**Party Wall Agreements: The Basics**

Whether you’re looking to add value to a property before putting it on the market, or build a happier home by creating the living space you crave, extensions, loft conversions and the removal, repositioning and redesigning of walls are often the gold standard in home improvement. But with the time and cost involved in any type of building work, it’s essential you go by the book.

Otherwise, you could end up in a very costly tug of war with your disgruntled neighbours.

**Understanding Party Walls**

Unless you want to appear on ‘Neighbours From Hell’, you must tell your neighbour if you want to carry out any building work on or near your party wall. But what exactly *is* a party wall?

A party wall is a shared wall, usually between a terraced or semi-detached house. It also includes garden walls built over a boundary and excavations close to a neighbour’s property. Party Wall Agreements are most commonly needed for building works that involve loft conversions, damp proof courses, and extensions. And you need a written Party Wall Agreement from all affected neighbours before party wall building works can start.

# **When (and how) to tell your neighbour**

At least two months before you plan to start building works, you have to give notice to your neighbour about your grand plan. But we’d always advise preceding a formal notice with an informal chat. After all, maintaining a good relationship with your neighbours is essential for a happy home life, so while following the legislation to the letter is your best line of defence, starting proceedings with a friendly chat over a cup of tea will go a long way.

At this stage, it’s not uncommon for your neighbour to ask for the contact details of your surveyor for reassurance.

# **Reaching an agreement**

In an ideal world, every notice would glide through without opposition. But in reality, not everyone will be happy with the suggested works.

So, what are the possible outcomes?

Once you’ve given notice, your neighbour can:

* Give consent in writing
* Refuse consent, which starts a negotiation and resolution process
* Serve a counter notice, requesting additional works be done at the same time

Your neighbour must let you know in writing within 14 days if they consent to your notice; if you can’t agree, you must appoint a surveyor to prepare a Party Wall Award (a legal document outlining how the works should progress, when the works will be carried out, and who will pay for what).

**Common mistakes to avoid (at all costs)**

The last thing you want is to waste your time and money by falling foul to easily avoidable – and all too common – mistakes during the party wall agreement process.

In our experience, these usually include:

* Not giving enough notice
* Not informing all affected neighbours (this includes the freeholder and anyone with a leasehold longer than one year). If you live in a terraced house, your neighbours on both sides may be affected depending on the planned works
* Not describing the proposed work precisely, or with insufficient information
* Not using the right form of notice for the proposed type of works. The form of notice for excavating foundations is different from that of a party wall, for example
* Not realising that one building project may need more than one type of notice served on each affected neighbour

A little foresight goes a long way, so keep these in mind before hitting start on any building plans.

**Helping you to move forward**

To lessen the risk (and associated stress) of building works, an experienced, reputable surveyor can act as an impartial third party to protect the interests of everyone involved. And that’s where we come in.

As experts in Party Wall matters, we offer:

* Objective and impartial advice on Party Wall matters
* Appraisal of building projects before work starts
* Preparing and serving Party Wall Notices
* Representing the Building Owner, Adjoining Owner, or both
* Preparing Schedules of Condition
* Negotiation and preparation of Party Wall Awards
* Defect surveys

We offer free (and no obligation) advice, as well as accurate quotes, so you really don’t have to go it alone.

Get in touch with our experts today.