

## Leven Road – Working in partnership with a social housing provider to create permanent, sustainable, affordable studios

### The project

Leven Road in London, E14, is the first 100 per cent affordable mixed-use development in the UK. The project consists of 66 affordable housing units for rent and shared ownership and 21 affordable artists' studios.

### Background

Swan Housing Association, part of the Swan Housing Group, builds and manages quality homes at rents that people can afford throughout London and Essex. They acquired a site in Poplar, London, E14, which included a building previously used for warehousing, which had been vacant for some time and had fallen into disrepair.

The local authority, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, wanted to see no job losses as a result of the new development and was also keen to promote employment growth and the needs of the local workforce. It is thought that 14 people were originally employed on the site.

### Known outcome

Tower Hamlets wanted job provision included in the development. However, building business units speculatively is a high risk activity. Units may not be let or sold for some time, threatening project viability. Vacant boarded-up units detract from the area, increase the risk of vandalism and crime and become harder to let.



Leven Road showing artists' studios on ground floor. Photo: Mike Molloy (2009)

After seeing the Galleria, Acme's ground-breaking project in Peckham, London SE15, Swan realised that artists' studios provided the perfect solution as an alternative to business use. Commercial sale of the units would have generated higher receipts, however Swan appreciated that Acme and their artists would guarantee 100 per cent continuous occupation from day one. They would also provide quiet activity that could become, over time, a significant resource for residents and the wider community.

The development includes 21 artists' studios, but as some spaces are shared and artists use assistants, the studios sustain at least 28 jobs on the site, twice the number previously employed.

**'Having seen the work undertaken at the Galleria we were certain that the presence of artists within our development would bring added life to the area and would help to bring existing and future residents together through ongoing community projects.'**

**Steve Eccles**, Development Manager,  
Swan Housing Association

### Benefits to developers of artists' studios

- Guaranteed sale of commercial space
- 100 per cent occupancy from day one
- Meets section 106 requirements, including continued employment use on the site and providing community benefit
- Local artists continue their work in the area
- Studio residency provides link to existing community

### Finance

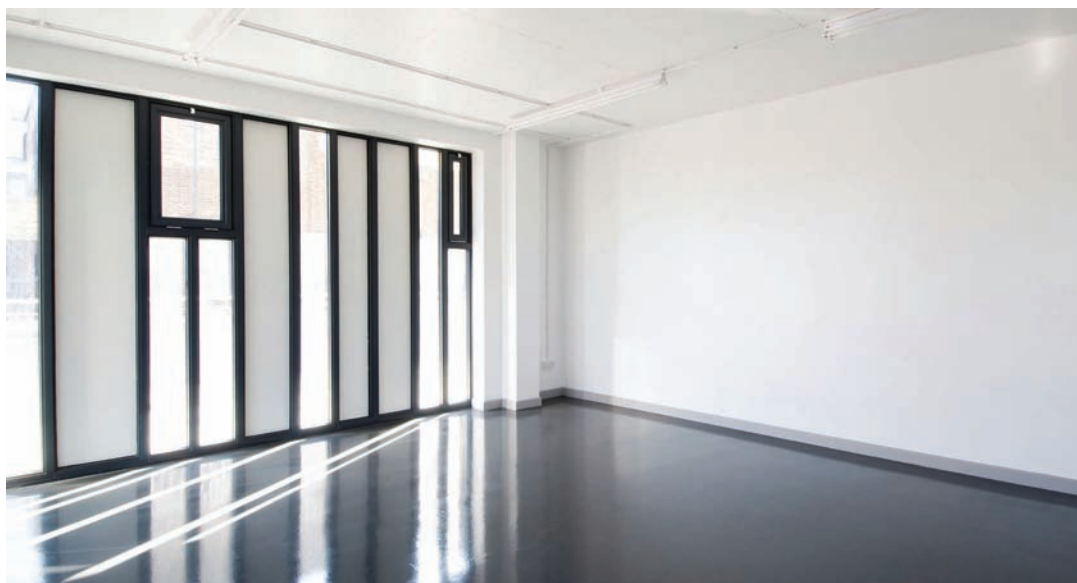
Acme bought a 125-year lease on the studios at a fixed price that covered the construction cost of the studio element of the building only. This price was much lower than if Acme had been involved in financing a stand-alone development as it did not include the cost of land acquisition or design team fees. The purchase price guarantees Acme can provide affordable rent levels for artists in perpetuity. Acme also drew on funding from Arts Council England's Grants for the arts – capital programme towards the cost of the project, releasing capital to be invested in future schemes.



