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In Pictures: Chelsea Barracks opens to the public for the first time in over 150 years

Qatari Diar unveils the first garden squares at its £3.5bn scheme in Belgravia, as buyer interest continues to bloom

Longstanding Belgravians and curious tourists have begun nosing around Qatari Diar's £3.5bn Chelsea Barracks scheme, after the site was opened up to the public for the first time in over 150 years.

Two of the project's seven garden squares – Mulberry Square and Bourne Walk – are now free to explore, having been designed by landscape architect Neil Porter of Gustafson Porter & Bowman, working with four-time Chelsea gold medal winner Jo Thompson.

The "floral spectaculars" have been launched to coincide with this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show, currently in full bloom on the other side of Chelsea Bridge Road, and promise a "visual feast for passers-by to revel in and enjoy for years to come".



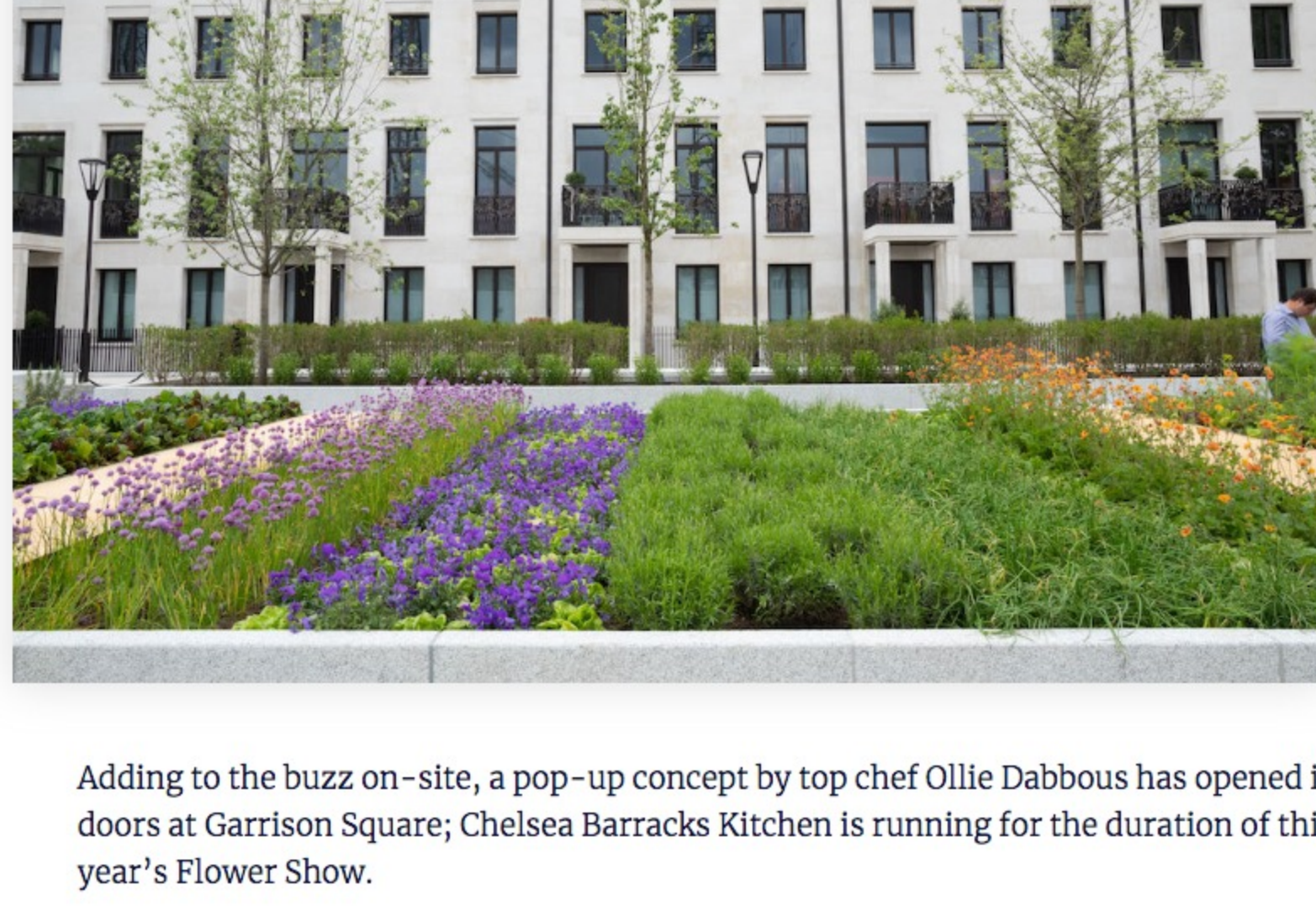
Neat timing aside, the marking of the site and garden squares marks a "significant milestone" for the 12.8-acre project, says Qatari Diar; the scheme has been in the making since the site was sold off by the MoD for £959m over 12 years ago, and has seen its fair share of ups and downs along the way – a back-to-the-drawing-board redesign, construction delays, a global recession, and an infamous intervention by Prince Charles.

Amidst Mulberry Square's highly successful take on a traditional kitchen garden, that all seems like a long time ago.

Grand English country estates, together with the historic Mulberry Garden at Buckingham Palace, have provided the inspiration for the rich planting scheme, which involves fruit trees, herbs and flowers that can be picked for cooking. Measuring 100m by 30m, the space will effectively form the gateway to Chelsea Barracks and the main thoroughfare through the development.

