

Response to consultation responses for “The potential impact of basement excavation on biodiversity: a paper for the RBKC Planning Department, 2014” by Kelly Gunnell, Ecology Service Manager, RBKC

Responses from Adonis Ecology, AMEC and GS Ecology:

Ref	Name	Question: __ Add comment	Council’s Response	Recommended Change
	Adonis Ecology	RBKC fails to provide any evidence that basements are a significant part of the decline in vegetated area within London.	The evidence provided shows that development in general is responsible for decline in vegetated areas (London Wildlife Trust, 2011). A basement beneath a garden can contribute to this decline.	No change
	AMEC Environmental & Infrastructure UK Ltd	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.	Other RBKC documents deal with this aspect. There is a tendency for post-development landscaping to contain more hard covers. This is illustrated by RBKC (Visual Evidence February 2014).	No change

Ref	Name	Question: __ Add comment	Council’s Response	Recommended Change
	Adonis Ecology	Correctly acknowledges that the benefit of a garden to wildlife depends on composition of the garden, but then overlooks opportunities for habitat enhancement offered by changing garden composition with basement developments.	A planning condition requiring habitat enhancement for individual private gardens would neither be practical or enforceable. The Council’s proposed policy is taking a proactive approach by which habitat/ biodiversity is fully considered at the application or even pre-application stage. A	No change

			design which does not degrade habitat is considered to be more appropriate than an approach where existing habitat is destroyed and an attempt is the made for it to be re-provided.	
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Ref	Name	Question: __ Add comment	Council's Response	Recommended Change
	Adonis Ecology	Overstates significance by failing to clarify impacts on species covered by wildlife legislation, Species of Principle Importance for Conservation in England or local BAP species;	These impacts are considered on a case by case basis.	No change

Ref	Name	Question: __ Add comment	Council's Response	Recommended Change
	Adonis Ecology	Presumes that large trees cannot be grown in 1m of soil depth without presenting evidence of this assertion	The depth that trees will grow to is covered in the detail in the Councils Trees and Basements (2014) report.	No change

Ref	Name	Question: __ Add comment	Council's Response	Recommended Change
	Adonis Ecology	Includes effects on drainage that are not a biodiversity impact	Drainage does have biodiversity implications. Flooding due to lack of adequate drainage will greatly impact vegetation growth. In 1 m of soil there may also be increased risk of the soil profile drying out, and once again impacting vegetation growth.	No change

Ref	Name	Question: __ Add comment	Council's Response	Recommended Change
	Adonis Ecology	Presumes that impacts cannot be adequately avoided, mitigated or	The mitigation hierarchy is employed on a case by case basis.	No change

		compensated for.		
	AMEC Environmental & Infrastructure UK Ltd	The current legislation and policy context is deemed sufficient to ensure the conservation of biodiversity interests within gardens in RBKC.	The current legislation and policy is used for individual applications. However, planning policy needs to consider and account for cumulative impacts that occur on a landscape scale. The cumulative impact can cause harm to biodiversity interests.	No change

Ref	Name	Question: __ Add comment	Council's Response	Recommended Change
	AMEC Environmental & Infrastructure UK Ltd	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.	Noted. Design and landscaping within a garden will not normally require planning permission. However, consent will be required when this is an integral part of building works and will alter the appearance of an area. Given the potential cumulative impacts of a large number of basements the Council is taking a proactive approach. A design which does not degrade habitat is considered to be more appropriate than an approach where existing habitat is destroyed and an attempt is the made for it to be re-provided. There is also a difference in the permanence of a basement and paving which is easily reversible.	No change

Ref	Name	Question: __ Add comment	Council's Response	Recommended Change
	AMEC Environmental & Infrastructure	In the context of assessing the impact of development every site warrants consideration in a case	Planning policy is the starting point but each application is considered on a case by case basis. The Council's policy is based on a	No change

	UK Ltd	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.	number of strands biodiversity is one of them. It is the purpose of planning policy to take the wider landscape perspective and to consider cumulative impacts. For example, it would be unfair to a resident to restrict their basement development, due to a concern about cumulative impacts, because theirs is the fifth or tenth case in an area. It is preferable to have a policy that considers cumulative impacts at the outset.	
	AMEC Environmental & Infrastructure UK Ltd	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.	Agreed that some sites will have little biodiversity, or low-value biodiversity, to begin with. However, the proposed restriction on size of the development is considering many different evidence strands of which biodiversity is one. The Council's proposed policy is taking a proactive approach by which habitat/ biodiversity is fully considered at the application or even pre-application stage. A design which does not degrade habitat is considered to be more appropriate than an approach where existing habitat is destroyed and an attempt is the made for it to be re-provided.	No change

Ref	Name	Question: __ Add comment	Council's Response	Recommended Change
	GS Ecology	The temporary loss of wildlife habitat is unlikely to be of	The losses need to be considered on a cumulative basis rather than one an individual	No change

		<p>significance and can be easily mitigated; the loss and movement of soil invertebrates and micro-organisms is unlikely to be of significance and in any case be controlled by a condition requiring the implementation of a sustainable soil strategy in line with DEFRA guidance, and; as long as it can be demonstrate that a mature and wildlife friendly landscaping scheme with space for large canopy trees as appropriate can be provided there should be no biodiversity reasons for limiting the extent of basement developments to 50% of the garden area.</p>	<p>site.</p> <p>As the comment states <i>“as long as it can be demonstrate that a mature and wildlife friendly landscaping scheme with space for large canopy trees as appropriate can be provided”</i> the proposed policy is seeking to do exactly this.</p> <p>This is supported in the Trees and Basements, RBKC, Feb 2014 document para 5.1 <i>“the proposal to restrict basement extensions to 50% of the garden footprint would assist in providing adequate soil volumes for trees to establish and grow healthily whilst maintaining and enhancing the green landscape.”</i></p> <p>It is neither practical nor enforceable to condition the loss and movement of soil invertebrates and micro-organisms in individual private gardens.</p>	
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References:

London: Garden City?, 1998 - 2008, London Wildlife Trust, 2011