Housing Creative Practitioners and Young People in East London

CW living lab

This research project is commissioned by

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Executive Summary

The Hackney Wick and Fish Island creative community is diverse with the potential for permanence

This report focusses on the Hackney Wick and Fish Island (HWFI) and wider East London area but highlights issues which extend well beyond London and the UK. By examining community-led responses to housing issues it highlights global themes of housing affordability, lack of housing supply, gentrification and displacement and changing demand patterns for living and working in the post Covid and digital-age city.

The study focussed on the creative sector and young people living in HWFI and the wider East London area. The study sample contained a highly diverse group of people, with 46% in ethnic and religious minorities and higher than average representation of LGBQT+ groups. 20% of the group considered themselves disabled and 20% were Carers.

The survey appears to have tapped into two main communities; one established and consisting of long-term residents of over 10 years and the other more transient and resident under 3 years. Interviews highlighted a major concern among younger groups about being able to afford housing either to rent or buy in the longer term which suggested that younger people who might otherwise want to stay in the area would not necessarily be able to do so.

Home ownership is unobtainable for most…

The average sold prices of conventional houses and flats in the HWFI area is between 10 times and 24 times the average annual Creative workers salary which puts home ownership in the local area out of reach of most people in this industry. Perhaps unsurprisingly therefore, the majority of interviewees in this survey rent from a private landlord (73.2%). The percentage is significantly higher than the 2011 census average. Only 16.2% of interviewees were owner occupiers (including shared ownership), with or without a mortgage. Interviewees, especially young creatives who are in the early stage of their careers, expressed the difficulty in buying a property.

… and current housing expenditure is too much

The costs of renting would appear to put a big strain on most respondents' personal finances. A large group of people in the survey (47% of interviewees) spend more than 40% of their net monthly income on rent or mortgage payments. (Nearly a fifth spent more than 60%). 41% of interviewees spend 20%-40% of their net monthly income on rent or mortgage, the rest are either not responsible for rent or mortgage (11%) or spend less than 20% (2%) of their net monthly income on rent or mortgage.

Opinions of what sort of monthly expenditure was reasonable were closely linked to these findings. The overwhelming majority (92.8%) of interviewees believe a fair and affordable rent should only take up to 40% of their monthly disposable income. So only 53.6% regarded their actual rent as affordable. Some interviewees renting from council/housing association mentioned that social housing in the area is "pretty cheap" suggesting that creative workers might be retained if more of this type of tenure were available to them.

Interviewees have different understandings of rent: some interviewees see rent as rent without bills (and/or council tax), whilst others regard rent as rent plus bills and council tax. Either way, recent rises in energy bills will inevitably worsen perceptions of housing affordability.

Affordable housing has social benefits

More than two-thirds of the interviewees (69.6%) said paying a more affordable rent would influence their productivity. Frequently mentioned reasons for that include "work harder to have more surplus money", "more time for friends and family", "more productive at work", "feel less pressured to have to pull intense overtime", and "more creative and financial freedom". It can be seen from the responses that paying more affordable rent would motivate some creative practitioners to work harder, have more time for family and friends and a better social life and feel less pressured to earn a living. The other interviewees say, their amount of work will not change with the change in rent because they have reached a work-life balance and would like to maintain it. A citizen scientist commented: "Majority of the interviewees weren't working for rent. They were working for other reasons".

Unconventional housing appears important

The majority of interviewees live in what might be termed 'non-standard' accommodation which doesn't necessarily conform to conventional planning use classes or investment asset classes. Most (54%) live in warehouses, 2% in tenements and 2% in boats. Only 20% lived in houses and 23% in flats. Most of those surveyed (64%) live with 3 or more other people.

The majority (63%) of interviewees living in warehouses consider their housing affordable, higher than the average percentage (54%) for all interviewees. Among warehouse living interviewees who consider their housing unaffordable, only 1 out of 11 (9.1%) do not want to live in warehouses anymore. Others still want to live in this type of housing mainly for the people and a sense of community,

In this particular creative community, the demand and supply of housing solutions might be described as non-conventional and as such could point the way to new and different types of living arrangements that might work elsewhere.

Living and working – separate, but close

In terms of the current workplaces, they vary among interviewees. 64.3% of interviewees work at a combination of workplace and home. 16.1% of interviewees said they only work at the workplace and 14.3% only at home.

For the warehouse living group, the majority (63.3%) work at a combination of workplace and home. A further 13.3% only work at home, indicating that some warehouse living people have the equipment and space required for creative work. The majority (73.3%) of warehouse living people work close to their workplaces, with less than 30 mins of commuting by walking or public transport. A further 43.3% of interviewees live within 10 mins of their workplace. 83.3% of interviewees living in a warehouse consider living close to the workplace quite important or very important. An even higher percentage (96.7%) said they would like to live and work in the same area because they can save time and money and reduce their stress. Although most warehouse living people prefer living close to work, 17.9% don't mind commuting if their job requires them to do so.

