

Why developers are now creating apartments big enough

for families and small-plot houses aimed at singletons and couples

Maxi flats... micro houses

By Jane Hughes

It used to be taken for granted that homeowners moving up the property ladder would progress from a flat to a house: couples lived in flats, families lived in houses. Not any more. Faced with a shortage of family homes, London is taking its lead from other cities around the world where apartment living – even for families – is the norm.

And, increasingly, plots too small for apartment blocks are being developed with bijou houses ideal for singles and couples.

Many local authorities now routinely stipulate that a minimum proportion of new flats should be big enough for families. In Westminster, at least a third of new homes are required to have three or more bedrooms. Increasingly, too, large developments are incorporating childcare provision and child-friendly facilities.

The shortage of family homes was exacerbated by the conversion of many older houses into flats during the Eighties and Nineties, as well as the tendency for developers to build schemes of one and two-bedroom units – popular with investors.

By 1995, more than 90 per cent of the new homes market consisted of flats of two bedrooms or less, according to property consultancy Hurford Salvi Carr (HSC). But as the balance is redressed, it calculates that the stock of larger two, three and four-bedroom flats will grow by up to 20 per cent over the next three years.

'Developers are waking up to what is an urgent shortfall and are providing a new generation of family-friendly developments,' says HSC's Jonathon Woodfield.

Larger flats are appearing across the capital. In Acton, three-bedroom flats at Berkeley Homes's West 3 Loft Apartments start at £390,000. At Adelaide Wharf, Shoreditch – where 147 private, affordable and key-worker flats are being built – there will be 12 three-bedroom flats for sale, some with private gardens.

The development by First Base also has a courtyard garden and parking – features necessary to attract families to apartment living, according to director Richard Powell.

Meanwhile, at Whitelands Park, Putney, Crest Nicholson is building a mix of 299 houses and spacious two and three-bedroom flats in the grounds of the former Whitelands College. Prices for larger homes start at £349,950 for two bedrooms.

IT consultant Ray Weatherby, 57, his wife, teacher Lee-Anne Pyke, 44, and their ten-year-old daughter, Clare, recently moved into a 1,100sq ft three-bedroom flat there and say it is far more practical than



JOHN HILTON

their previous house in Wimbledon. 'We used to live in Australia and were renting in Wimbledon but, with most of our children grown up, we found we didn't use much of the house,' says Ray.

'Here, the layout is much better as we have a bigger living area and don't have to constantly run up and down stairs. We've also got the benefit of communal gardens without having to do any gardening.'

At the same time as the growth in larger flats, a flurry of new one and two-bedroom houses is coming on to the market.



FAMILY VALUES: Ray Weatherby, wife Lee-Anne Pyke and daughter Clare are delighted with their new flat at Whitelands Park, left

Demand for property is encouraging the development of small or awkward plots that are often unsuitable for flats. And the resulting 'micro' houses are a hit with couples and the growing singles population.

City North, a contemporary mews of six flats, six houses of less than 900sq ft and one larger house, is just off Balls Pond Road in Islington. The houses met local demand for individual properties and allowed developer Fitzroy Group to stay within density limits on a small site. The last two-bedroom, two-bathroom house available costs £387,500.

Sarah Astin, 26, who works for a media agency, and Daniel Marriott, 25, a solicitor,



came across City North by chance when they were flat-hunting.

'We hadn't expected to find a house in Islington and it was great to be able to buy a freehold with our own front door,' says Sarah.

The couple bought a two-bedroom house, which Sarah says is about the same size as a flat but is over three floors. 'Because the bedrooms are upstairs, it feels as if there's more room and it means we are not living on top of each other.'

Even more mini is a cleverly designed £265,000 one-bedroom house in Paradise Passage, Holloway. Developed in the back garden of a house on Liverpool Road by City futures trader Tariq Choudhury, it's just 414sq ft.

The freehold property fronts on to a footpath, with a small park beyond. Because of planning restrictions, there are no windows on three sides, so the open-plan kitchen and living room has a large skylight and sliding French doors on to a yard enclosed within a glass-brick wall.

Also on Paradise Passage, a

terrace of three one-bedroom cottages is being built on back garden plots by developer and architect Malcolm Simmonds.

With top-lit stairs, underfloor heating and first-floor living areas, the cottages will be finished in September and will be priced at more than £300,000.

'There's a strong market for quality starter homes and these freehold houses are a unique product,' says Simmonds.

Rather larger than these is Cliff Cole Associates' £450,000 two-bedroom house in Martineau Road,



OUR HOUSE: Sarah Astin, above, enjoys having her own front door at City North in Islington

PARADISE FOUND: One of the one-bedroom cottages on Paradise Passage in Holloway, right



Highbury. Built on a private mews, it has a mezzanine study and spiral staircase and is aimed firmly at singles or couples.

● **Whitelands Park:** 0870 300 2722; **Adelaide Wharf:** Savills, 020 7613 1888; **City North:** Copping Joyce, 020 7288 0330; **Paradise Passage:** Thomson Currie, 020 7354 5224; **Malcolm Simmonds houses:** www.massimodevelopments.com; **Martineau Road:** Copping Joyce, 020 7226 4221; **West 3 Loft Apartments:** 020 8811 2336.