

Hazel Blears visits Acme's latest studio building

Hazel Blears MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, yesterday (5 May) visited Acme's newly-opened Leven Road Studios in Poplar, E14. The minister was given a tour of the development by Swan Housing's Chair Richard Frost and Acme Studios Chief Executive Jonathan Harvey and visited Acme tenant Claire Morgan in her studio.



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

Acme's 21 purpose-built studios form the ground-floor of a ground-breaking development with Swan Housing Group. The site includes 66 affordable housing units and is the first-ever 100 per cent affordable mixed-use scheme to offer both housing and studio space.

Acme Chief Executive Jonathan Harvey said: *'I was delighted to show Secretary of State Hazel Blears our new-build studios. Artists' studios provide quiet activity which can become a significant resource for residents and can play a key role in strengthening communities. Our studios at Leven Road were 100 per cent occupied from day one and though the artists have only been here a short time, connections are already being made between residents and local people.'*

To further strengthen ties between the existing community and both the residents and artists in the new development, Acme established the Tower Hamlets Studio Residency. This two-year award includes a free studio (worth £7,000) and a bursary of £10,000 a year and is given to an artist whose work involves social engagement. The first recipient of the award is Jan Hendrickse, a sound artist who plans to explore the acoustic ecology of East London, employing listening as a way of investigating the sonic environment.

The visit of the minister was organised by the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation, the ultimate planning authority in the area. The new development replaced an existing factory and planning consent included the requirement to continue employment use on the site. Swan Housing realised that working with Acme would not only fulfill the planning requirements, but also guarantee 100 per cent continuous occupation from day one and bring unique benefits to residents and the existing community.

Acme bought a 125-year lease from Swan on the studios at a fixed price which 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.

For further information about Acme, see www.acme.org.uk or call 020 8981 6811.

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