

# Executive Summary

## **BASEMENTS PUBLICATION PLANNING POLICY – ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON & CHELSEA**

1. The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea (RBKC) is proposing to amend current basement Planning Policy within the Borough.
2. RBKC have failed to demonstrate that the existing planning policies are in any way deficient or that there is evidence to demonstrate that they do not meet appropriate standards.
3. Inconvenience related to construction activity is seldom a welcome event but construction is an essential part of our economy employing hundreds of thousands of highly skilled individuals, many thousands of whom would be significantly affected if the proposed RBKC Planning Policies are adopted.
4. The documentation contained within our submission addresses each of the issues raised by RBKC and with the benefit of expert reports prepared by leading industry professionals will demonstrate that the claims made by RBKC are either without foundation or simply wrong.
5. In preparing the draft policy proposals, RBKC have relied upon the following principal evidence:
  - Alan Baxter Associates Basements Report March 2013
  - Consultation Responses on draft Basement Policy
  - Basements Visual Evidence – photographic
  - Lifecycle Carbon Analysis for Extensions and Subterranean Development – Eight Associates
  - Evidence Base for Basements and Policy CEI – Eight Associates
6. The principal report relied upon by RBKC is that of Alan Baxter Associates (ABA). ABA is a Structural Engineering Consultancy. Neither of the Report Authors hold appropriate professional qualification to enable them to comment adequately on a number of issues raised within the report.

7. Within the brief issued by RBKC to Alan Baxter Associates they were asked to report on the following construction specializations

- Arboricultural matters
- Horticultural matters
- Geotechnical matters
- Hydrology
- Environmental Health
- Sustainable Urban Drainage
- Energy Costs
- Eco-Homes Assessments
- Energy requirements
- The Party Wall Act

Neither of the report authors holds professional qualifications in relation to these specialist disciplines and any comments that they offer cannot be regarded as Expert Opinion

8. RBKC have claimed that basement construction has an extremely high carbon footprint and as such is damaging to the environment. In making these statements they have relied upon the various reports provided by Eight Associates.
9. Claims made by RBKC in relation to carbon generated through basement construction are wrong and the reports prepared by Eight Associates are fundamentally flawed.
10. Having established that the research carried out by Eight Associates was highly inaccurate we have commissioned three separate independent expert reports which all conclude that the information produced by Eight Associates and which is being relied upon by RBKC is deeply and fundamentally flawed.
11. The conclusion of the expert sustainability reports which have been prepared is that basement construction does not generate greater levels of carbon than equivalent types of above ground construction and it is extremely likely that on an operational use basis basements generate a lower quantity of carbon than equivalent above ground extensions.

12. RBKC are attempting to control the detail of a large number of issues that are already the subject of control and management under alternative legislation. If the proposed planning policy rules are adopted – RBKC Planning Policy will be controlling matters that are the subject of alternative Primary Legislation including:

- The Party Wall Act
- The Environmental Health Act
- The Control of Pollution Act
- The Building Regulations
- The Highways Act
- The Construction Design & Management Regulations
- The Health & Safety at Work Act

The Courts have made clear that any such attempt would render the entire Policy “*Ultra Vires*”

13. As RBKC state within their own published document ‘Relationship with Planning Legislation’ ....’*the Town & Country Planning Act Controls the appearance of buildings and land and the uses to which they are put, the Building Regulations ensure buildings are safe and fit for purpose, the Party Wall Act safeguards the interests of adjoining owners, the Environmental Protection Act and Control of Pollution Act protect the wider public and the environment from a range of harms and the Highways Act ensures the efficient and safe use of roads and highways. This is an oversimplified context as there are other important pieces of legislation too, but it serves to illustrate the complement of legislation and the separate roles that each piece of primary legislation has.* **The Courts have made it very clear that Authorities implementing controls under one piece of legislation should not attempt to emulate, influence or over-write controls laid down under legislation, attempting to expand control beyond the proper remit of a particular Act would be ‘ultra vires’. It may seem attractive to both observers or decision makers to attempt to bring matters under the planning umbrella that should not properly be there at all, the Courts**