Neighbourhood quality trumps affordability
The quality of a neighbourhood appears to be more important to the study group than the affordability of a housing unit. When asked what interviewees are looking for in their local community, neighbourhood and home, the five top features mentioned were:

1. Green space/nature
2. Facilities and activities including pubs, bars restaurants, events, entertainment, shops
3. Transport
4. Culture/art/creative space
5. Community

Recommendations to help preserve the vibrancy, uniqueness & diversity of HWFI

1. Product Mix Tailored for Different Groups of People
In general, interviewees of different age groups have different housing needs. They are more inclined to rent and have the flexibility when they are young, but when they settle down, they want to move out of London (to somewhere more affordable) to have their house. So it is important to have a good mixture of housing of different sizes and tenure to cater for the needs of the different groups of people. The interviewees felt that it was really important that there was a mixture of sizes from individual bed sits all the way up to larger units with 20 or even more people so that there is that sort of typology for almost every pocket.

2. Alternative Housing Models
Alternative housing models that facilitate alternative ways of living is hugely undervalued - in terms of people's mental health, community building and affordable living, a strong ethos of mutual aid networks allows people to live in areas they wouldn't normally live and do a profession that they wouldn't normally be able to do.

Mixed land use could be a promising solution. Ideally, the area could have a mixture of residential, commercial buildings and infrastructure. The need for communal spaces and green spaces should also be addressed, for example, using the co-housing method where people who share the same vision live together.

Tenants, developers, local communities and councils must join forces to enact change and meet the housing demand of the creative practitioners and businesses.

3. Key Worker Status for Creative Practitioners in the Creative Enterprise Zone (CEZ)
Creative practitioners in HWFI and the wider East London area need financial support. The gap between affordable rent and the current rent they are paying is estimated to be approximately £400 per month per person. Ideally, support should aim to fill this gap.

Community-led, co-living solutions like a new warehouse living housing product seems a promising solution but various issues need to be addressed and this cannot be done without the support of the local planning authorities.

Warehouse living is under threat due to development pressures and the local authorities must listen to the needs of residents to work out an alternative to address this issue.

Could creative practitioners be granted the equivalent of key worker status in CEZs, giving access to affordable community-led housing to resolve this issue?

4. Collaboration
Moving forward and providing more secure, affordable and enriching tenure in HWFI and the wider East London area, it is clear that collaborative efforts in planning, design and management of the housing and local community are essential. We highlight the need for further research on 1) the housing size and number of bedrooms, the housing tenure and the needs of different age groups, 2) detailed space usage and needs of the warehouse living community.

Last word
Overall, this study has shown that there seems to be a demand for alternative and unconventional forms of housing and workspaces, which includes warehouse homes. This type of community-led solution is generally seen as more affordable and a socially attractive housing solution.

Investors, planners and developers are faced with a place productivity problem if creative workers and creative industries are displaced by conventional forms of development. Local, community-led, co-living solutions could be part of a solution that can prevent the sterilisation and homogenisation of neighbourhoods and which preserve social and environmental value of the location as well as just the economic value.

Professor Yolande Barnes,
Chair of UCL Bartlett's Real Estate Institute
– April 2022


HIPSTA
LOVE ALL
PEACE + HAPPY
Kyle
SIMON
DANGER

Introduction

This report has been produced from research conducted by the Creative Wick Living Lab (CWLL) in collaboration with Professor Yolande Barnes, Chair of UCL Bartlett's Real Estate Institute, Dr Frances Holliss, Director of the Workhome project at London Metropolitan University, Levant Kerimol from Community-Led Housing London and architects Richard Brown (Brown Urbanism) and Philip Graham (Cullinan Studio) and is jointly commissioned by the Hackney Wick and Fish Island Creative Enterprise Zone (HWFI CEZ) and the Hackney Wick and Fish Island Community Development Trust (HWFI CDT).

The report focusses on particular conditions and issues centred on co-living arrangements in Hackney Wick, Fish Island and the wider East London area. In exploring these highly localised issues and conditions, it confronts a series of themes which extend and resonate well beyond London to other UK cities and many global cities. These themes include:

1. Worsening housing affordability as global asset prices have created barriers to home ownership and lack of supply pushes up rents.
2. Gentrification as land values have risen and new development risks the closure or displacement of local people and businesses.
3. Changing patterns of housing demand in the digital economy and post Covid environment and the rise of alternative urban living arrangements, particularly co-living and co-creation.

In 2018, HWFI CEZ's Baseline Report found that 75% of creative businesses sourced employees from the local area. Yet anecdotal evidence suggests that creative practitioners have been displaced from the area due to a range of economic pressures. The specific housing needs and impact of new property development on creative practitioner's living accommodation has not previously been studied. Local stakeholders have argued that policymakers need to identify and include their housing needs when making planning decisions. As new residential properties are developed and housing prices rise, many creative practitioners and local young people find themselves forced to move away. As a result, practitioners who remain based in the area have to travel further and some are lost from the area entirely. Young people grow up conscious that "We're never gonna be able to own a house" and "rent is too high".

Therefore, this research project aims to shed light on the housing pressures faced by creatives and young people within the Hackney Wick, Fish Island and wider East London area. It also looks at exploring opportunities for community-led housing initiatives to introduce new housing products that can provide more secure, affordable and enriching tenure in HWFI and ultimately help preserve the vibrancy, uniqueness and diversity of the area.

