

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

'DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR LIGHTWELLS ASSOCIATED WITH BASEMENT ROOMS' SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE APPROVED BY LEADER'S COMMITTEE 3 SEPTEMBER 2002

The creation of lightwells by the excavation of all or part of the front garden of a residential property will require planning permission. Where lightwells already exist, and are to be enlarged, planning permission will also be required for that enlargement.

Where there is no tradition of a lightwell in a particular property or street the introduction of an over large, visible and inappropriately designed lightwell could be harmful to the appearance of an area. For example, the scale of a property can be increased, or the softness given by a planted front garden can be lost with consequent damage to the street scene, and the addition of further protective railings can add an unnecessarily cluttered appearance to the street scene.

In conservation areas such developments can alter and harm the character and appearance of that area.

Proposals for lightwells associated with the excavation at basement level have, until recent times, mostly been limited to specific and confined areas of the Borough. However, the demand for such excavations has now increased considerably with some proposals being considered to be inappropriate in their extent and design.

In order to help property owners to submit proposals that would receive planning permission, the Council has produced this design guidance in order to clarify its policy and design approach to lightwells. The guidance also incorporates advice on Building Regulations requirements, and makes reference to environmental requirements for private sector housing. The guidelines have been the subject to extensive public consultation. They are now adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Unitary Development Plan. The Council will rely on this document in its determination of planning applications, and in connection with any appeal.

INTRODUCTION

In London many of the larger Georgian terrace houses had separate front access to the basement to allow for coal, waste and service matters to be dealt with separately from the main entrance to the house. In smaller houses basement access would be to the coal cellars which were to be found under the pavements. However, later medium sized and smaller London houses had no separate access and coal and bins were moved through the same main entrance. Towards the end of the 19th Century (after 1870) all medium sized houses and many smaller houses were built with a front garden (even those with basements). Gardens were regarded as adding status and, if kept

in good order, improving privacy and the appearance of the house. Iron railings (most removed during the Second World War), sometimes on a low brick wall, often enclosed the gardens. By the end of the 19th Century, almost all new houses had a front garden, or at least a forecourt, a paved stretch of ground of the depth of a bay window.

These front gardens now form the character of most of the Borough's streets and terraces, and when planted, provide a welcome greening of an otherwise hard urban environment.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

It is the Council's policy expressed in its Conservation Area Character Profiles (adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Unitary Development Plan) to discourage the excavation of front gardens in conservation areas. The policy states:

"The creation of lightwells by the excavation of all or part of the front garden of a residential property to provide windows to basements to increase the light to basement rooms requires planning permission, as does the enlargement of an existing lightwell. Where there is no tradition of a lightwell in a particular property or street the introduction of an over-large, visible and inappropriately designed lightwell could be harmful to the appearance of an area. This has a negative impact and will not normally be permitted where the lightwell would take up more than 50% of the front garden or would result in the loss of a substantial part of any planted area of the front gardens that forms an integral part of the design of the street or terrace."

Consequently, any application for a lightwell will be treated on its individual planning merits, taking into account local circumstances and the proposed size of the excavated area. Where lightwells exist already in a particular street or terrace, such as the Studdridge Street Conservation Area, and other areas in the borough and where a different model has already become established, further lightwells, which match the predominant design, may be considered acceptable.

There will be a few instances where the construction of a lightwell could be detrimental to the character of a building or the street scene and could be refused permission. Examples of such cases would be where front gardens or forecourts (both residential and commercial) are particularly small and the creation of a lightwell would result in the loss of the entire garden, or where a large lightwell would be clearly visible from public areas. A proposal for a lightwell where the whole garden would be lost would normally be refused permission. In the case of a listed building whose special character would be harmed by the construction of lightwells, such a development would almost always be unacceptable. In some parts of some conservation areas, even the recommended forms of lightwells enclosed in this guidance may be harmful, for example some where the front garden is clearly visible from the street, or where there is no front boundary enclosure.

The Unitary Development Plan Policy S8.1C “Residential units in Basements of Residential Properties” specifies that planning permission would not normally be granted for reasons including:

- (i) where such development would necessitate the creation of a lightwell at the front of the building that would be out of character with the street scene, especially where this would result in the loss of a significant part of the front garden;
- (ii) where such development would necessitate the creation of a lightwell at the rear or side of the building that would result in the loss more than 50% of the open area at the rear or side of the property as originally built; or, where the original property has already been extended or altered, the cumulative extensions and alterations would result in more than 50% of the open area being lost at the rear or side of the property as originally built;
- (iii) where, having regard to the guidance set out in the Building Research Establishment’s (BRE) report ‘site layout planning for daylight and sunlight – a guide to good practice’ (standard S3.1), the provision of daylight to rooms is adequate;
- (iv) where the net floor area of the flat and net floor area of individual rooms do not conform to the minimum requirements set out in standards S8.1A and S8.1B;
- (v) where the conversion of an existing basement would not be in accordance with on-street parking requirements set out in standard S8.2;
- (vi) where the creation of new basements would not be in accordance with off-street parking requirements set out in standard S18.1.

