

2 Basement size and design

- 2.1 Often with basement development, the only visual features are lightwells, skylights, or pavement lights, with the bulk of the development concealed wholly underground, away from public view. However, just as overly large extensions above the ground level can dominate a building, contributing to the over-development of a site, an extension below ground can be of an inappropriate scale.

SKYLIGHT –

A window, dome, or opening in the roof or ceiling, to admit natural light.

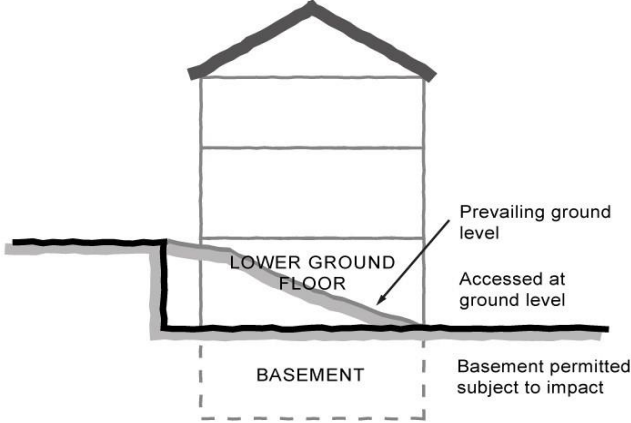
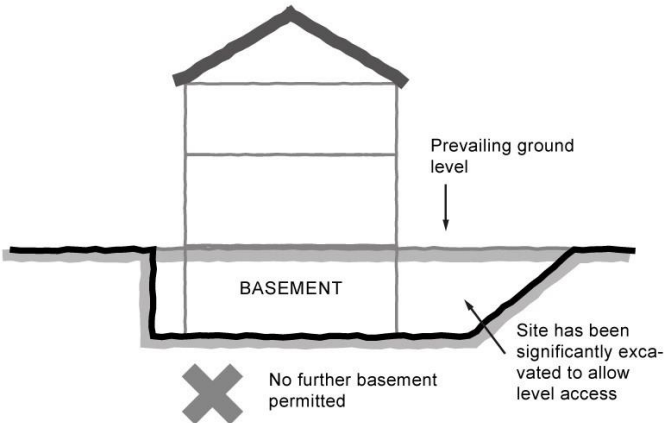
LIGHTWELL –

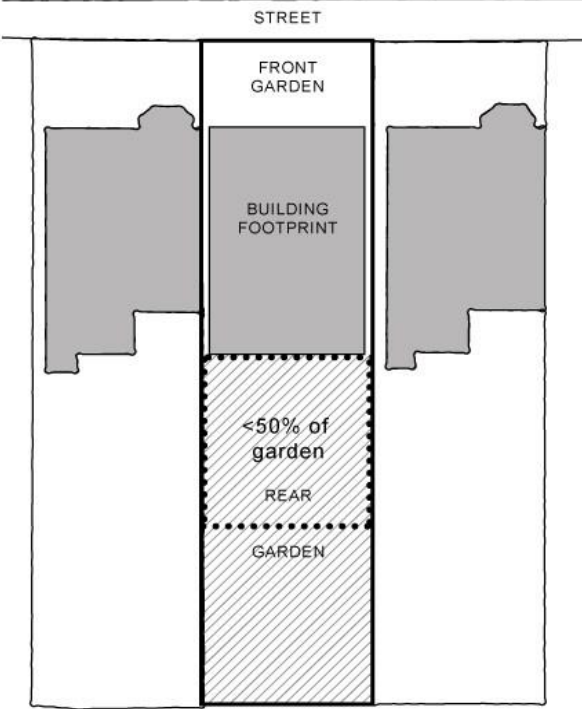
An opening within or next to a building that allows natural light to reach basement windows that would otherwise be obscured.

- 2.2 Larger basements can have a greater impact on the water environment by reducing the area for water to runoff and soak away. Basement development that extends below garden space can also reduce the ability of that garden to support trees and other vegetation leading to poorer quality gardens, a loss in amenity and the character of the area, and potentially a reduction in biodiversity.
- 2.3 Larger basement developments also require more extensive excavation resulting in longer construction periods, and greater numbers of vehicle movements to remove spoil. These extended construction impacts can have a significant impact on adjoining neighbours through disturbance through noise, vibration, dust, and traffic, and parking issues.
- 2.4 Local Plan Policy A5 on basements limits the size of basement developments. The section below lists the relevant criteria from Policy A5 accompanied by diagrams to show how these criteria apply.