Methodology

This research adopts a citizen science method. 10 citizen scientists were recruited and trained to conduct interviews with their recruited interviewees who are creative practitioners or young people in the HWFI and wider East London area. This method was chosen as it is more likely for citizen scientists to obtain the truth about how interviewees really think and feel. Citizen scientists have better knowledge of the area and closer relationships with the local community compared to researchers.

From February to March, data was collected in three ways. Firstly, the research team designed the survey questionnaire (see appendix) to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The survey questionnaire asked closed and open-ended questions about the interviewees' housing requirements and aspirations, working arrangements and personal information. Questions about personal information including income and levels of rent being paid were not asked due to sensitivity and trust considerations for creative practitioners living in informal settings. Instead, the average income and average house prices were estimated from available secondary data sources. The survey questionnaire was reviewed by academics and development sector stakeholders on the project to ensure their unambiguity, relevance and rigour. The citizen scientists were also asked to make suggestions on the survey questionnaire during their training session (7-10th February). The survey questionnaire was subsequently revised by researchers. Secondly, interviewees were also asked to provide images of their creative workspaces voluntarily.

Thirdly, after the interview process, citizen scientists were asked to reflect on their interview process and provide feedback on the process and thoughts on the research during a recap session (17th March).

For data analysis, firstly, the raw data was collated based on the questions answered. Specifically, appropriate presentations (e.g., pie chart, word cloud) were chosen to elicit meanings. For quantitative answers, pie charts were used. For short qualitative answers from interviewees, synonyms or words with similar meanings but different parts of speech (e.g., flexible and flexibility) were merged and then presented using world clouds and frequency tables. Long qualitative answers were grouped according to keywords and themes. Where appropriate, data from the warehouse living group, young people living with parents and young people (under 25) living independently were compared. The personal information of interviewees was compared with the average values of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) and the London Borough of Hackney (LBH) to ensure that the pre-set population sample objectives were met and the sample is sufficiently diverse to represent creative workers in the HWFI and wider East London area. Images of creative workspaces were collaged and included in the report. In terms of data collected in the citizen scientist feedback workshop, the meeting recording was transcribed using Otter with the text then categorised based on the themes and incorporated into the report.

A great deal of attention has been paid to maintaining good research ethics. This research is approved by the ethics committee of Loughborough University London. Consent forms and information sheets were prepared to make sure interviewees were fully aware of their rights and consent to the research. To ensure the quality of data collection, citizen scientists were trained on qualitative and quantitative research methods, research ethics and data analysis. The collected data has been securely stored, anonymised, and only shared with the research team members and stakeholders.

Demographic Mix

Our Interviewees
A total of 56 interviews were conducted. The interviewees include creative practitioners, businesses and young people who work, live or operate in the HWFI or wider East London area. Their personal information such as gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity was collected and anonymised. This is to 1) make sure the data collected is sufficiently representative of the local area and 2) identify any potential difference in results among different groups. For anonymity considerations, their exact locations were not collected.

Age
Interviewees aged 25-30 are the largest age group represented in this sample, followed by those aged 30-34. This age of people in the largest age group is younger than the figure reported by the LB Hackney policy and insight team in 2019, where the largest age group was 30-34 (Hackney Council, 2019).

Gender
The following chart (Fig. 1) shows that 51.8% of the interviewees were female or female-identifying, reflecting a good diversity representation of the studied area. This is also higher than the proportion of National Portfolio Organisations' workforce (50%) reported in 2021 (Arts Council England, 2021). There are also 7.1% of interviewees who self-identified as non-binary. In total, 19.6% of interviewees have different gender identities from their sex at birth.

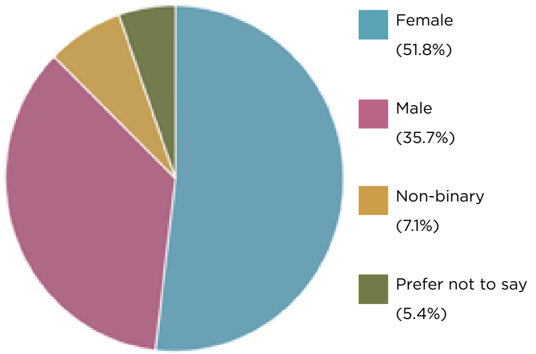


Fig. 1 Gender identities of interviewees.

Ethnicity
53.6% of the interviewees are white, while the rest are from ethnic and religious minorities. The representation of ethnic and religious minority (46.4%) is higher than the percentage (45.3%) reported by LB Hackney policy and insight team in 2019 and the percentage (13%) reported by the Arts Council England for its national portfolio organisations (NPOs), but lower than the percentage in the LBTH (55%) as shown in Census 2011 (Arts Council England, 2021; Hackney Council, 2019; Office for National Statistics, 2012a).

Disability
Of all the interviewees, 19.6% consider themselves to have a disability. According to Arts Council England, this percentage is higher than the percentage of disabled people working across NPOs (7%) (Arts Council England, 2021).

