

HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB TRUST

Supplementary Basement Guidance

Hampstead Garden Suburb differs from most areas of high value property in London in that it was carefully planned as a social and architectural experiment in which the nature and varied scale of the homes was critical to its purpose and conception. The Trust's role in its long term stewardship is profoundly influenced by the way the Suburb was developed and has survived.

Raymond Unwin intended his suburb to promote modesty, co-operation and community amongst residents: the simple life. The design of his homes reflected this and it remains an essential element in the character of the place today, despite the high prices paid for properties.

The controls exercised by the original Trust through the granting of leases are themselves a reflection of what Unwin wished to achieve. His battle against what he considered to be selfish individualism made it necessary to control not only the development of the Suburb but subsequent changes to properties. The restrictions on the individual were considered necessary for the benefit of all residents if the place were to survive meaningfully. The Scheme of Management, and the restrictive covenants in leases and transfers, enables the present Trust to continue this management role in the way that Unwin intended.

Today, however, development pressures are great. Homeowners and developers seek to maximise values, often without much consideration for the interests of other residents or the impact on the area as a whole. Basement construction is one way by which modest homes can be turned into very substantial ones. Recently, the Trust has received applications for basements under the very smallest cottages. The cumulative impact of this sort of development would change the nature of the area and make the Suburb less affordable for future residents.

Change to character

There is a wide range of different types of accommodation across the Suburb which the Trust has been keen to retain. Residents can choose from small flats and cottage homes through to larger terraced or semi-detached houses and substantial detached houses. All of these are adaptable to the sort of changes that new owners may wish to make to update properties to suit their needs. In many cases the Trust may approve modest extensions so long as they are in keeping and do not harm the character of the area. However, more radical changes, such as basements, which would considerably increase the scale of a property can, irreversibly, change the character of both the house and the area.

Although in many cases the physical manifestation of a basement may be minimal, its construction can still have an impact on the character of the area.

It is acknowledged by Historic England that 'character' is a concept which encompasses more than the aesthetics of the physical environment. Historic England defines the character of a heritage asset as '*the sum of all its attributes, which may include; its relationships with people now and through time; its visual aspects; and the features, materials and spaces associated with its history...*'. Character is a subtle concept, but is intrinsic to the experience of a place.

The character of the Suburb is defined by more than just the appearance of the buildings and the landscape. It must be of value to retain the aspects of the area which expressed the political and social ideals of the founders, and one of these was the variety of housing available. In a group of modest houses, carefully designed as a unit, the development of a basement under one property would undermine the unity, consistency and cohesiveness of the whole.

Damage to adjacent properties

There have been examples within the Suburb where basement construction has caused damage to adjacent properties. The construction of a basement under an existing house is invasive. It changes the nature of the house in its structure and in its use. Even with the right professional input, damage to adjacent buildings can occur.

In adjoining terraced or linked houses, built on shallow foundations on clay, the work can create problems with differential movement. Basement constructions insert a rigid concrete box into a flexible terrace with the result that while the developed building stays reasonably stable, the buildings either side can be subject to excessive movement and cracking.

Setting

The Trust has found that the impact of some basements already approved and constructed had led to changes in landscape character. The lush planting that is so characteristic of the garden suburb is often swept away for basement construction, replaced with large areas of paving and small scale planting. It is not possible to establish larger trees on or near basements. Changes in topography and the formalising of landscaping features are other signs. Basements under gardens are discernible.

The loss of existing mature trees over a long period time is also a result of basement construction. In Winnington Road, a stand of mature Oak trees that had been protected during the construction, showed signs of stress and slowly died following construction of a basement, possibly due to changes in ground conditions or unpredictable groundwater movements.

Excavating under gardens reduces the ability of the ground both to provide sustainable natural drainage and to provide space for planting that would encourage bio-diversity.

Temporary disruption

The construction of a basement under an existing house is a considerable undertaking. Often the timescale of the building work is long – sometimes over a number of years. Piling, the movement of spoil and materials, the sheer scale of the operation, constant construction traffic etc. can have a serious impact on the amenity of other residents and visitors. In some roads, such as Ingram Avenue, constant basement construction has made life difficult for residents for many years. Subterranean development inevitably adds complexity and time to a construction programme.

