
From: Jenny Haddon
Sent: 30 August 2013 12:56
To: Planning Policy
Subject: MSA Basements representation 2/9/13

Dear Sirs

Having found it impossible to find out how to comment online, I write with reference to the above consultation, as an interested party. I am the owner and occupier of 3 Bywater Street, where I have lived since 1979. My rear boundary abuts the rear boundary of 44 Markham Square, at which a substantial basement development below the house and garden is currently under construction. I have read the Consultation Paper with interest and refer specifically to Paragraphs 34.3.48,49, 50 and 52 .

UNDERSTATEMENT OF NEIGHBOURS' DISTRESS

The paper is correct in identifying that neighbours are affected by these developments, but it grossly understates the extent of damage to their wellbeing – this is not a matter of ‘concern’ but of real and ongoing physical distress. I speak with feeling, since I am currently experiencing it. I expect to have to do so for another two years.

I now learn, from other distressed neighbours, that there is a further application for a basement development next door to the one which is currently under construction. If that were to be approved, my time in purgatory goes up a further two years, presumably. And why should it stop then?

OCCUPATION DURING NEIGHBOURS' BASEMENT CONSTRUCTION

My house is, in practical terms, unlivable in during the hours of construction. This is not just my opinion. The Councillor who addressed the Chelsea Society on Basement Developments earlier this year told the meeting that he had moved out for the duration of his neighbour's development. I have not the resources to rent another place for two years but I do have a friend, albeit some way away, who is lending me the use of a room where I can continue with my profession of writing during the hours of construction. But I think: what about residents without alternative safe havens where they can get away from the noise, vibration, dust etc, even temporarily? What about residents who are bedridden, or caring for the seriously sick? They are stuck, effectively living on a building site, with no way out.

I attach, for your information, an account of one day which I spent recently, enduring the development at 44 Markham Square. I wrote it for my own purposes on the day in question (18th July). It is a useful illustration of what it is like, trying to conduct a normal day under the stress of this sort of development in a neighbouring site.

INFORMATION GATHERING ON DISTRESS CAUSED BY BASEMENT CONSTRUCTION

I should add that, the following morning, when identical construction work was going on, I endeavoured to bring the degree of disturbance to the attention of the RBKC, as, I understand, did other residents. I was passed from department to department. I finally left a message on the Environmental Health Department's answering machine, requesting them to investigate urgently, or at least to advise me what I could do. No one returned my call or emailed me. I also asked that my complaint should be logged, so that it could be aggregated with others' in order to provide evidence for future consultations such as this one. I was told that there was no mechanism to do so, nor data base to aggregate such information.

I have some sympathy for Council officials in this matter. Collecting data that they can't do much about at the time has probably seemed like a low priority. But it is important that this hole in the data does not disguise how much people's health and daily lives suffer from basement developments.

PROPER WEIGHT DUE TO NEIGHBOURS' EXPERIENCE IN BASEMENT DEVELOPMENTS

As I see it, basement developments are undertaken to provide extra footage in a high-value area – at the Chelsea Society meeting we were told that development costs were £500 per square foot, while the increased value to the property was £2,000 per square foot. Realistically, this extra footage is not for living accommodation, so we are not looking at something which effectively increases the stock of available dwelling space. This is fun and/or profit for the developer; profitable business for construction firms. But there is also an additional cost, a big one, not currently monetised, which is born entirely by neighbours. We are rate-payers too and statistically there are more of us—one development may affect as many as 50 neighbours. We deserve that this consultation paper should give appropriate weight to our experience.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer M Haddon

ANNEX

Living behind 44 Markham Square, with basement development in progress.

The true tale

Thursday July 18th

For several weeks I have been taking evasive action – getting up at 5.00 am and writing in my study until The Works start at 8.00am on the dot. After that it becomes impossible to work in my study, even with the window closed and the blind down. However, the room I have borrowed off-site is not available until 10.30, so I have an hour and a half to appreciate the full blast of building work before I leave.

Today, however, I have had to stay in Bywater Street because of work on a contract with a third party, copied to several others, and I need access to my email and files, neither of which are available off-site. I have to stay on line in order to answer my interlocutors' questions and respond to their requests.

I close all windows onto the building site (to the west) and draw curtains and blinds. The noise remains ever-present. It is impossible to ignore.

The sound of heavy engine running is constant from 8.03. They do not seem to shut it down at all. From time to time – sometimes at 5 minute intervals, but usually longer -- there is a nail-across-the-blackboard high-pitched screech which pulses, as if something is turning. I haven't timed it. This is followed by sharp tapping, as with a hammer on metal piping and then a swooshing sound, like something being poured. Intermittently there is a vibrating sound like a broken fan spinning but not engaging.

The bathroom wall, which abuts the former garden at 44 Markham Square, vibrates when this happens. So does the floor. My patio also abuts the former garden. It is impossible to be out on there without ear protectors. I keep the French windows closed but the kitchen still reverberates.

By 9.00am I have a headache and I feel slightly sick. I sip water and apply myself to contractual issues. They take much longer than they should. I keep losing my place in documents. When I make notes, my handwriting is unformed and twisty, smaller than usual and unfamiliar. It is also barely legible.

The noise stops around midday. For about 40 minutes.

By 2.00pm my headache is so bad that my vision is cloudy. At 2.30pm I go and sit in St Luke's gardens with a bottle of water. It is too hot, of course, but blessedly peaceful. Coming back into the house, the noise greets me the moment I open the front door. I sit on the stairs and cry.

But there is more work to be done this afternoon. More questions. I go even more slowly. This is crazy, I know this stuff off the top of my head.

The noise stops just shy of 5.00 pm. At first I can't believe it. I can still hear the engine-chuntering at the back of my head, somehow. But eventually I hear normal noises again – a car in the street,

the cat calling, a helicopter going over. I polish off the answers to the questions I have been struggling with all afternoon in about 20 minutes. Email them out at 6.15pm.

There's still the headache, though.