

**From: Robin Imray,** [REDACTED]

Application: 2018/2442/P  
Address: 1 Spencer Rise London NW5 1AR  
Proposal: Excavation of a basement below the house

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I believe this proposal is totally inappropriate for this locality. I also believe it contravenes Camden's guidance regarding basement developments in almost every way: in the harm it will cause to neighbours (both immediate and further up the street); in the impact of the work on the local ground and water conditions; in the damage it will cause to the area, both in itself and as a precedent.

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**Camden Guidance on Basements** (2017) states "*basement development must not cause harm to neighbouring properties; the structural, ground, or water conditions of the area; the character and amenity of the area; and the architectural character and heritage significance of the building and area*".

- **Harm to neighbouring properties:**

Spencer Rise was developed in the 1870s. Most if not all of the houses were cheaply constructed with only minimal foundations (my own still has earth directly under the floorboards). The street is therefore susceptible to movement, with a history of subsidence and underpinning (I assume Camden know this – it has owned properties in the street; it will also presumably have Building Control records of the underpinnings and shoring-up). Movement on the north side has been greater than on the south, so in the long term there must be a risk that substantial disturbance through excavation and groundworks on this bottom-of-street site will affect the essential stability not just of immediately adjacent houses but also of those further up the road. In the shorter term, the harm to the amenity of neighbours, both immediate and in the wider adjacent areas of Spencer Rise and York Rise, would be extensive and damaging during what would undoubtedly be a long construction process – excavation and carting away three or four hundred cubic meters of earth, successions of skip and concrete lorries. This constitutes massive disturbance in a narrow and generally quiet street. In normal circumstances such disturbance may be arguable as something to tolerate – we've all had work done on our houses – but when it comes to something as substantial as one huge excavation (and one which could well open the door to many others – see below), it cannot surely be argued as acceptable.

- **The structural, ground, or water conditions of the area:**

This overlaps with the subsidence concerns laid out above. Firstly the Fleet River runs barely 30 meters away underneath York Rise, which is just 3 meters or so below the current ground level of 1 Spencer Rise. The river is hardly alluded to in the application, yet the excavation will be to a depth of some 4 meters – the same level as, or even below, the Fleet. Recent weather extremes of heat and wet and the consequent shrink-swell of London clay must surely risk the integrity of all water utilities in this area, including that of the river culvert.

Secondly there seems to be a possibility that instability on the north side has been exacerbated by the presence of groundwater behind or below the houses on that side. Residents report drainage and damp issues. There certainly must be something that makes the north side less stable, and it would be remiss of Camden to give the go ahead to this proposal in such circumstances.

- **The character and amenity of the area:**

A pre-planning enquiry by the same applicant regarding this site (2017/4115/PRE; 14/09/2017) referred not only to a basement extension, but also to the addition of a mansard roof and a rear extension: a two-storey house in a street of similarly modest buildings was to be turned into a dwelling more appropriate to the nearby Dartmouth Park area. Even this current application is disproportionate in its implications for the inhabitants of a historically small, mixed and established community. The fact that the first two aspects of the plans for the house (rear and roof extensions) have been turned down is surely no reason to allow this – by far the most damaging to the neighbourhood in every respect except visually – as some sort of consolation prize.

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So I urge the refusal of the application.

1. The previous roof-extension proposal was rejected mostly for aesthetic reasons. How much more important for current residents (many of them part of a long-term community) are the issues of potential subsidence, water problems, disturbance, quality of life, and precedent for future upheaval?
  2. Is Camden really prepared to risk the structural integrity of a whole street of terraced houses and their residents' quiet enjoyment of their homes for the sake of a single speculative development?
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Incidentally, the use of maps in Vincent & Rymill's 'Desk Top Study' seems careless, even sloppy: it ignores the more accurate history provided to the applicant by the series of maps supplied to Ground & Water by Groundsure, and is not even correct in its estimate of the date the house was built – which was certainly before 1874 when the street was renumbered by the Post Office. Also sloppy is V&R's "Prediction of damage to adjoining properties" where they claim that "Strict control of the construction method together with the structural design will limit any potential damage to the adjoining garage". There is no garage involved. The sentence has surely been cut and pasted from another application. It is to be hoped that V&R's more important assessments are not as inaccurate and sloppy.

*Robin Imray*

