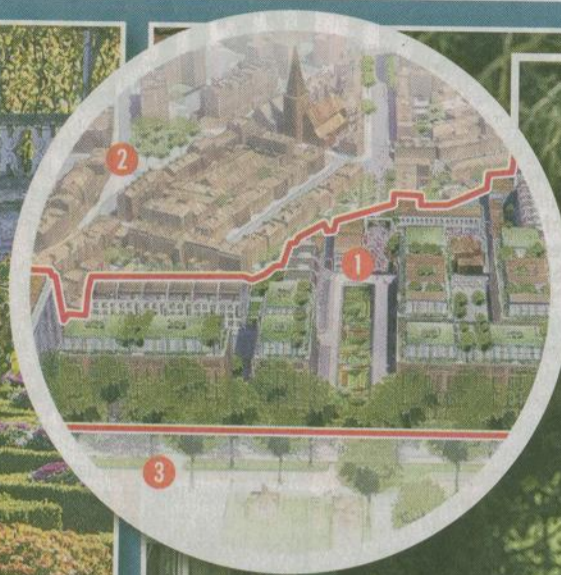
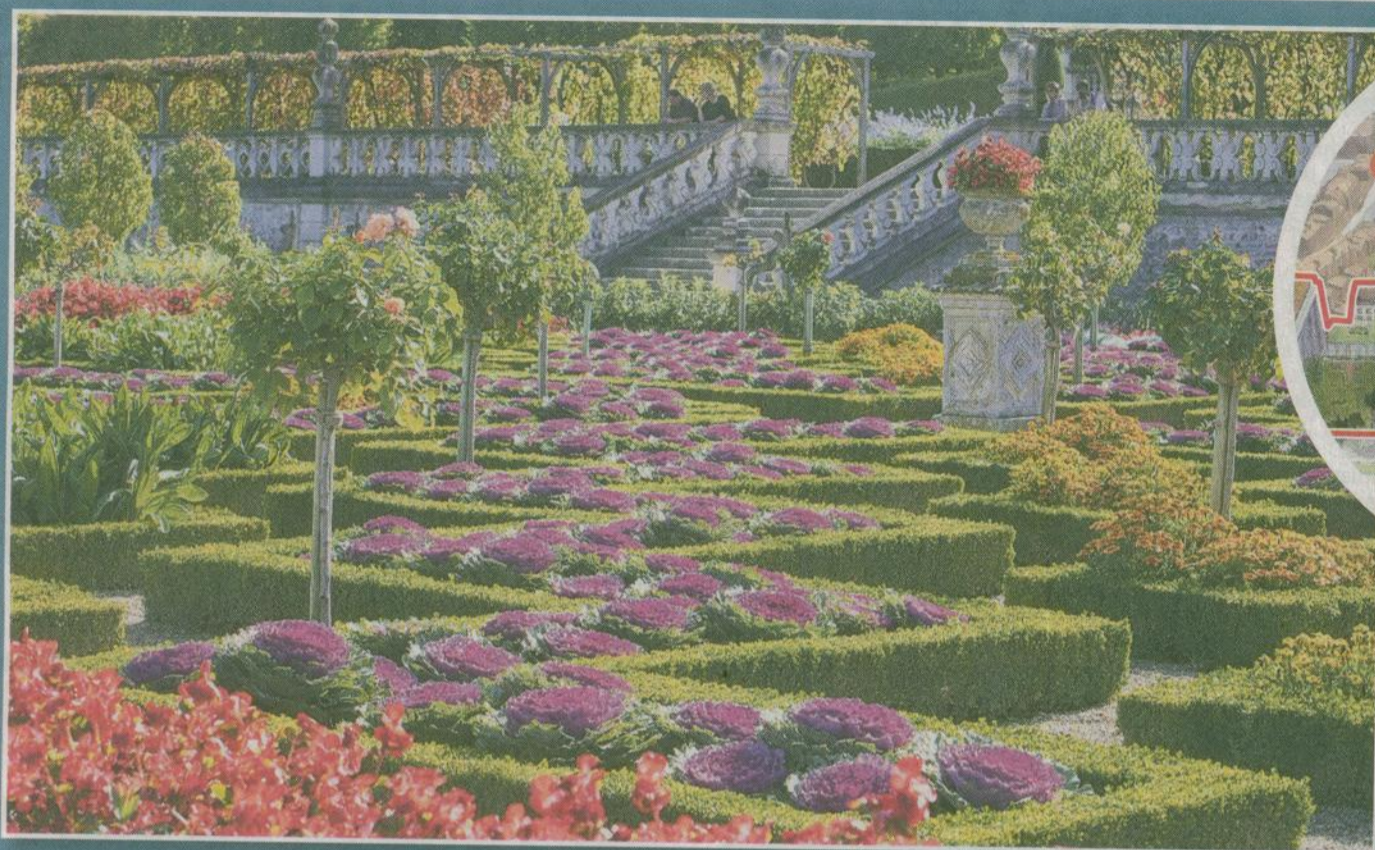


ANGELIQUE CARVALL/PETER WILLOWS



- 1 Chelsea Barracks development
- 2 Belgravia conservation area
- 3 Sir Christopher Wren's Royal hospital



Kim Wilkie says his design for Chelsea Barracks, inset top, was inspired by Château de Villandry in the Loire, top left

Mmm, tasty – the £246m veg patch

PLANS TO TURN A QUARTER OF THE PRIME CHELSEA BARRACKS DEVELOPMENT INTO ALLOTMENTS ECHO THE AREA'S HISTORIC ROLE AS A LARDER FOR LONDON

Nicholas Hellen
Social Affairs Editor

WILL this be the world's most expensive vegetable patch? Three acres of prime building land in Chelsea, west London, that cost developers £246m are to be turned into an oasis of fruit and vegetables.

