

A first for the young

Fifty brand-new affordable studios are part of a fabulous boost for Peckham, says David Spittles

GRITTY Peckham has quite a lot to shout about: the funky library designed by architect Will Alsop, proximity to Camberwell School of Art and Goldsmith's College, an emerging gallery scene, a council-sponsored streetscape programme involving local resident Anthony Gormley.

Now, in a ground-breaking planning initiative, 50 artists' studios are to be built on a canal infill site close to leafy Burgess Park.

The project is the first of its kind in London — part of The Galleria, a mixed-use scheme of private apartments, affordable housing and workspaces. It comes with the mayor's blessing. Ken Livingstone is intent on getting housebuilders to provide specified cultural facilities alongside new homes, and more such projects are likely.

There is a long tradition of artists colonising unfashionable areas, helping to transform them into desirable addresses. The downside for artists is that this drives up residential values and leads to the demise of affordable studio space. The Peckham development tackles this problem at source.

Barratt Homes won planning consent for 98 apartments, and as part of the deal will create 16,000sq ft of purpose-built workspace. On completion, the block of studios will be sold to Acme, a specialist charity, at a price below the construction cost of the building. Acme then lets the studios at subsidised rents.

Architects Dransfield Owens de Silva, based in nearby Bermondsey, has designed the entire scheme. It is crisp and contemporary-looking, and a welcome addition to the area.

Cultural palette: The Galleria, Peckham, offers 75 new apartments for sale and also includes affordable studios for working artists, housed in the block at the right



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The studio block rises five storeys and has a grid of glazed squares to form a distinctive façade. This commercial space is genuinely integrated with the residential element. A line of apartments occupies the fifth floor, while a linked low-rise block connects to the main 10-storey apartment building, called The Galleria.

Artists' studios range from 300sq ft to 600sq ft, and they should be ready by summer 2005. They are workspaces only, not live/work units. Call 020 8981 6811.

Acme cannot say yet how much the rents will be. But costs are certain to be enticing. The charity is the capital's main supplier of cheap studio space, providing 380 units in 10 buildings across east and south-east London. Rent levels are between £6.50 and £8.50 per sq ft per annum.

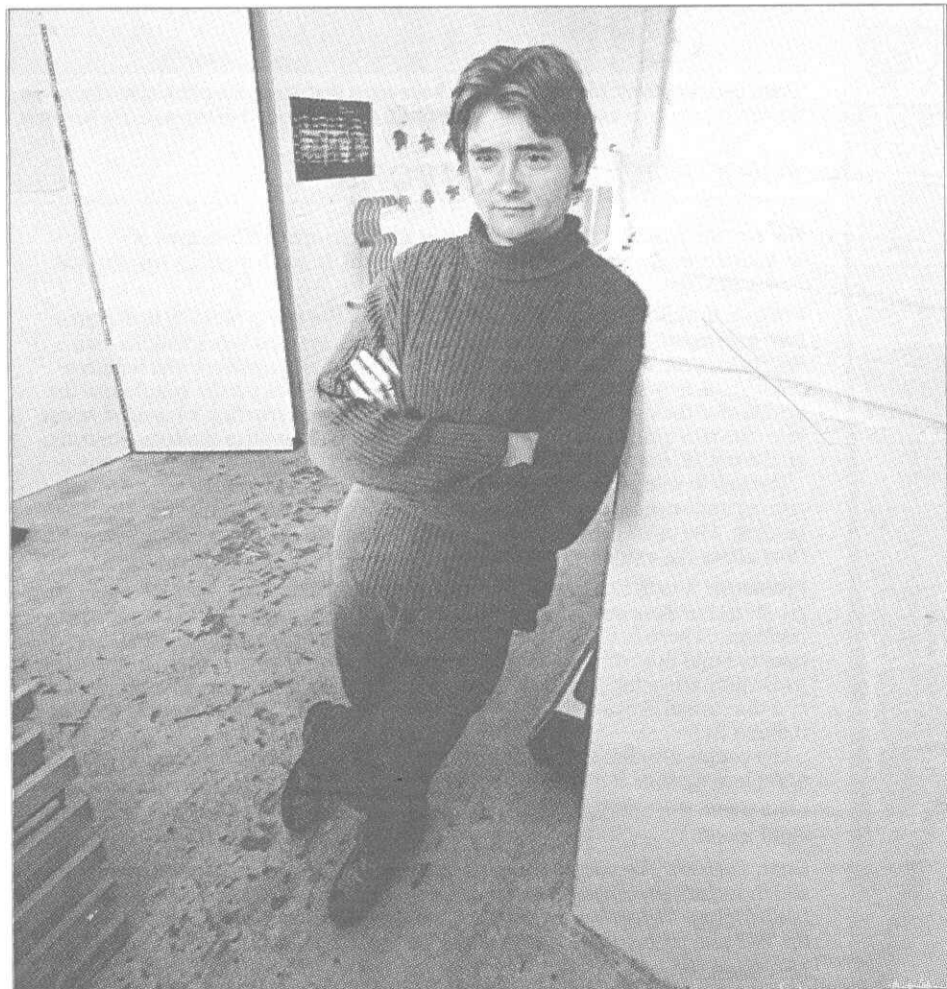
The intention is to allow artists more time to concentrate on their professional careers and less time working to survive. There is no obligation on artists to make their work public.

