

Brandon Lewis MP,
Minister of State for Housing and Planning,
Department for Communities and Local Government,
Fry Building,
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Cllr Phil Jones
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Dear Mr Lewis,

I am writing to express my deep concerns about basement excavation being considered as permitted development rights and the lack of clear Government guidance on this matter. Whilst the Planning Portal provides helpful 3D guides for residents and developers on the specific dimensions of rear extensions and roof alterations, such guidance on basement excavation works is noticeably absent.

The development of basements in residential areas is becoming an increasing popular way of gaining additional space in homes. In 2014/15 alone, Camden Council received 219 planning applications involving basement excavation. The possibility that such intensive and disruptive development works can take place without needing any sort of formal planning permission causes great public concern. Basement construction is unlike any other household development permitted under the GPDO. Once completed, basements are often more damaging than extensions to properties, however that point is generally only reached after prolonged construction activities and the potential for disruption to neighbours and local businesses. Unlike rear extensions or garden structures, neighbours genuinely fear the real possibility of structural impacts on their home. Basement development can have a real and on-going impact on the natural and built environment of the site and the surrounding area. The control that is afforded by planning permission gives residents added assurance that these impacts have been taken into account before basement development starts and measures have been put in place to minimise those impacts, particularly during construction.

Camden has very clear planning policy on basements. We require a detailed assessment of the scheme's impact on drainage, flooding, groundwater conditions and structural stability. We only permit basement development that does not cause harm to the built and natural environment and local amenity, and does not result in flooding or ground instability. We require a detailed assessment of the scheme's impact on drainage, flooding, groundwater conditions and structural stability. In particular we expect the applicant to identify suitable construction methods and mitigation measures to minimise the potential harm to the stability of neighbouring buildings and/or nearby structures.

Camden's policy on basements demonstrates not only how serious the Council takes such development but also shows that there are significant local factors which need to be addressed, in the form of a planning application, for the planning officers to confirm that proposals will not have a detrimental impact on the built and natural environment.

Camden residents look to the Council to reassure them that developments will not unduly affect them and their home. If basement excavation can be considered as permitted development, we have no power to assure them that such development has been adequately considered. The only option to address this is to review removing these permitted development rights.

I urge ministers to look again at basement development. Unlike any other type of development permitted for householders, basement construction is an extremely disruptive and potential dangerous type of development. The Council has evidence in the form of a report on basement development by ARUPs which demonstrates the particular constraints for basement development in Camden. Without Government support on this issue we will be forced to follow Westminster's example and seek a Borough Wide Article 4.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phil Jones', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Phil Jones
Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Transport & Planning