Accommodating the growing population in London is a major challenge, warns a recent report published by the Greater London Authority (GLA). This is particularly relevant in the context of the pressures for redevelopment of sites along the River Thames over the past few decades. Therefore, the big question is how should London grow along the River Thames, and where?

**Unlocking Safeguarded Wharves for development?**

The potential for unlocking wharf sites along the River Thames which are currently protected from non-wharf use has attracted increased interest in recent years.

Wharf safeguarding on the River Thames was initiated by the Thames Strategy (1995), with an intention to retain remaining commercial wharves along the River Thames and to protect them from change of use. In January 2005, the Mayor of London published the London Plan Implementation Report Safeguarded Wharves on the River Thames and in 2013 approved the Safeguarded Wharves Review - Final Recommendation document which identified and recommended 50 Safeguarded Wharves (as shown in Figure 1). This has now been submitted to the Secretary of State for approval and issue of required new/revised Safeguarding Directions.

![Figure 1: Distribution of Safeguarded Wharves by Sub-region (source: Annex 5 of the Safeguarded Wharves Review - Final Recommendation, 2013)](image)

Although regional policy context will remain a material planning consideration for the local authority, a recent successful planning application (as detailed in the case study overleaf) demonstrates the potential to maximise riverside sites which have Safeguarded Wharf status through innovative design solutions which secures the retention of the existing wharf uses whilst unlocking much needed brownfield land for mixed-use redevelopment.

The delivery of such diverse land uses on a single site requires a creative and unique approach to the design of the development, ensuring the protection of existing wharf capacity and uses, whilst maximising the efficiency of the site in respect to housing provision. A rigorous approach to environmental design and environmental impact assessment is essential to ensure any potential environmental impacts are identified and where possible, mitigated.

**Integrating the EIA process into the Design**

In order to achieve a truly mixed use development, the redevelopment of a safeguarded wharf site should seek to minimise the potential for conflicts of use and amenity disturbance. This can be achieved through detailed consultation with key stakeholders (such as the local planning authority, the GLA, the Port of London Authority (PLA), the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE)) and proactive environmental design.

It is essential to agree a set of performance parameters and design assumptions which would ensure that the existing, or re-provided wharf use can co-exist with the non-industrial uses proposed on-site without adversely impacting on each other.

These performance parameters and assumptions would form the basis of the environmental design and impact assessment processes. It is essential that during these processes potential environmental impacts be given due consideration throughout the project lifecycle.
The proposed scheme should therefore be subject to rigorous noise, vibration and air quality modelling during the design evolution.

Opportunities should also be identified and exploited. For example, it is likely that the PLA would seek to maintain the capacity of any safeguarded wharf which is proposed for redevelopment, and their use of the Blue Ribbon Network for waterborne freight purposes. Although this could pose a constraint to development, it may also offer the opportunity to transport demolition, excavation, construction and operational materials via the river reducing traffic movements and improving the amenity of local residents and, in the future, on-site receptors.

As the demand for wharf operations (i.e. cargo handling) varies over time, for a wharf to have a secure future it needs to be able to accommodate a range of commodities. Therefore, to ensure the long-term viability of a mixed use development on a wharf site, it is essential that the area dedicated to wharf use has been designed with maximum flexibility in mind, ensuring that waterborne freight traffic uses can be maintained even if the existing wharf commodity becomes redundant in the future. Furthermore, during the EIA process, consideration should be given to any additional environmental impacts or associated mitigation measures which would be required should the land use change from what is originally proposed.

Although the protection of existing wharf capacity and existing wharf sites remains a key aim of planning policy, with an integrated approach to design and environmental assessment, wharf sites could be creating new opportunities for redevelopment, potentially unlocking previous constraints and leading to the creation of thousands of new homes for Londoners, often in prime riverside locations.

Case Study

Project Name: Albert Wharf
Location: London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Project Description: Retained wharf operation across two safeguarded wharves accommodating an enhanced concrete batching plant, accompanied by a residential mixed-use development above the wharf operation, with a jetty along the foreshore of the River Thames.

Key Environmental Design Interventions: The design was subject to rigorous noise, vibration, transport and air quality modelling and consultation. This informed the following:

- Pedestrian and cycle access;
- Deliveries and servicing strategy;
- Plant specifications and operational use strategy;
- Vibration and noise control of safeguarded wharf uses and facilities (e.g. lining and enclosure of storage areas);
- Acoustic treatment of buildings;
- Foundation strategy;
- Acoustic treatment of the jetty components and unloading arrangements;
- Residential glazing performance;
- Residential and industrial ventilation strategies;
- Balcony treatment; and
- Operational management strategy.

Key Outcomes: The Environmental Impact Assessment for the Proposed Development was undertaken by Ramboll Environ (formally ENVIRON). As a result of the iterative and rigorous environmental design process, the EIA concluded no significant environmental effects are likely to arise with the exception of the increase in barge movements, which was considered to be beneficial.

The Proposed Development maximises the opportunities of the Site and delivers a truly exemplar designed mixed use scheme, in line with the aspirations of the South Fulham Riverside Supplementary Planning Document. "Sarah Cressy, Consultant, Ramboll Environ, June 2016."