

Balham boy buys 'Britain' in Dubai

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A Balham shopkeeper's son has bought a Great Britain-shaped island in Dubai because he says he misses home.

Property developer Safi Qurashi, 39, who grew up in Balham and went to school at Emanuel School, Battersea, bought the 11-acre island for £43m.

'Britain' is one of 230 islands in The World, a man-made archipelago off the coast of Dubai, constructed mainly from sand dredged from the sea. Viewed from above, it resembles a map of the world.

Mr Qurashi plans to build a mix of residential, hotels and business projects that reflect British architecture, because he says he is proud of his heritage and misses the UK.

The son of a Muslim who emigrated from India to the UK in 1961, Mr Qurashi began honing his business skills working at his father's tobacconist's shop in Tooting after school.

At the age of 11, he won a scholarship to the independent Emanuel School, and after working on business ventures in London, he emigrated to Dubai with his family in 2004.

His success in Dubai was launched after he bought an off-plan apartment and sold it three months later for twice the price he had paid.

His new Britain development is expected to take up to five years to complete and will not be exclusively for the super-rich.

It is not only Britain that Mr Qurashi is interested in, however. His company SafMus holdings has also bought the island of Moscow.