When the site of the former Chelsea Barracks was sold to the Qatari royal family for £959m in 2008 it was reported to be Britain's most expensive home property deal. But rather than cram it with expensive housing, the Qataris are turning a quarter of the 12.8 acre site over to what will be posh allotments with vegetable gardens, hedges and rows of lemon, pear, fig and apple trees.

Kim Wilkie, the landscape architect entrusted with the task, said this weekend: "I want this to be a prototype – in troubled times it's not enough for space to be ornamental.

"Any urban space can harvest water, grow food, provide recreation, employment – and also look beautiful at the same time. There's a prejudice that allotments are essentially scruffy."

He said consent had been given for more than 3¼ acres to be planted with productive crops and he expects work to begin next year.

At the heart of the site will be a vegetable patch measuring 328ft by 52ft, tended by professional gardeners supervised by Sarah Raven, the broadcaster and grower of vegetables and cut flowers. It will

supply a restaurant in the main square of the luxury development and possibly a regular farmers' market.

The crops will be rotated through the seasons to ensure they rival the beauty of a more conventional ornamental garden. From May to August climbing beans will provide height and structure, offset by golden streaks mustard and sweet

Genovese basil. From August to October there will be edible dahlias – chat noir and Jescot Julie – and red giant mustard for edible flower and height.

Chicory, red and green alternating mizuna, red giant mustard and cavallo nero kale will feature prominently in the autumn and winter months.

Raven said she would choose high-yielding plants and that herbs and salads would be cut regularly so they would regenerate throughout the growing season.

Allotments will be provided alongside an area of affordable housing – and possibly on the flat rooftops of some properties.

Wilkie, whose portfolio includes Orpheus, an inverted pyramid on the Northampton estate of the Duke of Buccleuch, said he was inspired by the Château de Villandry in the Loire, whose ornamental vegetable gardens are regarded as some of the most beautiful in the world.

He also studied 17th and 18th-century maps showing the fertile soils of Chelsea used to support crops which made it the larder of London.

Figs and peaches will line a

walled garden, while a grassy sports area will be surrounded by walnuts. The orchard will contain 38 apple trees of different varieties and lemon trees will be dotted around the main square near a chapel, bringing to 107 the total number of fruit trees on the site. Hazels will run for several hundred yards in a hedgerow beside an open water course, with a public footpath alongside. Wilkie admits he still has to win his battle to replace a patch earmarked for magnolias with a pear orchard.

Ground source heat pumps will provide 60% of the

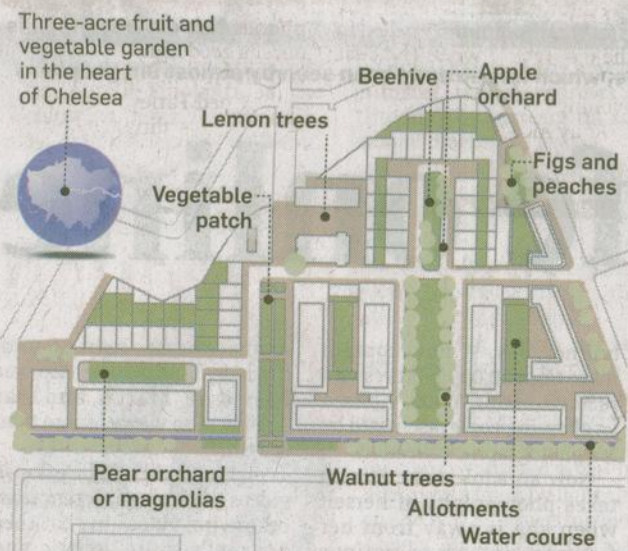
development's heating needs, according to Patrick Bellew of the engineering firm Atelier Ten, which is handling the project. The first of eight proposed bore holes has just been drilled to a depth of 460ft. Water will be extracted at the rate of 2½ gallons a second at a temperature of 13C and returned underground at 6C.

The original plans for the site envisaged 548 flats in steel and glass towers, designed by Lord Rogers, but they were withdrawn by Qatari Dia, the development arm of the Qatari royal family, after criticism by the

Prince of Wales. He had described the proposed modernist development as "unsympathetic and unsuitable" for one of London's historic districts. The site is next to Sir Christopher Wren's Royal hospital.

Wilkie said he had not tried to win the approval of Prince Charles. "There are lots of places like Detroit, Havana and San Francisco where they've pioneered allotments in the city but I'm not aware of a really high-end scheme with a productive garden," he said.

"It was my condition for coming into the project."



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