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Responsible Tourism (2006). Courtesy and copyright of the artist.
Grace Ndiritu

Chisenhale Gallery, London

Until 18 March

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Landmark Use of Planning Gain - Galleria Studios opened by David Lammy MP - 2006-07-19

The Galleria Studios are a vital addition to the stock of affordable artists' studios in London where there are so few buildings to meet the large and growing demand for suitable low-cost space. The majority of studio buildings in the capital are held on leases, many of them short-term, and the whole sector is very vulnerable to the impact of major developments and ever increasing land values.

The studios are part of a larger development by Barratt Homes. The original site had been occupied by a print company which had decided to move elsewhere. The local authority, the London Borough of Southwark, was determined to maintain the employment use on the site as well as securing at least 25 per cent of the development as affordable housing. The partnership with the studio provider and charity Acme not only allowed Barratt to fulfil all the local authority's requirements- in fact there will be more artists on site than original employees of the print company- but it provided Barratt with a known outcome.

Local authorities are keen to encourage mixed-use developments which combine housing, commercial and retail space because such schemes help create sustainable communities. Housing developers sometimes find commercial space hard to market and sell, with the result that such units often remain empty long after all the housing units have been occupied. The partnership with Acme not only provided a guarantee sale of the commercial space, but also ensured 100 per cent occupation and activity from day one.

In the past 'planning gain', has rarely included cultural facilities. This is now being actively encouraged; the Mayor of London's cultural strategy promotes the idea of obliging developers to provide specified cultural facilities as part of larger projects for which they are seeking planning approval.

The Galleria Studios is the first example of affordable workspace being created through the planning gain process in much the same way as affordable housing.

Further information from www.acme.org.uk; Communications Officer, pippa@acme.org.uk