Wandsworth Riverside Quarter is a strategic waterfront development of 700 apartments and 350,000 square feet of commercial and leisure space on the River Thames at the confluence with the River Wandle in the London Borough of Wandsworth, UK.

The development site was formerly used as an oil depot. Oil barges used to moor at a large industrial jetty just offshore in the Thames. After the decommissioning of industrial uses, the site became colonized naturally by a rich array of wildlife, including invertebrate populations of notable importance in a London context. The old jetty and some of the trees on site continued to provide a roost for an assemblage of riverine fish-eating birds and other waterfowl displaced by the site enabling works. The bird barges are at the same time habitats, art installations and indicators of ecosystem health. The presence of fish-eating birds in great numbers reflects the significant ecological recovery of the Thames tideway in recent decades. Retaining such waterfowl in the local area in this dramatic way adds real value to the development in terms of sense of place, providing considerable interest and ecopsychological benefits to residents, visitors and passers-by alike.

The scheme provides mitigation for the loss of the oiling jetty (which was demolished and replaced with low pontoons for pleasure boats and barges), by installing floating “bird barges” on the Thames. These proved highly successful in providing secure roost sites for the riverine fish-eating birds and other waterfowl displaced by the site enabling works. The bird barges are at the same time habitats, art installations and indicators of ecosystem health. The key spawning area for this species in London is close to the Thames-Wandle confluence. Here, the river wall was cut back and a series of folded and sloped step intertidal terraces were installed at the site’s north-east corner. The folds and slopes enable juvenile and adult fish to access the vegetated intertidal terraces at high water, including certain species and stages of fish that tend not to swim up and over step barriers they meet. The terraces are a riot of color in summer due to the flowering of native emergent plants specially selected and planted there.

The following features of the scheme are of particular note in terms of biophilic design:

- Habitats at both ground and aerial levels.

- The new landscape, across the site at ground level and on the roofs of key buildings, draws inspiration from the former pattern of osier (Salix viminalis) beds and channels at the “delta” of the River Wandle that existed in the late 1800s. Historically, the willow beds were cut to use the willow stems for baskets and other items. Sinuous landscape forms snaking towards the River Thames were created, reinforcing a sense of place and biological and cultural history. The arrangement around these landforms creates vistas through to the river and the heavily wooded Hurlingham Club grounds beyond, creating an intense green setting for a site so close to central London.

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roof level were designed with careful consideration of the autecology of displaced and other target species. For example, the biodiverse roofs incorporate areas designed for shallow floods in winter and summer rainstorms, to mimic the conditions of river-edge gravel habitats frequented by uncommon terrestrial invertebrates. Particular plant species required as food plants by certain species were favored in the design. The proposals included the installation of a wooded, semi-natural play area by the River Wandle with a very rich native groundflora and a wide variety of specific habitat installations for target species.

Resources


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