

Comments on the Campbell Reith Audit (June 2024)

Camden Planning Application 2024/0452/P

The Building Impact Assessment carried out by Green Structural Engineers (GSE) in November 2023 concludes that the proposed construction of a 36-foot swimming pool on the lower ground floor of No 28 Parliament Hill “can be undertaken without harm to the property or adjacent buildings.” The consultant engineers at Campbell Reith (CR) disagree, pointing out that the GSE report provides no adequate justification for this conclusion. (See CR paragraphs 1.14 and 5.11). Indeed, in common with my observations of 30 May, Campbell Reith point out that the GSE report confirms the existence of a “major challenge and risk to the adjoining properties.” (See CR paragraph 4.15).

As the semi-detached twin of No 28, No 30 Parliament Hill constitutes an adjoining property placed at significant risk by the proposed excavations. While GSE claim to have carried out site visits to adjoining properties and to have undertaken “an appraisal of the existing properties for any signs of historic or ongoing movement,” the Directors of 30 Parliament Management Company Ltd have serious doubts as to whether any such site visit or appraisal exercise has ever taken place.

GSE can have no knowledge whatever of the stability problems that have arisen at No 30 over the past half-century. The Directors can say with certainty that No 30 did not participate in the extensive underpinning work carried out at No 28 in 1997. But during 2012-2018, No 30 did experience significant movement at the front of the house. This instability required extensive underpinning and rebuilding of the steps to the upper/lower ground floors and to the front/side boundary walls.

It is relevant that the insurance industry regards No 30 as a high-risk property in consequence of historic movements and its construction on what Campbell Reith refer to as “high-volume change potential soils.” (See CR, paragraph 4.11). In April 2024, an insurance broker informed the Directors that eight major insurance companies had refused to provide No 30 with a quote for building insurance on grounds of subsidence risk. These companies included AXA, Allianz, Aviva, Covea, NBS, NIG and Zurich.

As noted in my previous comments of 30 May, the geotechnical ground investigation report of AVZGeoEng Ltd (November 2023) is pessimistic as regards the possibilities of the proposed project avoiding harm to neighbouring buildings. The report refers to “likely damage to adjacent properties” and acknowledges that a “rigorous assessment of the potential damage” is not possible in the absence of detailed knowledge of the stability of adjacent structures. The report confirms the risk of serious damage when it urges the activation of contingency measures “if movements of adjacent structures exceed predefined trigger levels.” The report also speaks of “the risk of ground loss/ground collapse beneath the neighbouring footings” during excavation and “long term swelling/settlement that will continue for a number of years.” In view of these expert assessments, it is difficult to accept that the planning application demonstrates “that the proposal would not cause harm to neighbouring properties,” as required by the Council’s A5 criteria for the approval of basement developments.

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