The Guidance

The Trust's existing basement guidance, as set out in the Hampstead Garden Suburb Conservation Area Design Guidance, remains unchanged but is augmented by this further guidance. Its purpose is to help clarify where the construction of a basement may be acceptable and offer advice on appropriate basement design. In determining applications for basements, or applications associated with a basement development, the Trust, when considering whether a basement is acceptable, will take into account –

1. The prospect of physical damage to the application property and neighbouring properties, including damage resulting from water movement or displacement.
2. Damage to the original design, character, amenity and historic interest of a close, group or street.
3. Setting a precedent that could lead to a general reduction in the range of dwelling sizes and types within the Suburb.
4. Disruption to the original homogeneity of a close, group or street of properties, including the size of the accommodation contained within the houses.
5. The possible increase in household size leading to the potential for increased number or size of vehicles, occupants, and/or visitors associated with the property and consequent detriment to the amenity of neighbouring properties, and the access and services associated with them.
6. Disruption to neighbouring properties due to the nature and/or timing of the application work and other construction works in the vicinity.
7. The size of dwelling resulting from the proposed development (and previous developments, such as extensions) compared with its original size and the size of properties to which it is related in terms of setting or type.
8. Potential damage to trees, hedging and mature garden planting or impact on the ability to establish a garden over a

basement which extends beyond the footprint of the house (in those situations in which a basement outside the footprint of the house might otherwise be acceptable).

In general, where a basement is acceptable in principle, the development should:

- Respect the character or appearance of the building, garden or wider area and the amenity of neighbours with external elements such as light wells, roof lights, mechanical plant, extracts and means of escape being carefully designed and discreetly sited;
- Not comprise more than one storey (approximately three metres in depth). Exceptions may be made on large sites where the development does not harm the built and natural environment or local amenity including the mix of housing in the suburb;
- Not add further basement floors where there is an extant or implemented Trust consent for a basement;
- Not extend beyond the original footprint of the house;
- Ensure that there is no loss, damage or long term threat to trees of townscape or amenity value or to boundary hedges or to the garden setting of the house;
- Not introduce light wells, pavement lights, grilles or railings to the front or visible side of the property;
- Ensure that traffic and construction activity does not harm pedestrian, cycle, vehicular and road safety, affect other transport operations, significantly increase traffic congestion, nor place unreasonable inconvenience on the day to day life of those living, working and visiting nearby;
- Ensure that construction impacts such as noise, vibration and dust are kept to acceptable levels for the duration of the works;
- Be designed to safeguard the structural stability of the application building, nearby buildings and other infrastructure;
- Ensure that the basement does not displace ground water or surface water flow in such a way that it causes flooding and that it does include a sustainable urban drainage scheme (SUDs);

- Include a minimum of one metre of permeable soil above any part of a basement which, in exceptional cases, may be approved beneath part of a garden;
- Have adequate headroom, daylight and ventilation;

In addition, the following will be taken into account -

- ❖ Within the Suburb there are many narrow roads and closes where the excavation and construction of a basement may be unreasonable because of the disruption and loss of amenity to other households during the works. Consequently basements in closes or narrow roads may not be approved.
- ❖ Because of the risk of differential movement when constructing a basement under one property in a terrace or adjoining another, basements will not normally be approved under semi-detached houses or houses in a terrace.
- ❖ In order to protect the range of house types and sizes that is a significant part of the Suburb's architectural and social character, basements will not normally be approved under small cottages or modest family houses.

The following should be noted:

Each application will be treated on its merits and, on occasion, consent may be refused even if the proposal appears to meet the guidance if there are reasons for doing so in order to protect the character and amenities of the Suburb. On the other hand, consent may be exceptionally given even though the proposal does not fully comply with this guidance if the Trust is satisfied that the character and amenities of the Suburb will not be compromised by the approval.

Approved by the Trust Council 16 February 2016

*In Winnington Road, the garage of a house neighbouring a basement excavation slid into the hole, causing considerable damage. In Hampstead Way, the detached neighbour of a new basement began to notice cracking soon after the build was completed. In Norrice Lea, a house slipped into the excavation under it as a basement was being constructed, and the adjoining house was damaged.