

Leven Road Studios – 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.



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

At a glance

- 21 purpose-built studios
- All studios located on the ground floor and fully-accessible
- 28 artists
- Over 6,000 square feet of space
- Units vary from 195 to 380 square feet
- High level of sound and thermal insulation
- Separate studio entrance
- Acme Tower Hamlets Studio Residency with free rent and £10,000 a year bursary for selected artist

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, 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

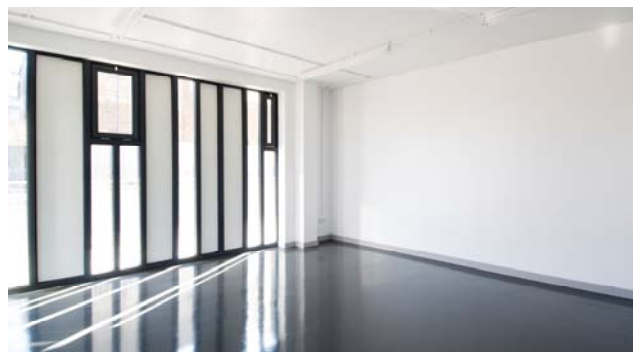
Tower Hamlets wanted job provision included in the development. However, building business units speculatively is a high risk activity. Units may not be let or sold for some time, threatening project viability. Vacant boarded-up units detract from the area, increase the risk of vandalism and crime and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

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 this will create and sustain at least 28 new jobs, twice the number previously employed.

Benefit to 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 local community will also benefit from an artist in residence scheme beginning in December 2008. The two-year residency includes a free studio worth around £7,000 and a grant of £10,000 a year.



*Interior of an artists' studio at Leven Road.
Photo: Mike Molloy*

Benefits 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
- Artist in residence 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.

Building on success

Acme is currently involved in a series of further partnership developments with social housing providers and developers:

- 12 studios, Harrow Road with Catalyst Housing Group in the London Borough of Brent – opens January 2010.
- 15 studios, High Street, Stratford with Genesis Housing Group in the London Borough of Newham – opens February 2012.
- 49 studios, Lesney Matchbox Works with Telford Homes in the London Borough of Hackney – opens 2012.

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