Acme Studios Chief Executive Jonathan Harvey with artist Claire Morgan and Hazel Blears MP at Acme's Leven Road Studios, E14. Photo: Anna Braithwaite (2009)

**'The size of the studio is so valuable to me. My previous space was smaller, much colder, less private and more expensive per square foot.'**

**Claire Morgan**, Artist  
at Leven Road



Interior of an artists' studio at Leven Road. The studios were designed to Acme's own technical specifications and feature natural light, extra wide doors and two metre high ceilings.  
Photo: Mike Molloy (2009)

### **An important model**

The nature of the Leven Road scheme as a 100 per cent affordable mixed-use development has generated interest from various sectors. Acme has hosted visits to the studios by the previous Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears MP and Minister for Culture, Barbara Follett MP. Both ministers were excited by the scheme and were keen to promote similar models elsewhere in the UK. The project is one of four shortlisted schemes for the 2009 Arts & Business Lloyds Innovation Award and is being nominated for a prestigious building award.

### **Involving the local community**

Most of the artists allocated a studio at Leven Road, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, already have strong local links both in their professional and personal lives. There are over 700 artists on Acme's waiting list, many of them local residents, looking for space in the borough.

The Acme Tower Hamlets Studio Residency provides an artist with a free studio worth around £7,000 and a grant of £10,000 a year. Unlike many artist-in-residence schemes, there is no obligation for the artist to produce a final outcome. Instead, the selected artist is one whose work naturally engages local people through workshops, events or collaborative work.

The current residency holder is Jan Hendrickse a sound artist who is exploring the acoustic ecology of East London.

**'This residency represents an amazing opportunity for me to develop my work. The project involves getting people to listen and respond to their environment.'**

**Jan Hendrickse**, Acme Tower Hamlets Studio Residency holder 2009-2011

### **Key details at a glance**

- 21 purpose-built studios
- All studios located on the ground floor and fully-accessible
- Over 6,000 square feet (557 m<sup>2</sup>) of space
- Units vary from 195 to 380 square feet (18 to 35 m<sup>2</sup>)
- All inclusive rent of £9.20 per square foot per year (£99.02 per m<sup>2</sup> per year)
- High level of sound and thermal insulation
- All studios wi-fi enabled
- Separate studio entrance
- Combined wheelchair accessible wash-up area and WC area
- Acme Tower Hamlets Studio Residency two-year programme offering rent-free studio and £10,000 a year grant for socially-engaged artist

## Building on success

Acme has pioneered partnership developments with commercial developers and social housing providers; Leven Road is the second of five new-build partnership projects.

In March 2010, Acme will open 12 studios in Harrow Road, NW10 in the London Borough of Brent as part of a development with Catalyst Housing Group.

Fifteen studios will be built as part of a major scheme in High Street, Stratford, E15 with Genesis Housing Group in the London Borough of Newham. The development is underway and the target completion date for the studios is February 2012.

Acme's largest partnership project will result in 49 studios at the Lesney Matchbox Toys factory, E9 in the London Borough of Hackney. Acme has been working alongside Telford Homes to develop a landmark mixed-use scheme on the northern edge of the London 2012 Olympic Park. Comprising 209 homes, 40% of which will be affordable, artists' studios and commercial space, the target completion date in July 2012.

A number of other partnership projects are currently being taken forward.

**'Including artists' studios within a new development creates a natural conduit to local communities. Artists' studios hold a natural attraction and by having them integrated into the heart of the development, we will attract other creative and commercial businesses to the area.'**

**John Fitzgerald**, Telford Homes Joint Group Managing Director

## About Acme

Founded by Jonathan Harvey and David Panton in 1972, Acme Studios is a London-based charity which provides affordable studio space, residencies and awards for non-commercial fine artists. Through this provision it continues to make a vital contribution to the development of art and artists' careers.

For more information on Acme's current developments or to find out more about the benefits of working in partnership with Acme, please contact:

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Acme Studios is supported by Arts Council England and is a member of the National Federation of Artists' Studio Providers and the National Housing Federation. Leven Road (Atelier Court) is a partnership project between Acme Studios and Swan Housing Group.



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