Carers
19.6% of interviewees of the sample are carers. This percentage is higher than the figure in Hackney (7.3%) and London (8.4%) (Office for National Statistics, 2012b).

Sexual Orientation
Interviewees that identify as LGBTQIA+ take up 35.7% of the sample. The detailed sexual orientation is shown in Fig 2. This number is significantly higher than the percentage (9%) in Hackney (The August 2018 GP patient survey, 2018).

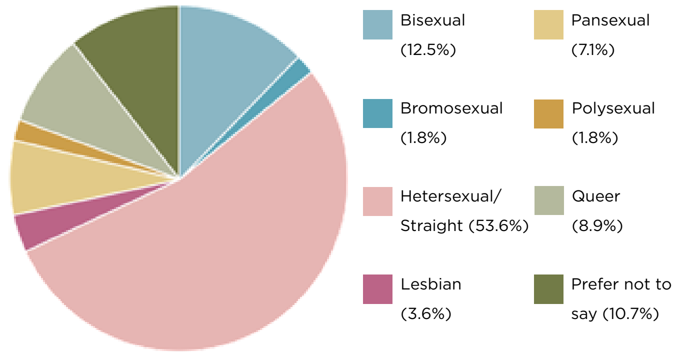


Fig. 2 Sexual orientation of interviewees.

Length of Time Living in the Area

Years of Living in the Borough and Neighbourhood

Fig. 3 shows that more than one-third of interviewees have lived in their borough for more than 10 years, whilst 18% of the interviewees have lived in the borough for less than 1 year. The percentage of warehouse living people that have lived in their borough for more than 10 years is 16.7%. This percentage is lower than the percentage for all interviewees. Nearly half (46.7%) of interviewees living in warehouses have lived in the borough for only 1-2 years.

In terms of years of living in the neighbourhood, only 29% of interviewees have lived in their neighbourhood for more than 10 years, while a quarter has lived in their neighbourhood for less than a year (Fig. 4). For warehouse living people, the percentage of living in the neighbourhood for more than 10 years is only 13.3%. Similar to the result of living in the borough, 40% of warehouse living people have lived in their borough for only 1-3 years.

Fig 5 shows that most interviewees (67.9%) have lived in their home for less than 3 years. The percentage for warehouse living people is higher at 80%. Fig 1-3 indicates many interviewees have moved around, although mostly within their borough and neighbourhood. It also suggests most of them may have tenancy agreements, leases and licenses of less than 3 years. Moving around and having short tenancy agreements, leases and licenses are observed to be more common among warehouse living people, compared with other interviewees.

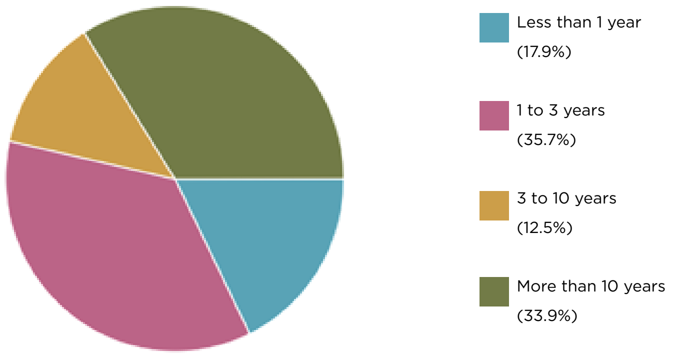


Fig. 3 Years of living in the borough.

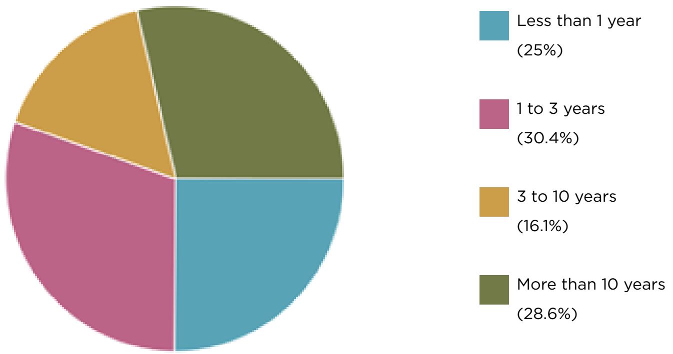


Fig. 4 Years of living in the neighbourhood.

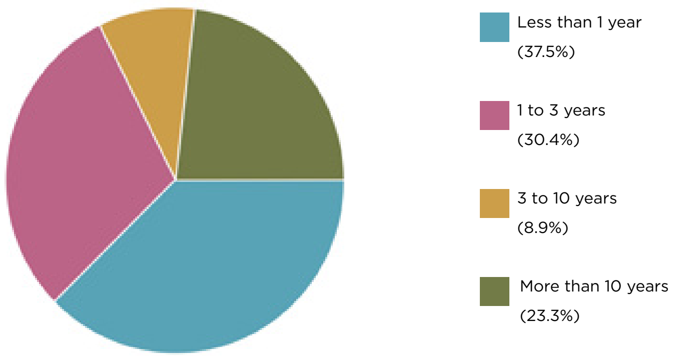


Fig. 5 Years of living in their home.