Table 1: Policy A5 Basements, criteria f. to m. regarding the size of basement developments

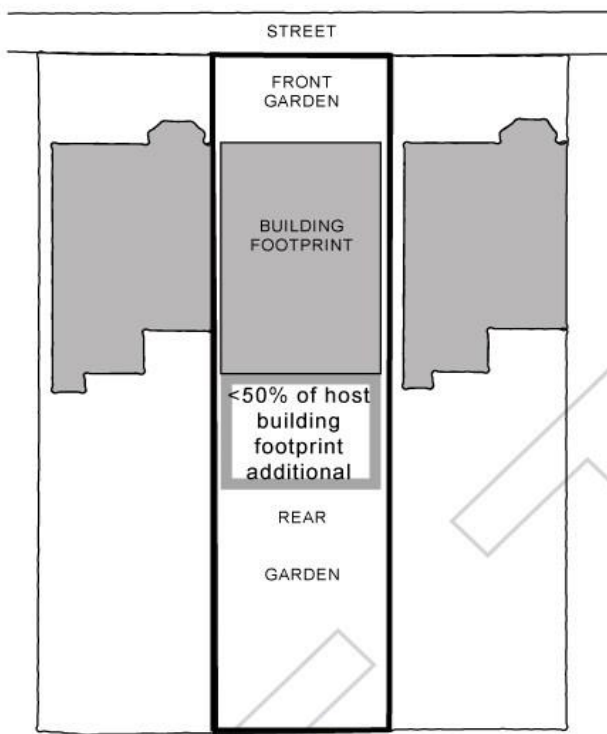
Policy A5	Guidance and diagrams
<i>“The siting, location, scale and design of basements must have minimal impact on, and be subordinate to, the host building and property. Basement development should:...</i>	A basement development that does not extend beyond the footprint of the original building and is no deeper than one full storey below ground level is often the most appropriate way to extend a building below ground.
<i>f. not comprise of more than one storey;</i>	The Council considers a single storey for a basement to be approximately 3 to 4 metres in height. The requirement for storey heights to be no more than 3-4 metres refers to

	<p>the total depth of the excavation (the external dimensions).</p> <p>Where appropriate we will allow a proportion of the basement to be deeper to allow development of swimming pools. Allowance of this addition depth will only be appropriate where it does not harm the neighbouring properties or the structural, ground, or water conditions of the area, and where the additional depth is required for a swimming pool and it not being used for any other purposes.</p>
<p><i>g. not be built under an existing basement;</i></p>	<p>Refer to paragraph 1.4, above, for details on basement definitions.</p> <p>Sloping and excavated sites</p> <p>Where a building is located on sloping land and there is a change in level across a site, a floor which is accessed at ground level at one side of the site (with no steps or ramp) will generally not be considered a basement, unless the site has been significantly excavated to allow access to that floor as shown in Figure 2, below.</p> <p>Figure 2. Sloping sites</p>  <p>Figure 3. Excavated sites</p> 

	<p>Lower ground floors</p> <p>Storeys built partially below ground are common in Camden, in particular in historic buildings. To be considered a lower ground floor and not a basement the storey must typically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a significant proportion above the prevailing ground level, • Be accessible from the outside of the building at the front and rear of the property, • Form part of the original fabric of a building, and □ Form part of the character of the area.
<p><i>h. not exceed 50% of each garden within the property;</i></p>	<p>This criterion applies to the front garden, the rear garden and gardens to the side of the property individually, rather than calculated as an aggregated garden area for the whole property. This criterion applies to gardens as they currently exist and not the gardens of the proposed development. The unaffected garden must be in a single area and where relevant should form a continuous area with other neighbouring gardens. Sufficient margins should be left between the site boundaries and any basement construction to sustain growth of vegetation and trees.</p> <p>Figure 4. Criterion h.</p>  <p>The diagram shows a property layout with a 'STREET' at the top. Below the street is a 'FRONT GARDEN'. In the center is the 'BUILDING FOOTPRINT'. Below the building footprint is a 'REAR GARDEN'. A dashed line separates the building footprint from the rear garden, with the text '<50% of garden' indicating the portion of the rear garden affected by the building footprint. The area below the dashed line is labeled 'REAR GARDEN'.</p> <p>Unaffected Garden: the area of garden under which no basement has been developed. For example wildlife corridors can exist at the very rear of property boundaries. It may be desirable to ensure that basements are not constructed along the rear boundary of properties in this instance.</p>

