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## More For Your Money: Furzedown, SW16

### Story of a secret enclave

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It is a well-trod migration route in the borough of Wandsworth. Young couples begin life together in a flat in Battersea, Wandsworth or Clapham and trade up to more space, a garden and better schools further south in Tooting or Streatham. A select few settle in Furzedown, a rather obscure area between the two larger, established suburbs.

The still-extant Furzedown House was built in 1794 but the area remained mostly heathland (furze is another term for gorse). Large-scale property development didn't arrive until well into the 19th century.

"Furzedown is a niche of late Victorian and early Edwardian houses," says Robin Lewis of estate agents Home London, who have just opened an office in the area. "By niche I mean that it is a genuine neighbourhood, not something invented by estate agents. Our buyers are usually a young couple with a baby, currently living in a flat, who need a bigger family home. Their flat is worth £300,000, and Furzedown is the first area they find offering Victorian and Edwardian homes for that amount."

It also offers a family-orientated ambience. "Furzedown is not party central," Lewis admits. "It is not great for young people in terms of cafés, pubs and clubs. It is also not brilliant for transport, but it is a nice area in which to live."

Public relations consultant Giles Morgan and his wife moved to Furzedown nearly four years ago, just before the birth of their first son. "We had been living in a two-bed flat in Fulham. We'd looked at properties in Dulwich and Streatham, but Furzedown was more affordable for young couples. We now have two sons, one of whom is in a local nursery. Furzedown has very good primary schools, and the state secondary school, Graveney, has 10 applicants for every place."

For many families, the next step up the ladder is an extension rather than an actual move. "We did a loft conversion, like many other couples here. We wouldn't live anywhere else in London, and we won't move for at least five years. If we do, it will be out of London. This area has a real community feel. Young people are moving in, and many people have been here for a long time. My neighbours have been here for 20 years."

### What can I buy?

The extremes of very tiny and very grand homes are absent in Furzedown, where two-bed purpose-built maisonettes and conversions start from £200,000. Small three-bed period terraces start from £300,000, and

five-bed houses sell for between £450,000 and £500,000. Six- and seven-bedroom houses are few in number and don't come on to the market often.

### **Is there a doctor in the house?**

Probably. With St George's Hospital nearby, Furzedown attracts both consultants and medical students - usually the former as home owners, the latter as renters. A section of Furzedown has post-war council houses that are now mostly privately owned, says Robin Lewis. Many of these houses have been bought by investors, who let them to medical students. Home London is selling a two-bed house on Welham Road for £239,950, and a three-bed semi on Nimrod Road for £299,950; both are ex-council.

### **How's the transport?**

You have to be prepared to walk a bit. Tooting Bec station on the Northern Line is a 15-minute walk or a short bus journey away. Tooting Bec Road has bus lanes and frequent, fast services. Nearby Tooting station on Thameslink serves Streatham, Elephant and Castle, Blackfriars and Kings Cross to the north, and Wimbledon in the other direction. Streatham station also offers service to London Bridge. Gatwick Airport is 20 miles away.

### **What grade do the state schools earn?**

Furzedown, Franciscan, Penwortham and Sellincourt primary schools consistently boast above-average results. A lot of people move into the area to try to get their children into the excellent local secondary, Graveney, but many are disappointed. Agent Robin Lewis estimates that property prices in the school catchment areas are at least £50,000 higher than they would be if the schools were less popular - but if the alternative is a fee-paying school, you save on school fees.

### **How are the amenities?**

Furzedown may have only one pub, but there are good bars and restaurants not far away in Balham and fantastic, cheap Indian restaurants in Tooting. The central road in Furzedown is Moyser Road, which has its own café, a pretty flower shop, antique shop, two hairdressers, and convenience stores. The week-long summer festival, this year on 18 to 26 June, has concerts, a parade, sports, quizzes and the usual festival fayre, and is organised by the Furzedown Community Network.

### **Tell me more**

The network produces a newsletter, organises coffee mornings and other social events and oversees a website ( [www.furzedown.net](http://www.furzedown.net) ), an internet discussion group for locals. The Furzedown Project offers a meeting place, classes, activities and health, and other support for older people.

### **Green areas**

Furzedown Recreation Ground has a playground, tennis courts and bowling green. Tooting Graveney Common is right next to Furzedown. Across Tooting Bec Road, the much larger Tooting Bec Common has the famous Lido outdoor swimming pool.

### **And one for the pub quiz?**

Why is Furzedown's one and only pub named the Samuel Johnson?

Answer: The writer and critic was a frequent visitor to his close friend, Hester Thrale who, with first husband Henry, lived in Furzedown House.

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