ARCHAEOLOGY

There are parts of the Borough that are designated as Archaeological Priority areas. Where excavation is required in these areas the Council will need to take into account the policies in the Unitary Development Plan and applicants should consult English Heritage before embarking on any work. This requirement is normally expressed as a condition to any planning permission.

MODEL DESIGN: LIGHTWELLS ASSOCIATED WITH BASEMENT ROOMS

Ideally, where a basement is being excavated to form additional living space, lightwells should be formed in the rear and/or side garden, where one exists. Such a location would almost always be more appropriate. There would be scope at the rear for the provision of light and air to any new basement room, and there would also be the opportunity to create links with any rear garden.

Where a new front lightwell is acceptable in principle, it should be as discreet as possible, and allow the scale, character and appearance of the property, street or terrace to remain unchanged. The design of any basement

elevation, in its form and fenestration, should relate to the design of the ground floor elevation. The excavation should retain a significant amount of accessible and usable planting area at ground level. Fences or vertical railings to surround the lightwell should be avoided, as they draw attention to the change, and would look cluttered especially if there are differing styles. It would be acceptable however, to put a railing from the front to back adjacent to the garden path in order to give protection. The Council is not seeking to prevent the use of fences and railings on the front property boundary, or along the path leading to the front door.

Many houses in Hammersmith and Fulham have a splayed bay window on the front elevation (a result of the late Victorian love of fresh air and extra space); others have a square bay, while fewer have a flat elevation. The majority of terraced houses have small front gardens where the formation of a lightwell would have the greatest impact. **These guidelines are predominantly aimed at these small gardens.** The guidelines may only be relaxed where the proposals relate to larger front gardens (i.e. more than 6 metres when measured from the main front wall).

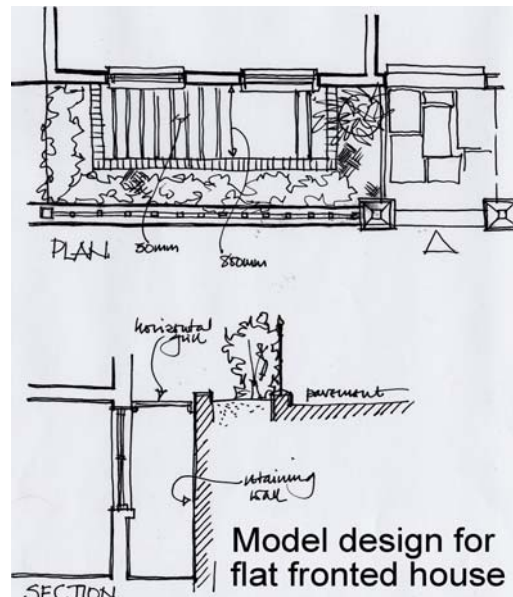
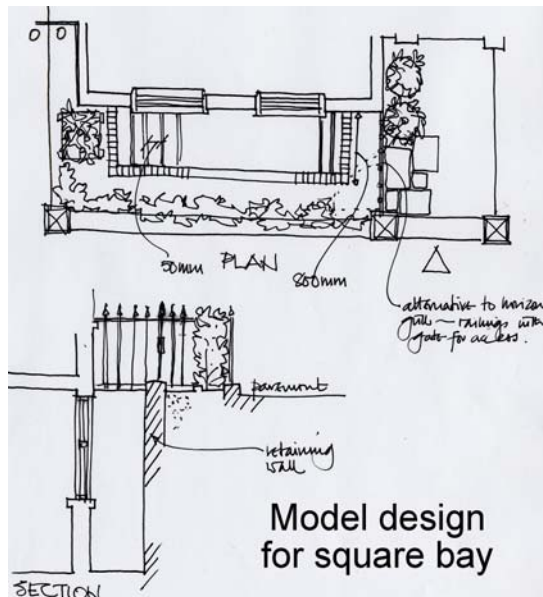
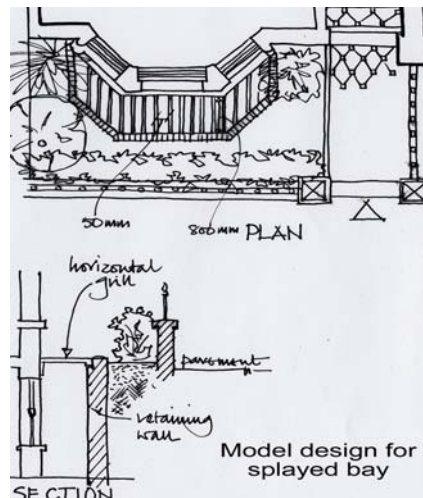
In the case of splay bay and square bay windows, the lightwell should follow the shape of the bay window on the ground floor. In the case of a flat fronted property the excavation should be no wider than the outer edge of the window or windows in the ground the ground floor elevation. All excavations should not exceed 800mm from front to back. The Building Regulations require that in order to prevent any one falling into a lightwell where it is deeper than 600mm, the opening should be protected by a guard. In order to avoid a cluttered appearance in the front of a property a horizontal grille should be used to achieve such protection over the excavation. The need for a grille can be avoided if a vertical railing is erected from the front entrance gate to the front door.

