

Putney Wharf, Putney

Project:	Putney Wharf
Project type:	High density 142 dwellings / Ha (Units: 172 Site: 1.21 Ha)
Year:	2004
Client:	St George South London Ltd
Architect:	John Thompson & Partners
Location:	Putney, London
Context:	Urban, mixed use
Sector:	Private



Case Study Detail:

This high-density, mixed-use development for St George adjacent to the Thames at Putney has brought new vitality to a previously neglected waterfront.

The completed scheme includes both apartments and town houses which are arranged around a new public square also containing offices, restaurants and bars and a fitness centre. This space has helped integrate developments on adjoining sites by providing a focal point for activity and has greatly improved access to the Thames. The buildings have a warehouse aesthetic that is sympathetic to the existing form and character of Putney, and in keeping with their riverside location.

A highly contemporary public house created out of glass acts as a counterpoint to the brick used elsewhere and the building acts as a focal point in the new public space, both visually and socially. Hard and soft landscaping is of a high standard and there are richly hued imported stone flagstones and

setts, supplemented with monumental masonry for public seating and planters. A stairwell access to the underground car park is capped with a stainless steel shelter.

Extensive thought has gone into controlling the public realm. There is CCTV, concierges and an onsite team who manage against any nuisance that would upset the balance of residential and commercial use and keep to strict standards for the cleanliness of the environment.

Existing streets and new pedestrian routes are well integrated into the new layout, and underground parking is provided for residents. One additional feature is that part of the river flood defence has been constructed so that it also acts as a small amphitheatre, with crowds on the day of the Boat Race in mind.

Awards:

The Waterways Renaissance Awards 2007 - Winner of the Design and Construction Category

Building for Life Award 2005 - Silver Standard Award Winner

Planning for London Awards 2004 - Best Planning built project contributing to London's Future

Building for Life Evaluation Summary:

Character

The site is dominated by the 175ft high Putney Wharf Tower, a concrete frame now faced with the early 21st century vernacular of terracotta rainscreen and gunmetal balconies. This is juxtaposed with the 19th century masonry of St Mary's Church which now includes an extension where expanses of glazing and timber modernise the Victorian historicist styling.

Like most Building for Life schemes, housing is the overwhelming driver for development, but the casual visitor would not sense they were arriving at a new-build residential scheme: the mix of architectural styles, renovated buildings and landscaping combine as a quarter with a distinctive character, rather than as a new development.

The number and quality of the access routes is designed to encourage pedestrians towards the development's commercial heart of bars and restaurants. Combined with well-lit spaces, CCTV and an overwhelming number of windows looking onto public spaces, safety is assured. The 24-hour onsite management team have performance specifications for everything from collecting litter to maintaining planting to keep the commercial premises looking at their best. The result is an impression of Swiss-like cleanliness and order, quite unlike other popular destinations around London. The scheme is testimony to how mixed-use can enhance a residential environment.

Residential developments tend to apply the expensive finishes to the residential units for sale, and skimp on the public realm. Conversely, at Putney Wharf, the public realm is where architectural detailing is of uniformly impressive standard, with its imported stone and stainless steel, while the buildings rely on a series of prosaic QS / contractor specified finishes, such as the PVC windows in the Castle Court and Brewhouse apartment blocks. Likewise, the glazing elements for the prow of the tower fail to match the specification of the rainscreen or balcony detailing.

Parking is provided in an underground car park, ventilated with podium gardens. There are several pedestrian routes across the site: along the river front, parallel to the river but set back, and routes from Putney northward to the riverside. The development opens up a previously inaccessible towpath to the public and reciprocally 'invites' the river into the development with a new slipway.

The scale of the tower does a lot to hide the presence of the rather ugly police station. The police station is very discouraging as you approach the site from the south, but the need to compensate for first impressions was among reasons for the ambitious and highly successful treatment of the main square.

Roads, parking and pedestrianisation

Car parking is mostly underground, with 247 spaces beneath The Tower and Brewhouse apartments. Thus, the spaces above are defined by the building layout and not by the problem of designing in car access and above ground parking spaces. There is no visitor parking for those using the restaurants and bars, but one of London's busiest bus stops is within 50 m and there are Tubes and overland rail stations within 5-10 minutes' walk. The site integrates well with surrounding pedestrian routes and roads and creates a new footpath along the river.

Perhaps the least appealing element of the development is the flats facing onto the slip road taking cars down to the underground parking. St George has tried to enliven these apartments with south-facing balconies looking back over the road to the garden square, but apartments at lower levels are likely to be exposed to noise and fumes.

Existing Victorian terraces to the eastern edge of the site now face onto five new townhouses built in Victorian terrace style, and a sixth low-rise white rendered Edwardian "house" camouflages a small office building. Pedestrian routes are very well overlooked throughout the scheme and so feel safe.

Design and construction

The design is specific to the scheme but includes two groups of styles. Firstly, the contemporary machined vernacular of Putney Tower and the landscaping, with its mix of stainless steel and frills-free masonry. Secondly, the faux warehouse styling of the London stock-brick faced Brewhouse and Castle Court blocks. This reflects the genesis of the project – a design competition for the tower refurbishment which led to Patel Taylor architects being appointed and a partnering arrangement between John Thompson's and St George to build on previous successes such as Charter Quay in Kingston.

St George is one of several London developers that build to a higher acoustic performance specification than required in the Building Regulations, using two skins of infill block work with a cavity to divide up the cross-wall and post-tensioned concrete slab construction into apartments. This method of construction means there are units without load bearing walls with the potential to be remodelled in the future.

Environment and community

Putney Wharf is in a fantastic location for public transport with bus stops outside the site entrance, and Putney railway station and Putney Bridge tube station within easy walking distance. As a result, minimal car use by residents is encouraged and no parking is provided for visitors, who rely on public transport. Aside from discouraging car use, the scheme has no features to reduce its environmental impact.

The scheme has a range of tenure with both private and affordable housing. A good range of unit sizes are also provided, with one, two and three-bed apartments along with four-bed townhouses. This should encourage a mix of residents and smaller units might provide a foot on the ladder for first time buyers with generous parents. The scheme's central location, as well as a mixed-use provision on site, ensures close proximity to bars, restaurants, local schools and shops.

Links:

<http://www.buildingforlife.org/case-studies/putney-wharf/introduction>

<http://www.thewaterwaystrust.org.uk/winners07.shtml>

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