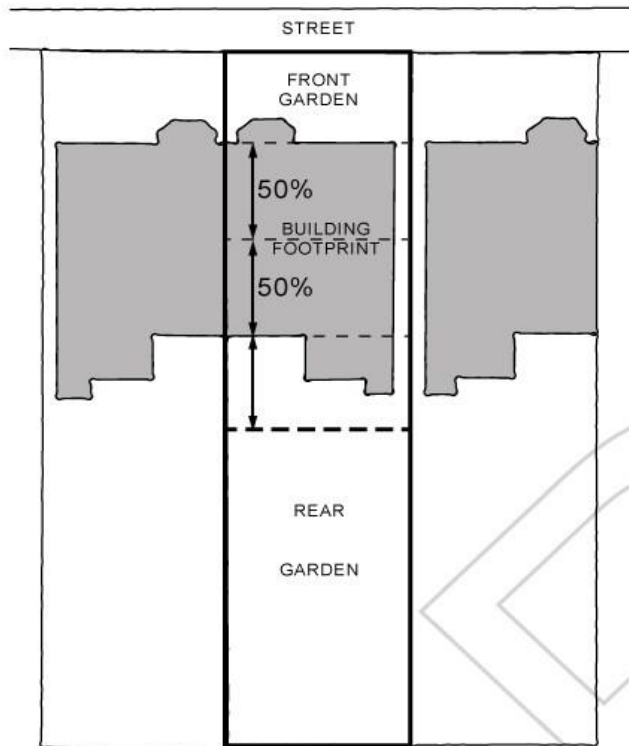
i. be less than 1.5 times the footprint of the host building in area;

Figure 5. Criterion i.



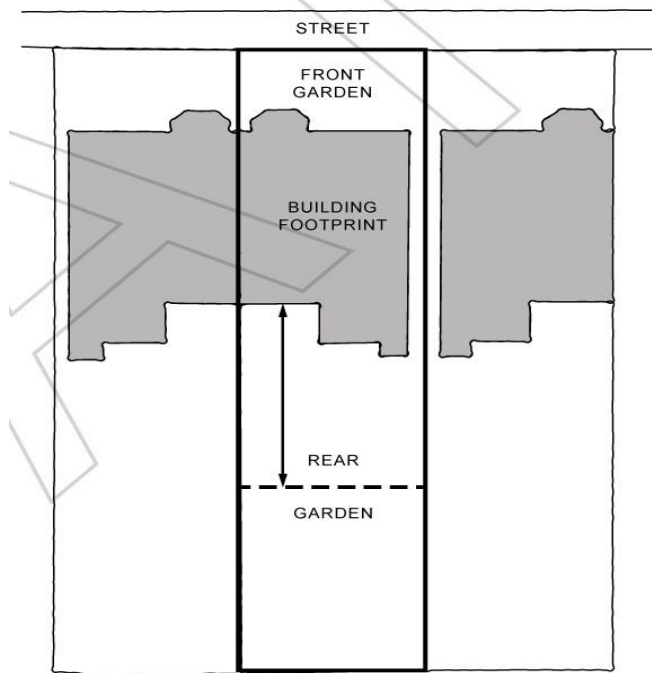
j. extend into the garden no further than 50% of the depth of the host building measured from the principal rear elevation;

Figure 6. Criterion j.



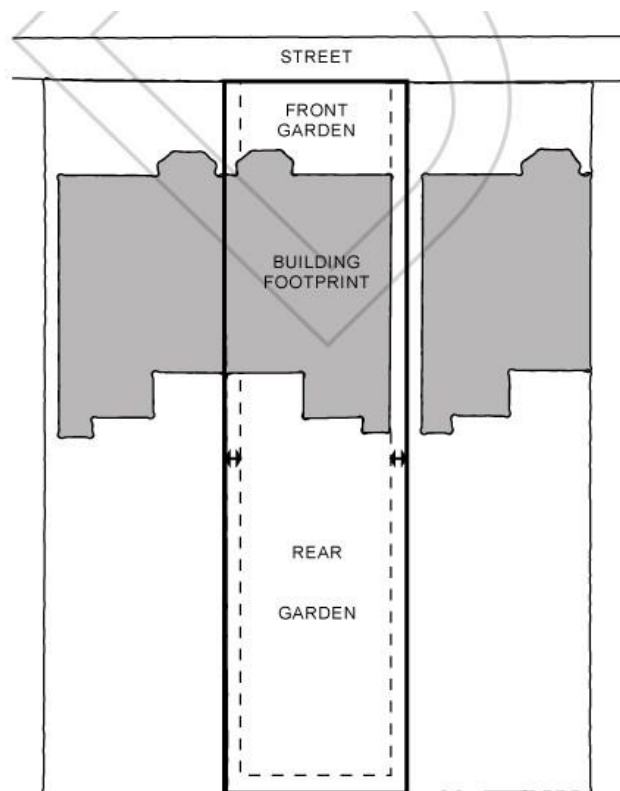
k. not extend into or underneath the garden further than 50% of the depth of the garden;

