

Tucked away in London's West End, Fitzrovia brings a village spirit to the heart of zone one. By Victoria Maw

It is unlikely that anyone would choose to live near London's Tottenham Court Road at the moment. Passengers exiting the underground are greeted with the pandemonium of the Crossrail works, which will eventually (in 2016) connect the station with Heathrow, but which for now are making Oxford Street even busier than usual. However, just streets away, and tucked inside four main roads – Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Street, Great Portland Street and Euston Road – is Fitzrovia, a proper community in the heart of the West End. Such is its individual spirit that it is often given that most revered label: a village.

Fitzrovia is not far from two other central residential areas, Marylebone and Bloomsbury. "Fitzrovia is different," says Rebecca Hossack, curator of the Rebecca Hossack galleries on Charlotte Street and Conway Street (and a former local councillor), who lives in the area. "I think it is more bohemian. It is for people who are confident in their own judgment."

Despite this most central of London locations, Hossack says people walking down Charlotte Street, the hub of Fitzrovia, stop to say hello to each other. The four border roads are littered with chain shops but the Fitzrovia streets are bus-free, narrow and mainly house independent businesses – coffee shops like Kaffeine on Great Titchfield Street or the very Italian football cafe, Italia Uno.

Last year, some of the more style-conscious local businesses (including the Charlotte Street Hotel and the Scandinavian Kitchen) formed the Fitzrovia Village initiative, a loose group of design-led retailers, to entice Londoners and visitors to Fitzrovia. "Fitzrovia has been well-groomed," says estate agent Laurence Glynne of LDG. "It used to be a little bit tatty but now it is well-dressed but without being in the designer zone."

Property prices reflect the luxury of being in a community inside zone one. "It is a very hot parish and any good properties, providing they are sensibly priced, will sell so the market is very, very live," says Glynne. Average prices are around £1,000 per sq ft, and a three-bedroom flat can fetch £1m. Highly sought-after mews houses cost far more.

Hudsons are selling an 18th-century house on Colville Place, a pedestrianised mews off Charlotte Street, for £1.45m. It has five floors, wood-panelled walls and period fireplaces. A more modest and modern fifth-floor two-bedroom flat on Rathbone Place is on the market with Hudsons.



Central Colville Place, a traffic-free street off Charlotte Street, main; the exterior of a one-bedroom flat on Berners Street, on the market for £660,000, Tottenham Court Road

come in much cheaper. A large one-bedroom flat on Berners Street is on the market for £660,000.

Julia Langkraehr, an American ex-pat, works in the Fitzrovia area and has just bought her second flat there, a two-bed, two-bathroom flat in a mansion block on Berners Street. "I would buy again in the area," she says. "I'm not a commuter and I find it is so easy here."

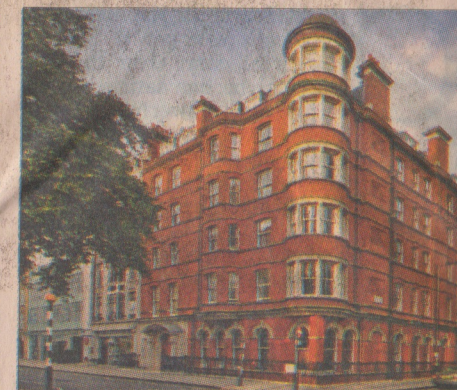
Like Langkraehr, many residents work locally, often in the advertising and architecture firms in the area. But Fitzrovia is also attracting young families, according to estate agent Jonathan Hudson of Hudsons, who lives and works in the area. His son attended the nursery on Whitfield Street and plays in Crabtree fields, a small public garden, which has a "fantastic and hi-tech" new play area. Child-friendly attractions – London Zoo, the British Museum – are reachable without dragging pushchairs on the underground.

The area also appeals to European buyers; indeed Hudson says one in two buyers are foreign. Italian entrepreneur Giovanni Sartirana recently bought a one-bedroom flat on Great Titchfield Street, which is

but Soho and the West End are near if you like to be in the middle of people."

As would be expected in such a central location, around 50 per cent of Fitzrovia's property is commercial. The main developers in the area, Derwent, have opened up a gallery showcasing their projects, which include the redevelopment of the Saatchi & Saatchi office building in Charlotte Street and a large number of buildings on Whitfield Street. Derwent have tasked development officers with walking the streets and asking local residents how they feel about the building projects. Glynne says: "Derwent are great in the area and are very passionate about wanting to keep Fitzrovia Fitzrovia."

However, one development that has been shrouded in controversy is the former Middlesex hospital site, now a gaping orifice, in the middle of Fitzrovia. It was set to house the "Noho" (north of Soho) development – an office, residential and commercial development. The plans were criticised by many local residents, who saw the name as an attempt to rebrand a historical area as trendy and modern. The Candy brothers were forced to sell the site in the economic



Rebecca Hossack, who has previously raised money to plant trees and has been involved in a campaign to save a former workhouse from redevelopment, devised a plan to divide the area into allotments for local people and businesses to grow their own produce. The scheme had to be put on hold because of changes in ownership of the site (the land was bought by Exemplar and Aviva last July), but Hossack still has hopes to revive it. "What was phenomenal about the project was how the community came out of the woodwork," she says. "It was just incredible. There is this really individual special community."

Buying guide

Pros

- The small size of most retail units means that big chain shops are unlikely to move in to the heart of Fitzrovia
- Fitzroy Square, a Georgian square, regularly features in costume dramas
- The Fitzroy Tavern was a drinking haunt of Dylan Thomas and George Orwell

Cons

- There are fewer really big houses and people live very close together
- A big garden is hard to come by
- The area risks being over-developed

What you can buy for

- **£100,000:** Around 105 nights in the penthouse of the Charlotte Street Hotel
- **£1m:** A two-bedroom apartment in a new development on Bolsover Street built around private landscaped gardens

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