

Developing artists' studios in partnership with commercial housing developers

By Rachel Barnett

IN THE FIRST PROJECT of its kind affordable artists' studios were created by the private sector. Housing developer Barratt Homes worked with studio provider Acme Studios to gain planning permission for a mixed-use development, which included purpose-built artists' studios. The Galleria, located in Southwark, south London, is an award-winning development and has been recognised as an example of good practice in partnership working. The project was formally opened by David Lammy, Minister for Culture, in June 2006.

"Our residential buyers at The Galleria enjoy the idea of having a colony of working artists as their neighbours. Like the design of the building and the location, the studios are definitely seen as one of the development's attractions."

Clive Fenton, Director, Barratt Developments Plc



Exterior of the Galleria

© Acme Studios, 2006

KEY FEATURES

- The partnership provides a vitally important model showing how 'social workspace' can be achieved through 'planning gain'
- A new studio residency was created, funded by Acme. This supports an artist involved with socially-engaged practice, giving them the opportunity to develop significant relationships, through their work, with local residents and the wider community. It also offers a financial and practical breathing space, allowing an artist to focus on the development of their practice
- The studio provider organisation was able to advise on design of artists' spaces
- The on-site creative community provided a unique buying proposition for prospective home owners
- The Galleria is featured in Shaping Places in London through Culture, published by the London Living Places Partnership, as one of a number of good practice case studies demonstrating the ways in which cultural and sporting activities have been integral to shaping the future of places across London through regeneration
- The Galleria was awarded Joint Bronze in best development category 'What House! Award' 2006

CASE STUDY: ACME Galleria Studios**BACKGROUND**

A print company employing around 30 people wished to relocate and sold their site to Barratt Homes. Initial planning permission was refused because the proposed development consisted entirely of housing with no employment use. 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.

Fifty purpose-built studios were introduced into the scheme to satisfy the employment requirement and planning consent was then granted, enabling Barratt to proceed with their development. The 'social housing' element of the scheme was included in the Section 106 agreement between the local authority and the developer. These agreements are used to establish benefits and to minimise any negative impact on the local community. The studios also constituted part of the 'planning gain' arising from the development, but the local authority did not make the studios part of the Section 106 agreement because Acme was able to provide sufficient guarantees that the studios would continue to be let at affordable rents. The fact that artists' studios were considered an appropriate use of the commercial space shows an important and timely attitude change, recognising that artists' work is a form of employment rather than a lifestyle choice.

Acme had been operating a studio building providing 160 studios in the London Borough of Newham, the lease on which was coming to an end. Given the

imminent loss of affordable studio space, officers at Newham were actively encouraging developers to integrate affordable workspaces in new residential developments. Acme was introduced to Barratt and although a scheme did not emerge in Newham, their discussions ultimately led to the partnership in Southwark.

FIRST STEPS

Acme confirmed to Barratt that they could guarantee 100 per cent occupancy and activity in the studios from day one because of the high demand from artists. The developers recognised that artists' studios were a good alternative to commercial units, which can be difficult to sell or rent and are often left empty.

Working together, Acme and Barratt's development director produced proposals which satisfied Southwark's requirement for employment at the site. The development's name was changed from 'Castle House' to 'The Galleria' to reflect the artist community. The prospect of living alongside practising artists was a major plus-point for buyers.

DEVELOPMENT

Working with a Southwark-based architect, Acme was consulted on the redesign to accommodate fifty studio spaces in the development.

Due to artists' requirement for studios with maximum wall space and high ceilings, and building regulations on room heights in residential units, there was a difference of 0.6m between the heights of the two

"The studio [at the Galleria] is perfect – close to where I live and in a good location, it is self-contained, warm and a great size. These may seem like basic things to have, but it is such a revelation to me and completely disproves the notion that artists have to suffer! In my previous studio, the rent was always going up, the roof leaked and there was the threat of it closing down altogether. This studio enables me to plan and think in a long-term way, which I have never been able to do in the past."