By leasing disused industrial buildings in places such as Spitalfields, Acme helped to bring about inner-city regeneration. However, it has been a victim of its own success.

Soaring property values are now putting rents beyond the organisation's reach and so, at Lanarca Works, in Bermondsey, Acme has decided to give up 30 studios when their lease expires in 2005.

Sculptor Mark Haywood, 37, is one of those who will be displaced. Fortunately, he is on the list for a studio at the new Peckham development.

Haywood works in a varieties of resin to create translucent objects. His work is clearly



Spatial displacement: charity Acme has found sculptor Mark Haywood a new workspace at The Galleria

‘I couldn't afford to live and work in London if I had to pay a commercial rent and full business rate’

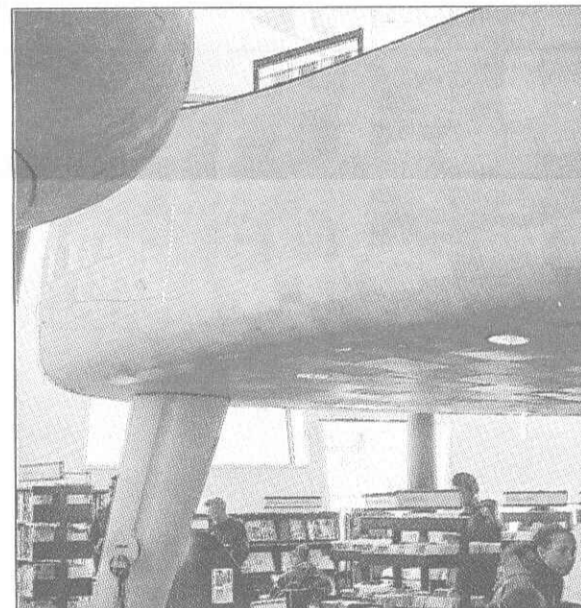
commercial and he makes a living from his art, but he says this would be impossible without subsidised studio space.

“I couldn't afford to live and work in London if I had to pay a commercial rent and full business rates.”

Slick, architect-designed studios may seem a little sanitised for bohemian artists who like to get their hands dirty. Nonetheless, Haywood is looking forward to working in a purpose-built space.

“It will make a difference. It is less beaten up than my current space. The light should be good. I also need some sort of office to cope with the increasing amount of paperwork,” he says.

Barratt's Galleria apartments will be released next year. Prices start at £170,000. Call 020 8522 5555.



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