

Application No:	Consultees Name:	Received:	Comment:	Response:
2019/3948/P	Susanne Lawrence	23/10/2019 20:31:31	OBJ	<p>I am the owner of the house immediately adjacent to the site of this proposed basement development and the nearest and most directly affected other than 47c which is actually attached to and twinned with 47d. My house, 47b, is literally just a few feet away and totally dependent for access on the forecourt under part of which the proposed basement would be built.</p> <p>The forecourt is actually owned by the freeholder of the 10 flats at no 47 (one big house on the left of the forecourt), while the other three properties that share it (my house, 47b, at the back and the two cottages, 47 c and d on the right) are all freehold but subject to a protective covenant which</p> <p>a) forbids any parking on the forecourt (apart, implicitly, from emergency vehicles; plus I have the sole right to drive across it to reach my garage)</p> <p>b) forbids any change in the exterior of the buildings without the approval of the forecourt freeholder, Sarah Robins of Stuart Lightband Ltd (whose objections to the proposals are published on your website).</p> <p>The forecourt is very soft and porous (just tarred over) and goes into holes at the slightest disturbance. All services (mains water, drains/sewers, telephone landlines, gas etc) run from the street into the forecourt immediately below the surface to 47b and c on the side of the proposed construction and in some cases all the way across to the flats at 47 and the maisonette known as Flat 1. Any work that has been required to those services over the 21 years I have lived here clearly demonstrated that the forecourt is not sturdy enough to withstand digging up, let alone the damage and destruction that would be caused to the pipes, phonelines etc of creating a basement in their path, whether underneath or impinging on them.</p> <p>Also, by removing the flowerbed at the side and replacing it with a lightwell and railings, there is effectively a narrowing of the driveway to my garage. Plus, while officially no-one is permitted to park there, the forecourt does get used for short periods from time to time by various service providers such as gardeners, removal and delivery vans and emergency vehicles such as ambulances and, heaven forbid, fire-engines. I have seen large lorries struggle through the main gate to deliver furniture, for example, and watched as they knocked down part of the hedge that borders the street and butted right up to the side of 47d. A lightwell there, whether open or glazed over, plus the railings, would be a disaster waiting to happen. The proposal specifically talks about 'pedestrian-loaded glazing', which presumably is not suitable for heavy (or any) vehicles to drive over.</p> <p>As for the basement itself, the risks of damage - cracking at least but potentially much worse - to 47c, which is adjoins the building in question, and to 47b, just inches away, surely go without saying. As editor of our neighbourhood newsletter (NNA News), I carried an article a few issues back by the then chair of the Heath and Hampstead Society drawing attention to the dangers (with examples of catastrophes, from gaping cracks to total collapse) of building basements in our area. Even 47d's own basement impact assessment report talks about the risks to 47c and b, but I'd be amazed if the fabric of the main building at 47 was not also affected.</p> <p>While no expert on the subject, I read the applicant's basement impact assessment (BIA) report very carefully and was extremely concerned by the vagueness of its terminology.</p> <p>For example, having stated that the proposed basement will extend to near the surface of the Claygate member of the London Clay Formation that has a high volume change potential and WILL be prone to shrinkage/swelling, the BIA report adds that it would be unlikely (vague, but doesn't rule out the possibility) to penetrate these strata and will extend to below the depth of observed root penetration and below the groundwater table, so shrinkage/swelling 'unlikely' to be a problem. But heave as a result of unloading IS expected to occur (albeit should be mitigated by the basement design - but WILL it be? How can we know? Can we take the risk?).</p> <p>It also talks about ground movements as a result of construction having implications for the Hampstead rail tunnel and therefore advocates an asset protection agreement with Network Rail, but will this happen and what might be the impact on us and the tunnel if things go wrong?</p>

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The report goes on to deal with the risk of flooding. It says groundwater vulnerability and soil leaching potential is high and though it says the potential for groundwater flooding is limited, that does not mean it is not susceptible. And it actually states there is a risk of one property being affected by external sewer flooding, although it does not say which.

It says the bedrock is designated as a secondary A aquifer and again that the Claygate member of the London Clay Formation may be encountered during construction. I do not know what the significance is of either of these factors - but it doesn't sound good to me!

They say the basement won't result in a change in the proportion of hard/surfaced/paved external areas but have they taken account of the proposed replacement of flower beds in our forecourt with a lightwell (and railings) and the extension of the basement well beyond the cottage footprint into over half the present cottage garden?

They say the excavation and formation of the basement COULD (invariably will) cause ground movement affecting both 47c (Rohan Heath's cottage) and 47b (my house). I guess this is an understatement.

And a few things are completely wrong: they talk about 47d being flat land but this part of Netherhall Gardens is an extremely steep hill and even the forecourt they intend to partly excavate slopes quite steeply down to the road; they say the front of the cottage cannot be seen from the road but this is untrue - you can see quite a bit from across the road and from higher up the hill (not to mention estate agents' photographs); they state that 47d is attached to 47b (instead of 47c) and they haven't even bothered to get the name of the road right - none of this carelessness or misinformation bodes well.

The Eldred Geotechnics report, since commissioned by the owner of 47c, bears out my concerns, referring to the shortcomings and overall inadequacy of the investigations undertaken by the people used by the applicant. Clearly much will depend on the methods and quality of the building works, but who knows who the owner would employ and what cutbacks might be made if he was to receive planning permission. I am told he intends to use his own son to oversee the project and, potential bias apart, that the son's experience of creating basements in this part of London is relatively limited. It is perhaps noteworthy that in the year or so since he bought the house, the new owner has made no attempt to introduce himself to any of the residents here, let alone to discuss his plans/intentions with those most directly affected, ie the owners of 47c or 47b. And I understand he thinks he can get the disabled parking bay outside suspended to make way for a skip. This is clearly not acceptable.

Other neighbours have drawn attention to the potential collateral damage to other nearby properties of building a new basement in this part of the road - with the presence of streams, railways (the overground line from Finchley Road and Frognal to Hampstead Heath runs directly under the buildings on this side of this section of Netherhall Gardens - 49, 47d, c, b and 47, 47a further down the hill, and Orchard Corner) and all manner of ancient pipework in abundance. These risks will be compounded by the construction due to start in the spring of a triple basement at 59 Maresfield Gardens, just a few yards up the hill.

Finally, I must object to this proposal on aesthetic grounds. In addition to the removal of flower beds from our forecourt, the dessimation of half the garden at 47d and the installation of (albeit inadequate) lightwells, skylights and new roof-lights, the proposal is to replace the charming Crittal windows (associated with the art deco and modernist movements in early 20th century architecture) with double glazing, and the cottage-style front door with a new glazed front door and glass canopy. As 47d is a (siamese) twin with 47c, which together make a pair of very pretty arts and crafts cottages, these proposals would surely run roughshod over the guidance related to this conservation area.

And I should perhaps add that my own house, 47b, has a large front landing window (not that dissimilar from that at the Freud Museum) which has often been sketched and photographed and included in publications about Hampstead architecture; I understand the late Hampstead historian Christopher Wade was quite a fan.

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So, personal upset and inconvenience aside, it would be considerably detrimental to the neighbourhood if this was to be damaged as a result of underground work in such close proximity.
I would ask that you reject this totally inappropriate and dangerous proposal.