Rebecca Stevenson, artist

CASE STUDY: ACME Galleria Studios

national federation of artists' studio providers



©Hugo Glendinning, 2006

Artist Rebecca Stevenson in her studio at the Galleria

sides of the building. The access repercussions were managed through a complex lift system, the innovative design of which serves the apartments and the studios on opposite sides of the building.

The specification for the studios was developed with Acme who, because of their experience in studio design and provision, were able to provide a detailed design for the new build, maximising convenience and practicality for artists. Design features included keeping walls as clear as possible, running services to the sides of walls or across ceilings and creating practical washrooms. This opportunity to create these studios has helped Acme to develop a standard specification for other new-build schemes.

As the project developed Southwark Council entered into a partnership with Acme to create and part-fund an artist-in-residence programme, with mentoring of the artist provided by the South London Gallery. The aim of the residency is to nurture and extend the relationship between the artist, their work and the wider community. The artist is expected to achieve publicly-visible outcomes and encourage greater local participation in arts practice.

FINANCE

Acme negotiated a 155-year lease on the studio block from Barratt at a fixed price, sufficiently below the construction cost to enable Acme to guarantee affordable rents in perpetuity. Acme drew on funding

from Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts Capital programme towards the costs of this project, releasing capital to be invested in future schemes.

Studios are rented to artists on seven-year leases at a fully inclusive rent of £9.20 per square foot, per year (from April 2008). This covers repayment of loan finance and running costs and generates a small surplus to cover central management costs and to invest in further schemes. This financial model ensures that the project is self-sustaining and will deliver affordable studios and community-focused programmes in perpetuity.

FUTURE

The success of the project has led to further partnerships between Acme and social and commercial housing developers. Projects include Leven Road with Swan Housing Association in Tower Hamlets (2009), Harrow Road with Catalyst Housing Group in Brent (2010), Stratford High Street with Genesis Housing Group in Newham (2012), and the Lesney Matchbox Toy Factory development with Telford Homes in Hackney (2012). These projects will result in further studios for the long-term, provided at affordable rent levels for artists at the heart of new residential developments.

The Acme Southwark Studio Residency, an opportunity for artists who are involved in socially-engaged practice to develop significant relationships with cultural agencies and communities in the borough, will continue, with a new artist taking up a residency every other year.



© Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre, 2008

Southwark Studio Residency Holder Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre 'Night Salon - Women Only Special'

CASE STUDY: ACME Galleria Studios

BENEFITS

To artists:

- The development has provided purpose-designed and built studios for 57 artists
- Rent is less than average for a London studio space which means artists can concentrate on developing their artistic practice and reduce the amount of part-time work they would otherwise have to do to cover a more expensive studio community
- As the studios are located in the heart of a new residential development there are many opportunities for artists to engage with the local community
- Rather than converted ex-industrial units, the studios are purpose-built to meet building and environmental specifications and are practical workspaces for artists
- As the spaces are permanent, artists can settle without the worry of disruption to their work from moving from one studio space to another

To commercial house builders:

- Barratt has been able to fulfill the local authority requirement for employment use through the partnership by providing Acme with 50 new studio units and achieve planning consent and development profit
- The existence of artists' studios on-site was seen as a 'value-added' and positive benefit by Barratt when marketing the apartments to potential buyers

To the community:

- The artists' studios provide a permanent, accessible resource for local residents
- Rather than having to deal with the problems associated with ground floor commercial units, which are often left empty and become magnets for vandalism and anti-social behaviour, local residents are aware of occupied, active artists' studios. This helps to regenerate and improve the area
- The studio residency programme supports an artist committed to working with the wider community, providing workshops and open access art programmes

MORE INFORMATION

Founded by Jonathan Harvey and David Panton in 1972, **Acme Studios** is a London-based charity which provides affordable studio and living space, and residencies and awards for non-commercial fine artists. Through this provision it continues to make a vital contribution to art and to the development of artists' careers. Acme supports over 500 artists and manages over 400 studio units in 11 buildings across London. Acme is recognised as the leading studio development organisation in England and has helped more than 5,000 artists with this fundamental means of support. Acme Studios is funded by Arts Council England.

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