Meanwhile, Bourne Walk, on the border of Chelsea Bridge Road, has been furnished with mature trees and native flora to create an "ecological corridor" designed to encourage wildlife to the area.

Gustafson Porter & Bowman has been working on the project for the last six years, and will be managing the permanent planting strategy for each of the gardens. Over five acres across the site (some 40% of the total) has been allocated as public green space.

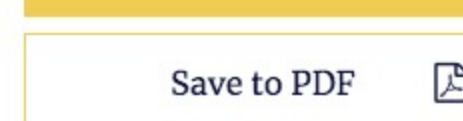


Adding to the buzz on-site, a pop-up concept by top chef Ollie Dabbs has opened its doors at Garrison Square; Chelsea Barracks Kitchen is running for the duration of this year's Flower Show.

On the sales front, buyers have so far picked up 70% of the apartments, which start at £5.25m, and three of the mammoth townhouses, priced at upwards of £37m. Speaking at an event to mark the opening of the site, Qatari Diar's Richard Oakes described the project as "the best-selling super-prime scheme in London".



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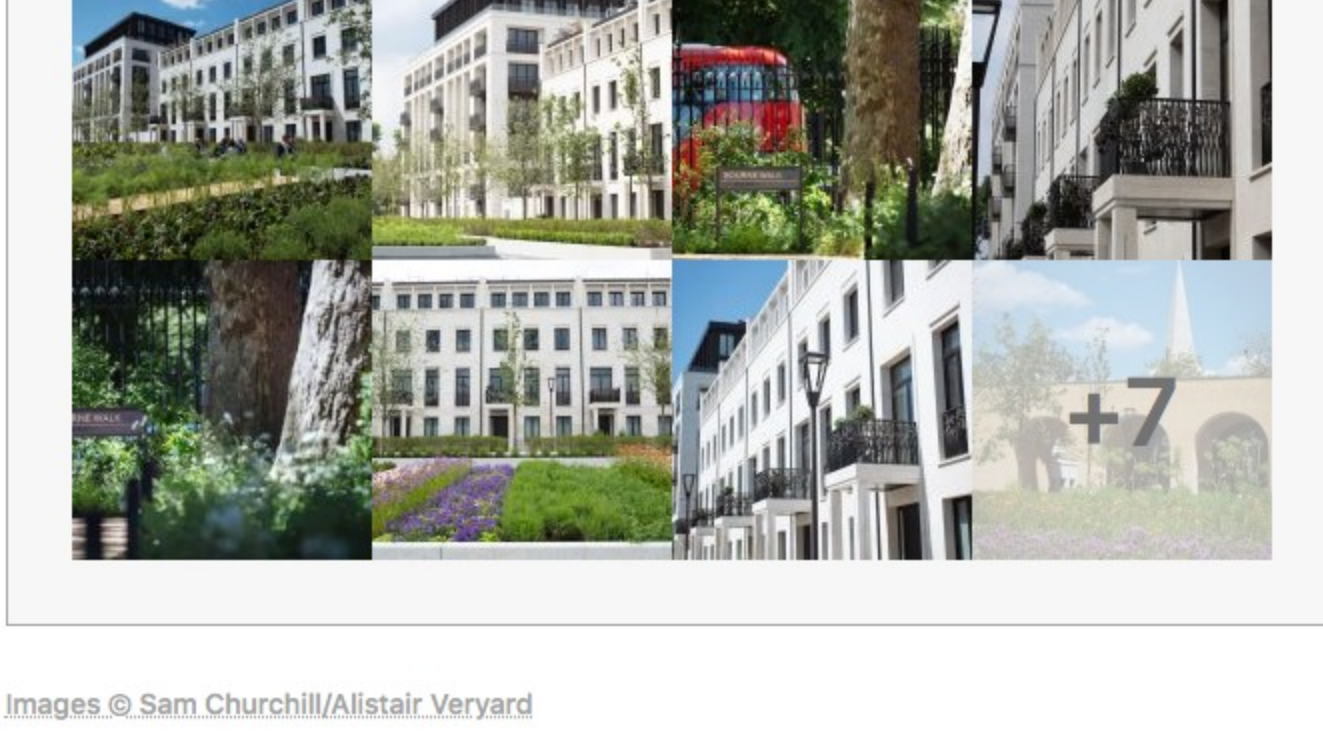


Neil Porter, Gustafson Porter & Bowman: "What's particularly exciting about the gardens at Chelsea Barracks is that, the way they have been designed means there is a variance of colours and smells at each different point of the year, as the seasons change. From day one, the gardens will be bold and lively for residents and neighbours alike."

Jo Thompson, landscape and garden designer: "We incorporated evergreen hedging to break up the expansive length of Mulberry Square, and then herbs, planting, vegetables and flowers have been entwined to create an artistic patchwork."

Richard Oakes, Chief Sales and Marketing Officer Europe and Americas at Qatari Diar: "A British masterpiece in urban design, garden squares have been a feature synonymous with London for the past 400 years and so it was important to us that we honour and incorporate this element of English heritage into the landscape design of Chelsea Barracks. To have grand open spaces within our city is a rarity that shouldn't be taken for granted, and we are thrilled to be able to reveal the first two of the squares to the public this May."

IN PICTURES: MULBERRY SQUARE & BOURNE WALK, CHELSEA BARRACKS, BELGRAVIA (Qatari Diar)



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