

Review of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea’s “Impact of Basement Development on Biodiversity”

Executive Summary

- It is concluded the need for a new policy to restrict basement development to a maximum of 50% of back gardens and no more than a single storey cannot be justified on grounds relating to adverse effects on biodiversity.
- The current legislation and policy context is deemed sufficient to ensure the conservation of biodiversity interests within gardens in RBKC.
- The proposed bespoke basement policy does not add additional levels of protection for biodiversity within the borough but instead provides an inappropriate blanket policy that would be better suited to be dealt with on a case by case basis as is currently the procedure.
- Garden design is permitted development as such it is not possible to control design for the benefit of biodiversity except at planning stage though appropriate planning conditions.
- As stated in the RBKC biodiversity basement paper (Gunnell 2014) the primary reason for changes in garden composition in recent decades relates to a shift in garden design choices and management. None of the documentation cited refers to basement developments contributing to these changes.
- In the context of assessing the impact of development every site warrants consideration in a case by case basis. The blanket assumption that all domestic gardens offer biodiversity value, and all gardens with subterranean development offer limited biodiversity value does not adequately address the complexity of the subject and is factually incorrect.
- Broad brush restrictions, as outlined in the bespoke basement policy, will potentially and unnecessarily restrict legitimate developments on sites where there are no trees, vegetation or biodiversity value of note thereby missing an opportunity for enhancement through planning conditions.