Figure 7. Criterion k.



l. be set back from neighbouring property boundaries where it extends beyond the footprint of the host building; and

Figure 8: Criterion l.



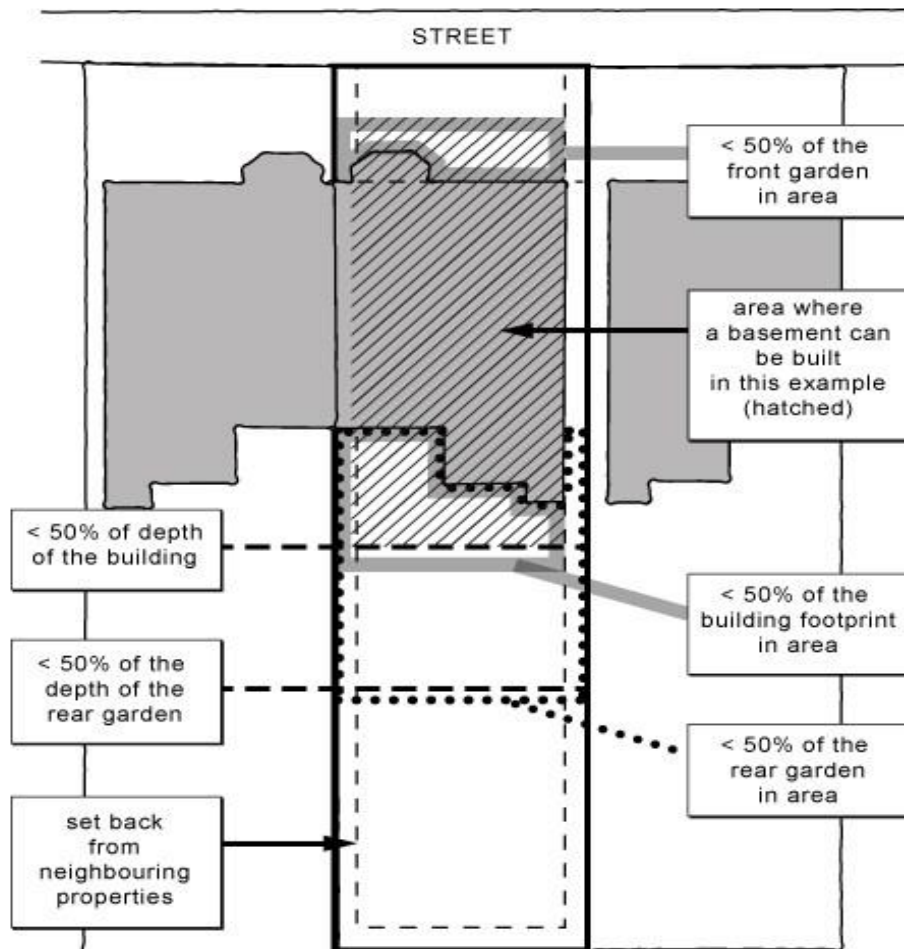
The policy objective is to provide significant space free from basement development to enable water drainage and area for planting. How this unaffected area is connected to neighbouring properties should be considered.

Providing a setback to neighbouring properties will generally not be required where built form or a basement on the neighbouring property extends up to the property boundary.