Housing Tenure

The interviewees specified their area(s) of creative practice or business type(s). The word cloud was generated by processing such responses with Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software. It points to the prevalence of practitioners in the fields of music, performance and visual arts, and design. Those working in fashion design make one of the largest groups of our sample. The word “creative” was used along with consultancy, branding, director, hub, services, producer, fabricator, community engagement, and workspace provider.

Household and House Size

The biggest group of our interviewees (25%) lives with at least three other people, followed by 23.2% living with 5 or more housemates and 16.1% living with at least 4 people. This sample data is higher than the average in LBTH, where only 22.2% of residents have 4 or more people in their households. Among interviewees, 91.1% live with other adults, and 8.9% live with at least one young person (under 18).

Consistent with the large household size, 33.9% of interviewees report having 5 or more bedrooms. Another 19.6% and 19.6% of interviewees have 4 and 3 bedrooms. The rest of the interviewees live in 2-bedroom accommodation (16.1%) and 1-bedroom accommodation (10.7%).

Household Composition

44.6% of interviewees report living with other professionals, followed by 28.6% living in their family home. The rest of the interviewees share with other housemates in warehouses (14.3%), live alone (5.4%), share with other households (3.6%), or live in specialist shared accommodation (e.g., student accommodation) (3.6%).

Housing Type

The majority of interviewees (53.6%) live in warehouses, followed by 23.2% of interviewees living in flats. Other types of housing that interviewees live in include terraced houses, semi-terraced houses, tenement houses and boats, at 12.5%, 7.1%, 1.8% and 1.8%, respectively.

Creative Practitioners

Types of Creative Practice and Businesses
The interviewees were asked to specify their areas of work and their job titles. A word cloud was generated by processing their responses using computer-aided and artificial intelligence supported word cloud generator software. The word cloud shows the prevalence in the areas of design, music, visual art and the service industries. Many respondents work as a freelancer with multiple part-time jobs. The seniority of their positions range from junior to senior.

Interestingly, some of the jobs mentioned do not belong to the creative sector, such as dog groomer (2 mentions), waiter (2 mentions), nanny (2 mentions) and bartender (2 mentions).

Fig. 6 Occupation of interviewees

Table 1. Occupation of interviewees and their frequency

designer	10
artist	6
freelance	6
musicians	3
dog groomer	2
project coordinator	2
creative producer	2
dancer	2
research	2
photographer	2
illustrator	2
bartender	2
marketers	2
nanny	2
waiter	2

I. Housing, Neighbourhood and the Local Community

Housing Affordability and Affordable Rent
As shown in the following graph (Fig 7), 41.1% of interviewees spend 20%-40% of their net monthly income on rent or a mortgage, followed by 28.6% spending 40%-60% of their net monthly income. The rent or mortgage cost 17.9% of interviewees more than 60% of their net monthly income. The rest of the interviewees are either not responsible for rent or mortgage (10.7%) or only spend less than 20% (1.8%) of their net monthly income on rent or mortgage.

The majority of interviewees (53.6%) regarded their rent as affordable, considering the average housing rental price in London and their salary. Some interviewees renting from council/housing association mentioned that social housing in the area is "pretty cheap". For interviewees who consider their rent unaffordable, reasons such as "social life is affected" and "the increasing energy bill is making it expensive". It can be inferred from the responses that interviewees have different understandings of rent: some interviewees see rent as rent without bills (and/or council tax), whilst others regard rent as rent plus bills and council tax.

Five interviewees (9% of the sample) are young people living at home with their families. Three of them live totally rent-free, while two reported they pay their parents a small amount of money every month. This correlates with the main benefit of living with parents being saving money on rent; otherwise, these young people can barely afford rent.

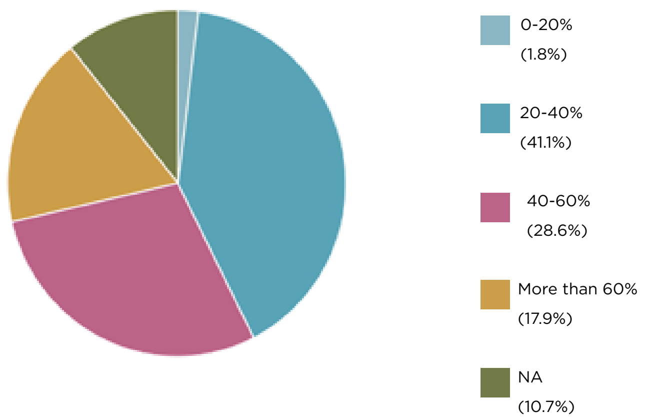


Fig. 7 Rent or mortgage being paid each month by interviewees as the percentage of net monthly income.

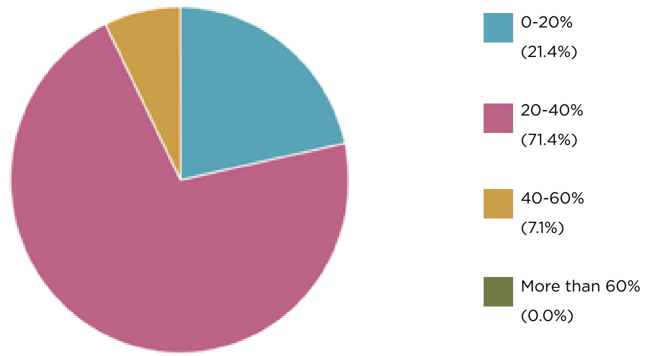


Fig. 8 Affordable rent as a percentage of your monthly disposable income.

