

NEW HOMES



a café at street level that stands on the site that was, until 1971, Kensington Barracks.

It lies within the Kensington Palace Conservation Area and Squire & Partners, the architects, have gone to considerable lengths to add something appropriate to the streetscape, an issue not addressed by

the previous occupier, an Eighties office block.

For the facade, they used seven different types of handmade bricks, ranging between rust red and nearly black, which reflect the wide-ranging palette of Kensington Palace itself. The buildings have traditional vertical window proportions that echo the elegant period townhouses and villas of the surrounding streets.

Leading off the main street and taking the place of what was once a nondescript shopping precinct that housed a Café Rouge will be a new public garden. Designed by Scape in conjunction with Squire & Partners, it aims to open up the site to local residents and office workers, linking Kensington Church Street to Kensington Gardens by widening walkways.

"Kensington is a very residential area which is known for its garden squares," says Marcie Larizadeh of Squire & Partners. "The aim was to improve access to Lancer Square and make it accessible to everyone rather than behind gates and with a residents-only fob."

Apartment prices here reflect their W8 address, starting from £4.11million. Amenities include a 25m (82ft) pool, spa, parking and 24-hour concierge. Those buying apartments and penthouses on the upper floors will enjoy west-facing views over Sir George Gilbert Scott's St Mary Abbots spire.

More than half have already sold. The majority of interest has come from British buyers, says Chris Richmond of CIT Group, the developer. It has been behind a number of projects across central London including Regent's Crescent and South Bank Tower.

There are few new-build homes around here, so local demand is high. "Kensington is a largely domestic market, and we have interest from families, professionals and retirees," he says. "Some have been waiting for years for this to come to fruition."

most desirable neighbourhood, yet it flies under the radar of many top-end property buyers as a place to live. Traffic is one of the reasons, argues Guy Meacock of buying agency Prime Purchase. "It's a great road with some fantastic streets leading off, but it's also a major bus route."

The area has suffered from proximity to Kensington High Street and its precipitous fall from retail grace. When the likes of Bus Stop, Biba, the roof gardens (London's largest), and Ken Market were in full swing, the street was an edgier alternative to King's Road. Today, it's something of a retail desert - save for anyone in the market for outdoor gear.

The same could be said for Notting Hill Gate, which has a number of empty shops and whose future has been under discussion for many years. A current proposal for a 236ft tower to replace the Fifties eyesore of Newcombe House has inflamed many residents, who argue it would rob the neighbouring area of light.

Among these challenges, however, Kensington Church Street has held its own. The reasons are two-fold, believes Victoria Shepherd, co-founder of the homeware brand Cotton & Cologne, which opened on the street in 1995. "There's a very strong community of local residents here," she says. "All our team know them, and their dogs, by name."

Now, a new development is aiming to boost this community feel, strengthening the character of Kensington Church Street further and increasing its residential make-up. Lancer Square has apartments, offices with shops and



It is bookended by two desirable neighbourhoods yet it flies under the radar of many property buyers

Old-school Kensington gets a brand new look

*Arabella Youens
rediscovers the
overlooked area
that comes with
royal neighbours*

Kensington Church Street should rank among the finest in London. Taking an attractive uphill route towards Notting Hill, it lies just a few (tightly policed) yards from Kensington Palace and boasts a string of long-standing notable shops and restaurants.

The late artist Lucian Freud ate breakfast (and often lunch) in Clarke's at the Notting Hill end; the owner, Sally Clarke, sat three times for him. From there down past the bursting floral facade of The Churchill Arms to Kensington High Street runs an almost continuous line of shops and specialist dealers, many of whom have been in

situ for several decades. Among them is the antiques emporium Lacquer Chest; owner Gretchen Andersen has been at the helm since 1959. Another is Ann's, a lighting shop that can make up shades in all shapes and sizes including with pink linings - a trick that was allegedly used by the Duchess of Windsor to make her guests look more attractive.

It's a black book destination for interior designers. "I love the street; the antique shops are more old-school than the design-led ones on Pimlico Road," says Henriette von Stockhausen of VSP Interiors. "It's also much easier going and one doesn't get intimidated while browsing."

The long, curving street is bookended by two of west London's