<p><i>m. avoid the loss of garden space or trees of townscape or amenity value</i></p>	<p>In accordance with Local Plan policy A3 on biodiversity the Council will expect developers to follow the principles and practice set out in 'British Standard 5837:2012 (or as subsequently updated) Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations'</p> <p>To find out more information on trees including identifying which trees are protected by a Tree Preservation Order visit www.camden.gov.uk/trees</p>
<p><i>Exceptions to f. to k. above may be made on large comprehensively planned sites."</i></p>	<p>For the purposes of this policy, large comprehensively planned sites are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new major developments, for example schemes which comprise 1000sq m additional non-residential floorspace or 10 or more additional dwellings; • large schemes located in a commercial setting; or developments the size of an entire or substantial part of an urban block.. (Local Plan para 6.133)

2.6 The criteria of policy A5 must be considered together, therefore the area where a basement may be developed is the smallest of these areas. The diagram below shown all of the considerations together.

Figure 9. All criterion of Policy A5 of the Local Plan



Skylights

- 2.7 Where a basement extension under part of the front or rear garden is considered acceptable, the inclusion of skylights designed within the landscaping of a garden will not usually be acceptable, as illumination and light spill from a skylight can harm the appearance of a garden setting.

Habitable rooms

- 2.8 Local Plan Policy A5 on basements states that the Council will not permit basement schemes which include habitable rooms and other sensitive uses in areas prone to flooding. Outside of these areas, where basement accommodation is to provide living space (possibly for staff), it will be subject to the same standards as other housing in terms of space, amenity and sunlight. Suitable access should also be provided to basement accommodation to allow for evacuation. Further guidance is contained in the Camden Planning Guidance on Housing.

Basement walls, windows, and doors

- 2.9 The development of a basement and the introduction of light wells may result in an area of exposed basement wall and will usually mean new window or door openings. Any exposed area of basement development to the side or rear of a building will be assessed against the guidance in CPG1 Design (refer to section 4 on extensions, alterations and conservatories). In general, this expects that any exposed area of basement:
- is subordinate to the building being extended;
 - respects the original design and proportions of the building, including its architectural period and style; and
 - minimises the loss of garden space.
- 2.10 Any visible basement wall should not dominate the original building due to its size.
- 2.11 In number, form, scale and pane size, basement windows should relate to the façade above. They should normally be aligned to the openings above and be of a size that is clearly subordinate to the higher level openings so as not to compete with the character and balance of the original building. On the street elevation, and on certain rear elevations where there is a distinguishable pattern to the fenestration, the width and height of windows should be no greater than those above.

FAÇADE –

The face or front of a building.

FENESTRATION –

The arrangements of windows in a building.

Lightwells

- 2.12 The building stock in Camden is varied. Some areas contain basement developments that include front lightwells taking up part, or all, of the front garden. Other areas do not have basements or lightwells that are visible from the

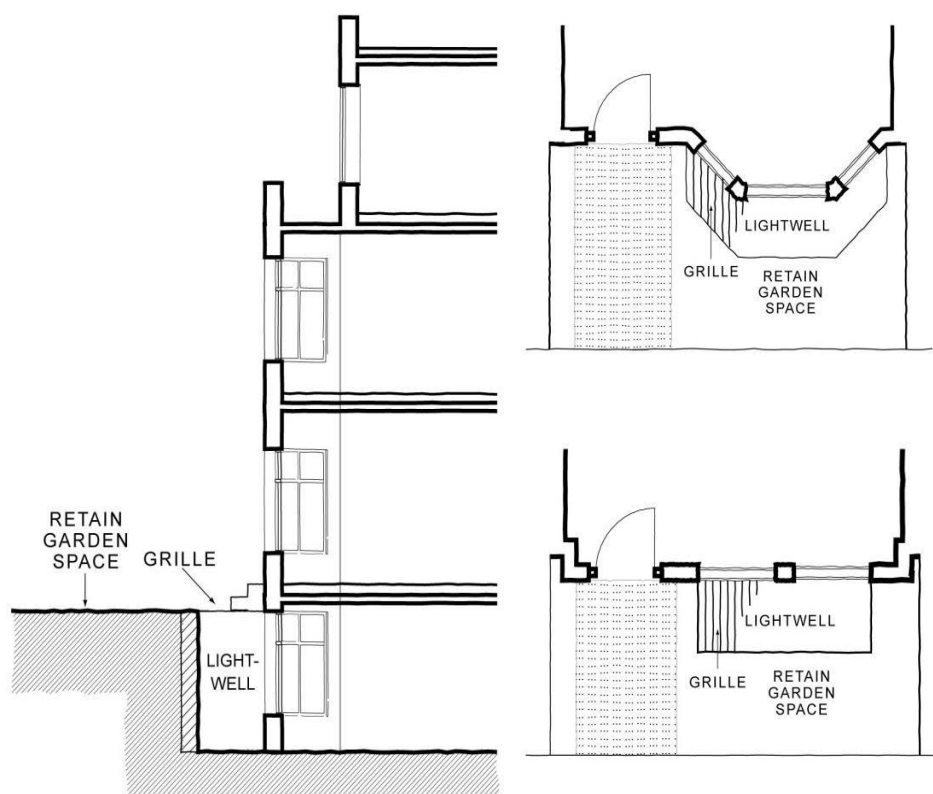
street. The presence or absence of lightwells helps define and reinforce the prevailing character of a neighbourhood.