As shown in Fig 8, the overwhelming majority (92.8%) of interviewees believe a fair and affordable rent should only take up to 40% of their monthly disposable income, while 21.4% of interviewees think it should be less than 20%. For the warehouse living group, the proportion of interviewees that think a fair and affordable rent should take up to 40% of their monthly disposable income is slightly higher at 93.3%, whilst the rest 6.7% can accept it to be up to 50% of their monthly disposable income. For young people living with parents, their idea of affordable rent ranges from 20% to 35% of their monthly disposable income. For young people (under 25) living independently, 75% of them regard 20%-35% of rent to be affordable, whilst 25% consider it to be up to 50%.

An estimation of affordable rent per person per month is £878. It is calculated based on the 1) average percentage calculated from the responses; 2) average salary of creative workers in London (Glassdoor, 2022). The gap between affordable rent and the current rent they are paying is estimated to be £400 per month per person.

To illustrate, according to Zoopla (2022), the average sold prices for detached houses, semi-detached houses, terraced houses, and flats in Hackney Wick in the last 12 months are £753,000, £915,000, £733,537 and £403,897 respectively. Based on the average salary (£38,874 per annum) of creatives in London (Glassdoor, 2022), the prices are equivalent to approximately 19-, 24-, 19- and 10- years' salaries of creatives.

The average rental price in the London Borough of Hackney is currently £405pw for 1-bedroom flat, £566pw for 2-bedroom flat, and £918pw for 3-bedroom flat (Foxtons, 2022)

Interviewees, especially young creatives who are in the early stage of their careers, expressed the difficulty in buying their property:

"The biggest thing a lot of us spoke about was how difficult it actually is to get on the property ladder."
–Abbie, Citizen Scientist.

Warehouse Living: Views, Benefits and Problems

As reported in the previous section, 63.3% of interviewees living in warehouses consider their housing affordable which is higher than the average percentage (53.6%) for all interviewees. Among warehouse living interviewees who consider their housing unaffordable, only 1 out of 11 (9.1%) no longer want to live in warehouses. Others still want to live in this type of housing mainly for the people and a sense of community, although they mentioned that some of the warehouses are not well-maintained. Interviewees who are living in warehouses shared their thoughts on warehouse living:

“I love it; there should be more places like this to live. All my visitors love it too.”

“The warehouse life/community has changed my life for the better, and I see an entirely different culture in London that I want to be a part of and build towards expanding.”

Some interviewees favour warehouse living in general. However, some concerns about living in warehouses were mentioned, such as the poor conditions of some warehouses, the people they are living with, and that warehouse living is predominantly for young people.

“I would live in them if they were divided a bit more and if the warehouses actually worked as residential spaces (i.e., no mould, windows, heating).”

“I’m not sure about living in a warehouse because it depends. Is it warm, clean, beautiful, spacious and who are my neighbours?”

“Living in a warehouse is good but mostly for young people.”

Interestingly, compared with the warehouse living people who mainly have a favourable view of warehouses (90%), only one person of the young people group would like to live in warehouses. Reasons for the reluctance of living in warehouses is either due to a lack of awareness of this type of housing or thinking warehouses are expensive and unregulated.

Housing Aspirations

The word clouds (Fig 9-11) show the top features interviewees are looking for in their local community (the people), neighbourhood (the place) and home. Table 2-4 show the frequency of features mentioned by interviewees.

The top three features that the interviewees look for in their neighbourhood are transport, green space and shops. The aspirations of young people (under 25) living independently are varied, although they still value green spaces and shops. Interestingly, for the warehouse living group, their top 3 are green space, community and transport, where community ranks two spots higher compared with its ranking among all interviewees. This may be explained by the strong sense of community valued by the warehouse living sector. Notably, 60% of young people living with parents expressed interest in living close to other young people. Among them, one interviewee works part-time as a youth worker; the other two mentioned young people and youth centres are among the top 3 things they are looking for in a neighbourhood or local community. The other three most mentioned desirable neighbourhood features include green space (3), transportation (2), and shops (2), which coincided with the most appearances among all interviewees. This shows that young people living with their parents have very similar needs for their neighbourhood to other interviewees, except that they may also be in favour of the presence of dedicated space for them, such as youth centres.

The top three features that interviewees are looking for in their communities are creativity, diversity and friendliness. This coincides with the results of young people (under 25) living independently. For warehouse living people, the results are slightly different, namely: creativity, diversity and community, although friendliness comes very close at the 4th place. The most important requirement for young people living with parents is friendliness. Other desirable features from this group are miscellaneous, but there were mentions of creativity and diversity.

Fig. 9 The top features interviewees look for in their neighbourhood (the place).

