

Mega-basements brought low as neighbours force limits to be set



Kirsty Bertarelli got her planning application in just in time and in March it was approved Chris Jackson/Getty Images

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Kirsty Bertarelli, Britain's richest woman, had hers approved just in time. Dame Joan Collins loathes them and Robbie Williams and Jimmy Page had a very public spat over them.

Mega-basements, often used by the wealthy to squeeze swimming pools, state-of-the-art gyms and private cinemas into homes in London's most expensive boroughs, have been the cause of arguments in many streets.

However, the days of building huge subterranean extensions, often dubbed "icebergs", may have come to an end.

Westminster council sounded the death knell yesterday and others are preparing to follow suit.

Following the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, Westminster confirmed that it would limit the size and depth of basement construction and implement rules which mean

that residents would need planning permission.

Robert Davis, its deputy leader, said: “Our residents have been facing an underground epidemic on their quiet residential streets, and I want to help stop the horror stories of people living next to mega-basement construction.”

Earlier this year Ms Bertarelli upset her neighbours in Belgravia over plans for a two-storey mega-basement at her three-storey mansion in Lyall Mews in Belgravia. The former Miss UK, who is married to a Swiss pharmaceuticals billionaire, submitted her planning application just in time and in March it was approved.

Other celebrities that have built down include Nicole Kidman, Roman Abramovich and Lord Lloyd-Webber.

More recently, Page, the Led Zeppelin guitarist, attacked Williams’s plans to upgrade his £17.5 million mansion in Holland Park. The singer had to scale back plans for a two-storey basement extension.

Like Page, Collins has complained about mega-basements, telling a Belgravia residents’ magazine that she found it “shocking that people are digging down to put in swimming pools and bowling alleys when they only live here for two or three months of the year”.

The main complaint is the disruption they cause for neighbours, including months of noisy construction work and in some cases cracks in walls.

The council is proposing to limit basements to a single storey, except in exceptional circumstances, and any extension to 50 per cent of site area.

Currently, many basement extensions can be done under permitted development rights, and therefore without the need for planning permission.

However, the council will be using an article 4 direction to insist that all applications are considered through the planning process, allowing neighbours and communities to have their say.

In December, Kensington & Chelsea won a battle to limit the scale of basement development, stating that many of its residents “have experienced years of misery from noise, vibration, dust and construction traffic”.

Rosie Caley, design director at Oxford and London Building Company, said: “This will curtail anyone with an open cheque book that has dream of a three-storey basement with car parking, a tennis court and a swimming pool.”