

Dear Madam /Sir,

Planning application no: 2022/0157/P
Address: 27 Highgate West Hill, London N6

We write regarding the building works taking place at 27 Highgate West Hill, London N6 within the borough of Camden.

We are addressing this to the Camden planning team and copying in Susan Prose of the Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee. If there is a team more suitable to us liaising with, we would be very grateful to receive their details.

We are not seeking to intervene in the works. We hope that for the sake of both the proprietors and surrounding neighbours that the works can be completed as quickly and smoothly as possible. We do however want to notify the council of the impact of this work on the surrounding area and properties, including our home. We want to ensure that work as major and as destructive as this is not set as a precedent for future work in the immediate area.

We did not object to the planning application for this work. We note, however, that as lay people, there was no way for us to have foreseen how major the works would be and, more importantly, that the actual undertaking of the work (ie getting from A to B) would create such material damage to our home. There were over 30 documents in relation to the application, which is an overwhelming amount of information for a layperson to have to digest.

As background information, we live at number 29. The numbering of the street means we are not direct neighbours (the houses run as n27, n28,n29). This is a row of terraced houses on a steep hill. We are uphill from the works. N28 and N29 are small and narrow homes; we are just over 3m from n27. We have no party wall agreement. The houses are built on clay with (we are told) relatively shallow foundations. This means that the properties do shift slightly with seasons.

We bought our home in 2018 and over the past circa 6 years have experienced some minor superficial cracking to small areas of our internal plaster. We believe our home is nearly 200 years old.

During the first 3 - 4 months of the works, we experienced significant cracks both internally and externally to our plaster work. We also had what was for circa 6 years a very minor leak with extremely heavy rain spread significantly, signalling a shift. Various door frames, including our front door, bathroom and bedroom doors, shifted. Carpentry work was needed so we could use our front door. We were not the only nearby neighbours with this issue.

We informed the structural engineer from n27 who maintained that this was unrelated to the works, entirely coincidental and due to weather changes. We understand why this position was adopted in terms of liability, but this was very upsetting and stressful. We have liaised directly with the owners moving forwards. For the avoidance of doubt, the issues we have experienced are not coincidental. We have physically felt the vibrations - we have video footage of our radiators vibrating from the work. On the other side of our wall (i.e. the wall between n 28 and us (n 29)), our neighbour's ornamental teapot fell off a ridged stand on their mantelpiece because the vibrations were so strong. We have spoken directly with the proprietors of 27, with whom we are and wish to remain on good terms. As they predicted since early 2024 (following the end of the heavier work) the work has been felt significantly less. We are not the only neighbours who have had their property damaged.

We have a young family and this has and is a huge source of stress for us. We are now taking measures to protect ourselves from being in this position again. Our main concern is that whilst when this specific building work was proposed, the professionals involved were perhaps unable to foresee or did not consider the negative impact it would have on neighbouring properties, the reality of such a major development so close to old properties is that serious damage has been caused. It was frustrating that it was only on the speaking with the structural engineer that they noted how close our home actually was - we would have thought a full area assessment would have been carried out before starting such major works. Seeing on an almost daily basis how huge the work is - the enormous trucks, the drilling, the huge amount of earth being removed, entire removal of all internal plasterwork with a pneumatic drill, it is quite shocking this work was approved. We are therefore putting in writing that this has had a very real impact on our home. This not only has serious financial implications for us, it has and continues to be a source of great stress. It cannot be a precedent for work in the area. The properties are too old and the way they were constructed (as terraced houses, on a steep hill, with only the resources and construction methods available nearly 200 years ago) means they cannot withstand such construction/development projects. It is not fair that our "old" home is damaged so "new" homes can be built. As lay people, we could not have possibly known this from the plans. By way of example, we have seen the plans for the landscaping. We have no problem with the plans, but we could not have predicted that carrying out such plans would have involved the major digging out of the garden it has done. (Our understanding is the entire border between n27 and n28 has now been underpinned.) We could not have foreseen the amount of drilling involved to remove all interior plaster work. This quite literally felt like someone was coming through our wall and with great anxiety we have watched cracks spread throughout our home.

We have informed our neighbours at n27 that we would be writing to the council accordingly. We have no doubt that they will not want to be going through what we are in the event that someone in the vicinity looks to undertake such major works again, and it is for all our sakes this work is not set as a precedent. We had no plans to redecorate our home, but it now needs to be fully redecorated. There are many old properties on this street - we implore that the work that is allowed to be carried out on them is within reason and keeps in the mind the protection of other surrounding properties.

In light of the above, we would be very grateful to receive a site visit so that we can show the council the impact this has had and the reparation work that will need to be carried out. We would be very grateful to receive a response from the council on this matter, given it is causing us ongoing distress and concern about how we protect our home now and in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Ben and Charlotte Alderson