Table 2. The top features interviewees look for in their neighbourhood (the place) and their frequency

transport	21
green space	16
shop	13
community	12
creative space	4
culture	7
sports facilities	3
nature	6
art	5
safety	5
affordability	5
bar	5
restaurants	5
outdoor space	2
events space	2
social activities	2
industrial area	2

Fig. 10 The top features interviewees look for in their local community (the people).

Fig. 11 The top features interviewees look for in their home.

Table 3. The top features interviewees look for in their local community (the people) and their frequency

creative	20
diversity	19
friendliness	16
community	12
open	5
community spirit	3
family	3
young	3
safety	3
caring	3
friend	2
kindness	2
fun	2
activists	2
support	2

Table 4. The top features interviewees look for in their home and their frequency

space	40	location	3
affordability	14	cleanliness	3
natural light	12	quiet	3
outdoor space	7	community	3
good basic facilities	6	good kitchen space	2
communal area	6	sense of community	2
windows	6	living room	2
studio space	5	insulation	2
flexibility	5	friendly space	2
accessibility	5	privacy	2
safety	5	architecture	2
cosy	5	homey	2
good housemate	5	comfort	2
good people	3	creative space	2

The top three features that people look for in their home are space (40 mentions), affordability (14 mentions) and natural light (12 mentions), regardless of their current housing and work arrangement. For young people living with their parents, 80% of them stressed the need for sufficient space and outdoor areas such as a garden or balcony. They mentioned that the need for adequate space is partly due to the nature of their work requiring creative space or room to work. Other features they care about include affordability (1 mention), natural light (2 mentions), safety (2 mentions), and accessibility to amenities (2 mentions). These features were also frequently mentioned by people residing in warehouses and other housing types in the area, with 13, 10, 3 and 3 mentions, respectively. The percentage of young people living with parents mentioning affordability (20%) is less than interviewees living in other types of housing (25%). This may be attributed to them not paying rent themselves, thereby lacking awareness of affordability.

85.7% of interviewees think creative practitioners have particular housing needs. They believe the following needs must be met: more space to create and network with other creatives, flexibility to adapt the space, fewer noise restrictions, certain conditions of light and ventilation, accessibility and financial support for housing due to unstable income.


FIRENZE

II. Housing and Work

Housing Affordability and Amount of Work
More than two-thirds of the interviewees (69.6%) said paying a more affordable rent would influence their amount of work. Frequently mentioned reasons for that include “work harder to have more surplus money”, “more time for friends and family”, “more productive at work”, “feel less pressured to have to pull intense overtime”, and “more creative and financial freedom”. It can be seen from the responses that paying more affordable rent would allow more creative practitioners to spend more time working on their own practice rather than numerous part-time jobs, have more time for family, friends and their mental health and a better work-life balance. For the rest of the interviewees, their amount of work would not be affected by a change in rent because they have reached a work-life balance and would like to maintain it. A citizen scientist commented:

“Majority of the interviewees weren’t working for rent. They were working for other reasons.” –David, Citizen Scientist

Fig. 12 Benefits experienced by interviewees during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fig. 13 Problems experienced by interviewees during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 5. Benefits experienced by interviewees during the Covid-19 pandemic and their frequency

time	16
commuting	13
free time	10
money	10
flexibility	9
none	6
increased productivity	4
savings time	4
comfortable	4
low social pressure	2
better work	2
life balance	2
ability	2

Table 6. Problems experienced by interviewees during the Covid-19 pandemic and their frequency

work-life balance	8
crowded workspace	7
isolation	6
social life	5
silo working	5
necessary tools	4
noise	4
WIFI issues	3
motivation	3
boredom	3
distraction	3
mental health issues	2
screen time	2
unemployment	2
repetitive	2

Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic
Both benefits and problems were experienced by most interviewees during the COVID-19 pandemic (Fig 12, Fig 13), although 10.7% of interviewees reported zero benefits. Among the benefits that have been reported by interviewees, 13 appeared more than once. “Time” is the most frequently mentioned benefit (16 counts), followed by “commuting”, “free time”, “money”, and “flexibility” with 13, 10, 10 and 10 counts, respectively. The frequency of benefits and problems experienced by interviewees are shown in Table 5 and Table 6, respectively.

Regarding problems of working during the pandemic, lack of work-life balance, crowded workspace and isolation were mentioned the most. Interviewees said that their social life is affected, they were stuck at home and the line between work and life was blurred.

60.7% of interviewees reported that more than half of the adult household members worked from home during the pandemic, among which 10 households had all their members working from home. This shows that they have been impacted by COVID and have been able to adjust their working practices to compensate for the impact.

Workplaces and Commuting

In terms of the current workplaces, they vary among interviewees. 64.3% of interviewees work at a combination of workplace and home. 16.1% and 14.3% of interviewees said they only work at the workplace and at home, respectively. The percentage of homeworking interviewees is slightly higher than the percentage (9.9%) of homeworking people in the arts, entertainment and recreation sector in the UK in 2019 (Office for National Statistics, 2020). This indicates that Covid is still influencing people's workplaces. There are also 3.6% of people in the sample who work in other workplaces (e.g., delivery). The rest 1.8% of interviewees reported they are unemployed.