**will not tolerate this** – Document 23 – RBKC Statement – Planning Consent in Context of Alternative Legislation.

14. RBKC accept that Planning Policy should not seek to exercise control over matters which are the subject of alternative legislation and yet that would be the natural consequence of the adoption of the proposed planning policy changes.
15. Basement construction is already amongst the most highly controlled construction process carried out.
16. The level of documentation required to obtain Planning Consent under current policy includes:
  - Fully developed Structural Engineering Design Philosophy
  - Site Investigation Borehole
  - Environmental Sustainability Assessment – Eco-Homes
  - Arboricultural Report
  - Hydrogeological Report
  - Geotechnical Report
  - Construction Method Statement
  - Construction Traffic Management Plan
  - Acoustic Report
17. Further controls are entirely unnecessary.
18. It is a fundamental principal that Planning Consent should not be refused for any proposal on the basis of a matter which can be resolved through the use of a Condition – Circular 11/95.
19. The Court of Appeal decision in ‘Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council v Secretary of State for the Environment, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1994’ *is clear that non planning construction related matters that are the subject of alternative legislation should be left to the controls of the relevant statute.*
20. In attempting to gather evidence RBKC carried out a survey which was specifically aimed at capturing the experience of those people affected by basement construction.
21. The survey carried out by RBKC is fundamentally flawed and the evidence should not be relied upon because RBKC failed to make a distinction between basements which were

constructed as a component part of a far larger re-development and those cases where the basement may have been a stand-alone project.

RBKC have formally confirmed that *'it is extremely rare for a basement to be dug in isolation with the vast majority of such projects being associated with the refurbishment of the wider building.'*

22. The questionnaire provided by RBKC to residents who participated within the survey did not allow the respondent to be clear that the inconvenience they alleged they experienced was actually related to the basement component of a wider redevelopment.
23. It is understandable that residents would be confused as to the precise source of their inconvenience, bearing in mind the statements made by ARUP Associates in their formal report to RBKC on subterranean development where they state specifically under Paragraph 5.4 Nuisance Caused During Works – *'main forms of nuisance and disturbance during basement works are, in general, at least of similar and sometimes greater magnitude than equivalent categories of disturbance created by other types of residential building works such as replacing a roof, converting a loft or adding a conservatory.'*
24. It is highly likely that having received a questionnaire from the Local Authority which fails to make a distinction between basement construction and that of the wider project, that the respondent will automatically blame the basement for any perceived inconvenience bearing in mind the statement by RBKC that it is extremely unusual for a basement to be constructed in isolation.
25. The Residents' Survey conducted by RBKC is fundamentally flawed and should be disregarded.
26. Freedom of Information enquiries to RBKC has provided formal responses on the part of the Local Authority on a range of issues.
27. RBKC have confirmed that they have no supporting evidence on a range of issues including the following:
  - The number of Planning Consents where a basement is simply a component part of a larger redevelopment – **no supporting evidence available**

- Analysis of Residents' Survey to ensure that where a basement is simply a component part of a wider redevelopment that it is not unfairly blamed for construction inconvenience – **no supporting evidence available**
- Results of study to demonstrate that basement construction within the gardens of Listed Buildings has caused damaged to the host property – no supporting evidence available
- Results of survey to demonstration any trees within RBKC which have been damaged as a consequence of excavation below the root protection area – **no supporting evidence available**
- Details of studies to demonstrate that the construction period for basements is longer than above ground extensions – no supporting evidence available
- Proof that basements restrict the range of planting – **no supporting evidence available**
- Proof that retaining at least half of each garden will enable natural landscape and character to be maintained – **no supporting evidence available**
- Details of projects where basements constructed to a depth of more than one storey have led to damage to the subject or adjacent buildings – **no supporting evidence available**
- Schedule of Listed Buildings that have been damaged as a consequence of basement construction within the host garden – **no supporting evidence available**
- Schedule of foundations to Listed Buildings that have been substantially modified as a consequence of basement construction – **no supporting evidence available**

28. RBKC are relying upon as evidence the photographic schedule contained within 'Basements Visual Evidence.'

29. The vast majority of projects listed by RBKC were granted Planning Consent under policies which were withdrawn in May 2009. The remainder of the schemes were still under construction at the time of photography.