- 2.13 Where basements and visible lightwells are not part of the prevailing character of a street, new lightwells should be discreet and not harm the architectural character of the host building, or the character and appearance of the surrounding area, or the relationship between the building and the street. For example lightwells may need to be covered by a grille, have no railing, and be of an size appropriate to the host building and garden.
- 2.14 In situations where lightwells are not part of the established street character, the characteristics of the front garden or forecourt will help to determine the suitability of lightwells.
- 2.15 In plots where the depth of a front garden is quite long, basement lightwells are more easily concealed by landscaping and boundary treatments, and a substantial garden area can be retained providing a visual buffer from the street. In these situations new lightwells that are sensitively designed to maintain the integrity of the existing building may be acceptable, subject to other design requirements and environmental considerations.
- 2.16 In plots where the front garden is quite shallow, a lightwell is likely to consume much, or all, of the garden area. This is likely to be unacceptable in streets where lightwells are not part of the established character and where the front gardens have an important role in the local townscape.
- 2.17 Excessively large lightwells will not be permitted in any garden space.
- 2.18 A lightwell to the side or rear of a property is often the most appropriate way to provide a means of providing light to a new or extended basement development, and can often provide a link to the rear garden. Lightwells to the side or rear of a property should be set away from the boundary to a neighbouring property.
- 2.19 Applicants should check with Building Control at an early stage how their basement proposal incorporates a means of escape and whether this has been properly considered with regard to the size of the lightwell.

Railings, grilles and other lightwell treatment

- 2.20 In order to comply with Building Regulation standards, lightwells should be secured by either a railing (1,100mm high) or a grille. In gardens that front a street, railings can cause a cluttered appearance to the front of the property and can compete with the appearance of the front boundary wall, or obscure front windows. This is particularly the case in shallow gardens. Where front light wells are proposed, they should be secured by a grille which sits flush with the natural ground level, rather than railings (refer to Figure 10 on the following page). In certain publicly accessible locations grilles should be locked to prevent lightwells being misused (e.g. for casual sleeping or drug use). In most cases metal is the preferred material for grilles and railings. Glass railings or grilles are unlikely to be acceptable.
- 2.21 Railings will be considered acceptable where they form part of the established street scene, or would not cause harm to the appearance of the building or the surrounding area.

Figure 10. Lightwells and railings



- 2.22 The lowering of the natural ground level to the rear of the property should be minimised as much as is practicable.

Conservation areas and listed buildings

- 2.23 In the case of listed buildings, applicants will be required to consider whether basement and underground development preserves the existing fabric, structural integrity, layout, interrelationships and hierarchy of spaces, and any features that are architecturally or historically important. Where the building is listed, new basement development or extensions to existing basement accommodation will require listed building consent, even if planning permission is not required. The acceptability of a basement extension to a listed building will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the individual features of the building and its special interest. Applicants should contact the Council at the earliest opportunity to discuss such proposals. Enquiries of this type can be answered through the duty planning service:

<https://www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/content/contacts/councilcontacts/environment/contact-the-duty-planner/>

LISTED BUILDING CONSENT –

This is legally required in order to carry out any works to a Listed Building that will affect its special value. This is necessary for any major works, but may also be necessary for minor alterations and even repairs and maintenance. Listed Building Consent may also be necessary for a change of use of the property.

- 2.24 As with all basement schemes, the Council will need to be satisfied that effective measures will be taken during demolition and construction works to ensure that damage is not caused to the listed building and any buildings it directly adjoins. Poor demolition and construction methods can put neighbouring properties at risk and so can have considerable effects on the character and appearance of heritage buildings and conservation areas.
- 2.25 The Council will expect the submission of a management plan for demolition and/or construction where basement works are proposed in conservation areas or adjacent to a listed building. Further guidance on this is set out in the section on construction management plans in Camden Planning Guidance on Amenity.