

## ST THOMAS' SCHOOL, KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

Places for People is one of the largest property development and management companies in the UK, with 59,871 homes either owned or managed in a mixture of different tenures.

Our strategy is to create mixed-income communities by providing a range of tenures that enable people to choose the housing solution that best suits their needs. We deliver this strategy through managing the whole place, not only in terms of the property and its surrounding area, but also through the provision of support services such as employment training and nursery provision that enable people to prosper both socially and economically.



We are innovative in our approach to development, working on mixed-use developments combining community infrastructure with new homes.

## ST THOMAS' SCHOOL

### BACKGROUND

St Thomas' School is located in one of the most deprived communities in the country. The Golborne Ward in Kensington and Chelsea, where the school is located, suffers from high levels of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, and the school provides an important source of stability.

Constructed in the early 1970s, St. Thomas's school building fell well short of current DCSF standards, with small classrooms, and few IT facilities. The building also had poor accessibility and security.

### PROCESS

The school had tried to access capital funding from the government for refurbishment, but found themselves put at a low priority level that meant it would be many years before work would be carried out.

St Thomas' is one of 147 Church of England schools in London that is supported by the London Diocesan Board for Schools (LDBS) and after several years of unsuccessfully attempting to access funding, the LDBS and the school's governing body to come up with an alternative solution.

They commissioned architects, Pollard Thomas Edwards, to devise a scheme which involved leasing airspace over the school, avoiding selling off recreation space in an area where children need all the play space that they can get. Places for People were then selected to develop the combined complex, and a joint partnership was formed.

The governors were all in favour of the scheme. There were some initial concerns about being able to see into the playground from the apartments, but assurance was given that screening would prevent this from occurring, entrances would be completely separate, and there would be no access between the school and the apartments.

The school were involved in the design process from the early stages and the children had the opportunity to contribute to discussions through the school council system. For example, concerns around cloakrooms, toilets and outdoor spaces, were incorporated into the designs.

Kensington and Chelsea's housing and education departments were also both involved in planning the scheme, with a particular influence in deciding the mix of affordable housing to be provided.

While in this case there was a partnership formed with the LDBS, this kind of relationship would not be essential in similar developments in the future- the model could be replicated with anyone who owned a suitable school freehold.

Decision making was shared between the partners, with a clear legal structure drawn up to ensure all parties had sufficient control.

## THE DEVELOPMENT

The partnership meant that the school allowed its land to be used for flats – in this case above the new school building – and in return, Places for People funded the new school, from the sale of 55 private homes. The development also features an additional 14 affordable homes for rent and sale.

Funding came from the Department of Education via the LDBS (£400,000) and the Homes and Communities Agency (£2,188,000), with the remainder coming from Places for People Homes.

There were no section 106 agreements on top of this and a 6% profit was made from sales.

The school benefitted from more independence than they would have done if funding had come solely from the Government. For example, the school was able to go beyond statutory requirements for the design of schools - the classrooms are larger, and the fittings are of a higher quality.

The new school has:

- more classroom space
- a multimedia dance and music studio
- excellent computer facilities
- a separate dining room
- a sports hall
- interactive whiteboards in every classroom
- improved play space and security

**Total Project Costs:** £16.4 m  
**Funding:** Places for People, London Diocesan Board for Schools  
**School involvement:** Pupils and teachers worked closely with architects and Places for People to develop the layout

Places for People will continue managing the residential elements of the scheme, but this comes without any cost to the school's autonomy. There are no unusual restrictions or obligations to leaseholders and the school is subject to the normal planning processes should it wish to develop further or carry out any major work.

## PROMOTING THE MODEL ELSEWHERE

This type of innovation is crucial in areas where land values are high and affordability is scarce. New solutions such as this are essential if we are to meet housing need as well as finding sufficient finance for necessary infrastructure. Places for People is keen to promote this model elsewhere.