30. Photographic schedule produced by RBKC is unreliable for the following reasons:

- Virtually all of the schemes that have been constructed were built in line with policy which has not been in force since May 2009
- The remainder of the schemes were under construction at the time they photographs were taken
- There are no examples of fully landscaped basements constructed under the Planning Rules which have been in effect since May 2009
- An Article 4 Direction regarding landscaping does not apply across the Borough and residents will have been able to implement landscaping schemes without reference to the Planning Department resulting in modification to gardens unrecorded by RBKC
- The before and after photographs span a period of up to 13 years during which time householders may have taken the opportunity under Permitted Development to modify their gardens – Potentially removing greenery and Installing Decking/Paving

31. RBKC have refused to provide an explanation as to why it is necessary to impose a blanket ban on any type of basement below a Listed Building based upon planning reasons.

32. Since 2011 RBKC has granted Planning Consent for 38 above ground extensions of Listed Buildings and yet refuses to even consider the possibility of a subterranean extension.

33. English Heritage specifically consider the potential for underground extension within their English Heritage Practice Guide where they state, *'proposals to remove or modify internal arrangements including insertion of new openings or extensions underground will be subject to the same considerations of impact on significance as for externally visible alterations.'*

34. It is unreasonable for RBKC to impose a blanket ban on subterranean extensions to Listed Buildings.

35. The blanket ban imposed by RBKC cannot be based upon structural reasons because within their report Alan Baxter & Associates state, *'from a structural engineering viewpoint there is little difference in risk between a Listed and an un-Listed building... the objection to basements under Listed Buildings primarily relates to how a building is used rather than any particular structural risk.'*
36. ARUP Associates go onto say within their report to RBKC , *'subterranean developments have been successfully achieved in London and elsewhere over many years. In general these successful projects have been undertaken by experienced, competent teams, who recognise the potential hazards and mitigate against them.'*
37. RBKC Planning Policy seeks to restrict the use of parking bays for the placement of a builders skip or other construction related storage despite the statements contained within the report by Alan Baxter Associates, that, *'most construction sites in Inner London involve the suspension of car parking bays and the establishment of welfare facilities for the workers on or adjacent to the site.'* It is entirely unreasonable for RBKC Planning Policy to attempt to restrict the placement of a builders skip on the public highway which is subject to control by the Highways Department under relevant Highways Legislation.
38. The expert independent report produced by Waterman Transport concludes that basement construction does not generate any greater quantity of construction traffic than other forms of urban residential construction.
39. The expert independent report produced by Waterman Energy concludes that the Eight Associates Report on carbon generated through basement construction is fundamentally flawed.
40. The expert independent report produced by MES Energy Services concludes that the Eight Associates Report on carbon generated through basement construction is fundamentally flawed.
41. The expert independent report produced by BBS Energy Services concludes that the Eight Associates Report on carbon generated through basement construction is fundamentally flawed.

42. The expert independent report prepared by Barrell Tree Consultancy states that, *'there is no demonstrable need to leave any portion of a garden free of basement development in order to enable flexibility in planting trees.'*
43. The expert independent report prepared by David Gilchrist, Horticulturist, states that, *'I m of good quality well drained top-soil above a basement structure will provide an excellent environment for the growth of plants and shrubs whilst strongly encouraging bio-diversity.'*
44. The independent expert report prepared by the Environmental Protection Group, states that, *'there is no valid reason why basement construction should be limited to a blanket ban of 50% of a garden area on the basis of drainage or flood risk.'*
45. The independent expert report prepared by Taylor Williams Daley Chartered Surveyors states that, *'the Party Wall Act more than adequately deals with any perceived risk or problems with basement construction... therefore through RBKC's lack of understanding of the Party Wall Act I find the reasoned justification and Policy CL7 of RBKC Basements Publication Planning Policy to be unsound.'*

## **Conclusion**

There is no evidence to support the draft policy proposals

All of the issues that matters seek to control are already controlled under Alternative Primary Legislation

Independent Expert Reports contradict what RBKC Planners say

Expert Legal Opinion suggests that Proposed Policy may be Ultra Vires

RBKC are basing proposed Policy on information that is deeply flawed