was unbearable - a condition or unilateral agreement is needed for work to start only when the electricity supply is operational.
- **Hours of work** – many sites have worked 08.00-18.30 Monday to Fridays and 08.00-13.00 on Saturdays. These are the longest hours in London. We are pressing for no Saturday working as a condition an 08.00-18.00 on weekdays. Being woken up by building work on six days a week is totally unacceptable.
- **Construction Traffic Management Plans** – the Council's policy in its SPD on Transport (2008) and the forthcoming revised SPD on Transport and Streets, requires contractors to keep skips, materials and equipment off the highway wherever possible. This was not implemented as draft CTMPs were not challenged. VRARA has worked over the last four years to make the area a "skip-free zone" (ie no skips kept on the street 7 days a week/24 hours a day). This is now happening in most cases.

BUT- good management may mitigate the worst impacts, but it essential but not sufficient – people still have to suffer for usually two years at a time!

Concentrations/Cumulative Effects

The growing number of basement projects produces two sets of problems –

- coordinating projects in the same street which overlap – the cumulative impact of several simultaneous projects; and
- the long-term suffering due to successive projects in the same street.

We have chosen Albert Place as such a case and would invite the Inspector to visit, where 7 out of 14 houses have been the subject of applications for basements, of which:

- one is completed,
- four are currently under way, and
- two more have received planning consent recently.

In addition one of the other houses is undergoing a comprehensive refurbishment but not including a basement.

Even though some of these are well managed, the attached photographs – all taken at midday on the same day last week – illustrate the chaos, which is driving out some of the few remaining residents.

One of those residents - Mrs John Keffer – would like to speak to this issue so that the Inspector understands the cumulative effects of these projects on local residents who have been living who have had to live through a succession of basement projects. I attach her representation below for ease of reference.

VRARA strongly **supports** the Council's desire to strengthen its policy to manage basement projects. We **strongly support**:

- limiting the number of basement storeys,
- limiting the extent of basements of unlisted buildings to 50% of the combined garden area.
- stopping the loss of mature trees to enable large basements.

We are still concerned, however, about basements in the gardens of listed buildings, such as in Canning Place and support the Kensington Society and other representations to have no basements under gardens of listed buildings. We also favour tightening up some of the definitions.

Michael Bach
Chairman:
Victoria Road Area Residents' Association

Representation by Mrs Debbie Keffer

To whom it may concern at the planning policy committee,

I am writing to stress my deep concern about the current issues concerning all the construction in the area, and in particular my street which is Albert Place.

I have lived in this house for 7 years, and in the last 3 of those years have seen

continual construction... with a dismal future of several more years of continual construction. This is a street with only 14 homes facing the street with an addition 3 houses tucked into the corner, and no exit so you must turn around and come out the same way you came into the street. The parking is limited and so suffers when parking is suspended for long periods of time. The noise is constant from literally 8:00 in the morning till 6:30 at night on most days. There have been at least two houses at a time under construction, and at the moment there are four houses under construction with at least one more house awaiting approval from the Council to forge ahead with their "improvements" and renovations. So as you might conclude the percentage of homes on my street under construction is quite high, and only seems to continue to move higher.

Don't misunderstand me, I am all for improvements, they revitalise the area..... But they must be watched carefully and controlled so that the quality of life of existing neighbours that have lived in the area and will continue to live in the area is not compromised. It is "these neighbours" rightful quality of life on their street, and "my" rightful quality of life on my street, that I feel has been sorely abused by the amount of disruptive construction that continues to invade our everyday life.

I am also very concerned by the rapidly increasing number of basement developments and the inadequacy of the Council's current planning policies to deal with the extreme pressure to excavate basements. These developments due to their scale, duration and impacts on our neighbourhood during construction and the cumulative effect of successive schemes have severely affected our quality of life through both noise, vibration and dust and through the impact of construction traffic and long-term parking suspensions.

I strongly support the Council's proposals to change their policy toward basements in order to:

- to reduce the scale of basements by limiting them to one storey and no more than 50% of the garden, except for listed buildings where there is already a restriction about building under them;
- to be more explicit about the need to:
 - ensure proper drainage through soakaways,
 - retain trees,
 - ensure that buildings are adapted to a higher level of performance in respect to energy, waste and water consumption,
 - ensure better control of the traffic and parking problems due to the demolition, excavation and construction process
 - ensure better control over noise, vibration and dust
 - ensure structural stability

I consider this essential because of the impact on our quality of life that is caused by the scale and number of basement construction projects and the

resulting inconvenience caused by traffic and construction activity.

I would like to have our support recorded in favour of the proposed changes.

Yours truly,

Mrs. John Keffer

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