Where the lightwell is used as a means of escape the grille must be capable of being opened by one hand as someone holds onto the ladder with the other. If the lightwell is not used as a means of escape, or required for ventilation, other traditional measures such as glass blocks could be used. Where a lightwell is used as a means of escape, a ladder will also need to be provided to affect the escape arrangements from the basement. These features should be included in any planning application. (Guidance Notes incorporating Building Regulations Technical requirements are found in Appendix 1) Any proposal should have sufficient space left in the front garden to provide the opportunity for planting, and in the case of small gardens, there should be at least sufficient space left for a sustainable hedge.

Any planning permission will have conditions attached relating to the grilles, planting and a requirement to build the proposals in their entirety.

Recommended lightwells are shown in the drawings, these show a plan and section from front to back, for each type of property, together with dimensions. The examples have been designed to comply with building regulations

requirements for means of escape in case of fire, if the only possible means of escape is through the front lightwell area.



APPENDIX 1: BUILDING REGULATIONS REQUIREMENTS

The following are regulations relating to Fire Safety and Means of Escape from Basements. There are **two** options available for achieving means of escape in case of fire.

Firstly, if the only means of escape in case of fire is by using the front lightwell area, then there are a number of rules which need to be met.

A lightwell with 800 mm wide and 1250 mm long (inside measurements) will be large enough to form a reasonable escape route.

A non-combustible ladder should be provided to allow anyone to step out of the lightwell to ground level. It should have a rake of 70 degrees and be

positioned in such a way that 450 mm of the window or door remains clear. A handhold should be provided above ground level.

Some form of protection is needed to prevent anyone from falling into the lightwell. If this protection is provided by the use of a horizontal grille, a section of it must be capable of being opened by one hand (as someone holds onto the ladder with the other). This could be done by providing spring loading or a counterbalance. The hatch size should be the plan area of the ladder or a minimum of 800 mm x 600 mm, whichever is the greater. Bars to the grille should be spaced at no greater than 50 mm apart. The grille should be fitted only with simple fastenings clearly visible and readily openable without the use of a key.

Any new basement window should have an unobstructed opening area of no less than 0.33 m² amounting to at least 450 mm by 750 mm clear opening. The bottom of the opening area should be not more than 1100 mm above the floor.

In order to make the escape route safe from any fire breakout from any existing ground floor window, if that window is within 1.8m of the lightwell, you will need to ensure that the ground floor window sill is at least 1100 mm above ground level, or if the sill is lower than 1100 mm above ground level then glazing to the windows should be made fire resisting and fixed shut. If the latter is not practicable you should install a smoke detector in the ground floor front room which contains, or is linked to, an alarm which will provide early warning to occupants in the basement.

Secondly, where the means of escape in case of fire is by using the internal staircase, the following rules need to be met.

All doors to habitable rooms (including the kitchen), entered from the stairway of the dwelling, should be fire resisting and self closing to ensure that a protected route is provided, **or**

Where the existing doors to the stairway are not fire-resisting, the dwelling should be provided with a mains operated system of automatic fire detection. A detector should be provided in each habitable room (heat detector in the kitchen). Such a system should accord with the recommendations of BS 5839 Part 6.

In all the above options, the following additional recommendations (from Approved Document "B" attached to the Building Regulations) should be complied with: -

The basement room should be separated from the stairway by fire-resisting construction, and

Smoke detection should be provided within the stairway enclosure, at each landing level.

Finally, you should remember that it is the responsibility of owners, builders and their professional advisers to ensure that all temporary works are carried out in accordance with health and safety (construction) regulations and good building practice. Health and safety (construction) regulations are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive.

Also, before you start any work you must obtain planning permission, building regulations approval, and any necessary highways consent where excavations are proposed adjacent to public highways (i.e. the edge of the pavement). In addition you should serve any necessary party wall notices and reach agreement with the adjoining owners where the proposed works affect the party wall. If this is not done before the work begins, the adjoining owners may take legal proceedings and halt work until such time the works affecting the party walls are agreed with them.

NB. All calculations and details relating to retaining walls and underpinning works, etc. must comply with the Building Regulations to the satisfaction of the Building Control Officer.