For the warehouse living group, the majority (63.3%) work at a combination of workplace and home. A further 13.3% only work at home, indicating that some warehousing living people have the equipment and space required for creative work. The majority (73.3%) of warehouse living people work close to their workplaces, with less than 30 mins of commuting by walk or public transport. A further of 43.3% interviewees live within 10 mins of their workplace. Only one interviewee among the 30 warehouse living people lived more than 1 hour away from the workplace. 83.3% of interviewees living in a warehouse consider living close to the workplace quite important or very important. An even higher percentage (96.7%) said they would like to live and work in the same area because they can save time and money and reduce their stress. Although most warehouse living people prefer living close to work, 17.9% don't mind commuting if their job requires them to do so.

Surprisingly, among young people (under 25) living independently, the proportion of people who only work at home is 50%, with 25% reporting that they work both at home and the workplace. Most of them (75%) also live very close to their workplace (10 to 20 mins commuting), whilst the rest spent more than 1 hour commuting to the workplace. Consistent with them living close to their workplace, all of them would like to be able to live and work in the same area. 75% of them said they would consider the housing availability in the area when deciding on taking up a new job.

Of young people living with parents, 40% only work at home. 40% work in a combination of home and workplace, whilst the remaining 20% only work at the workplace. For those who go to a workplace to work, it takes them more than 30 minutes to travel to work (by public transport), with one person's commuting time more than 45 minutes. Despite all living relatively far from work, they have mixed opinions on the importance of living close to work. No apparent correlations were found between their current workplace, commuting time and their preference for living close to work. For example, for the two people who only work at home, one thinks it is very important to live close to work, while another believes that it is not very important. In total, 60% of young people living with parents thought it is very important or quite important to live close to where they work; the reasons include convenience and the better local community. While the rest 40% regarded it as of less importance, where the blurry work and life boundaries were mentioned as the main reason, and they do not like to live and work in the same area for this reason. This was also reported by a citizen scientist:

"A lot of people said that they would rather not live in the same area that they worked anyway, just because of their productivity levels. They'd rather have to go out to a palce of work, and then go home. Because otherwise it blurs the lines and then their home isn't their home anymore."
–Abbie, Citizen Scientist.

Interestingly, for young people living with parents, the decision to take a job in an area seems to be not affected by their distance between work and home, even if they mentioned that living close to work is quite important or very important to them. This is also consistent with citizen scientist's feedback:

"For the question would you take a job if there wasn't accommodation, for the people I spoke to, that didn't actually matter. The opportunity was greater than 10 times in the same place where they were."
–David, Citizen Scientist.


PARTY Shit
DARK TIMES

III. The Way Forward

Under the current housing model, nearly half of the interviewees spend 40% of their monthly net income or more paying rent and/or mortgage. The poor affordability of housing in HWFI is forcing some creative practitioners operating in this area to leave. One of the citizen scientists said:
"The overall feeling is that people are dissatisfied with cramped spaces, extortionate amounts of rent and people that they cherish and love are moving out of London because of the rent." —Josephine, Citizen Scientist.

Based on the survey findings, to improve the affordability of housing in HWFI and help preserve the vibrancy, uniqueness and diversity of HWFI, some suggestions are proposed in the following sections.

Product Mix Tailored for Different Groups of People
Different needs have been observed among interviewees of different age groups. One interviewee mentioned that

"Living in a warehouse is good but mostly for young people."

In general, interviewees of different age groups have different housing needs. They are more inclined to rent and have the flexibility when they are young, but when they settle down, they want to move out of London (to somewhere more affordable) to have their house.

Based on the findings of this research, the following suggestions are made:
People who have settled down aspire to live in their own house with their family. A flat or house with at least 3 bedrooms is typically required. For young creatives who are at the early stage of their careers, they prefer renting with like-minded people in housing that have shared communal space and space to create.

Nevertheless, a more detailed survey of the preferred products for different groups would be essential for moving forward to a solution.

A citizen scientist, whose interviewees fall into the age group of 25-30, mentioned that:

"The interviewees all said they want to move into London to rent but then when they're older and ready to settle down and have a family they want to move out of London to buy their house."
—Abbie, Citizen Scientist.

A citizen scientist highlighted the importance of having access to a good mixture of housing of different sizes and tenures to cater for the needs of different groups of people:

"They (the interviewees) felt that it was really important that there was a mixture of sizes from individual bed sits all the way up to larger units with 20 or even more people so that there is that sort of typology available for every pocket or almost every pocket."
—William, Citizen Scientist.

Alternative Housing Models
Existing research on housing needs of the creative industry reported the requirements for flexibility, convertibility and multi-functionality (Florida 2002; Miao 2017). These are consistent with our sample responses about housing aspirations, which 1) stressed on the need for local amenities, convenient transport links, shops, pubs and restaurants; and 2) highlighted the special housing needs for creative practitioners, including better convertibility, less noise restrictions and flexibility in space (i.e., communal shared living space with adequate space).

An interviewee highlighted the need for alternative housing models:

"Alternative housing models facilitate alternative ways of living is hugely undervalued - in terms of people's mental health, community building, and affordable living, a strong ethos of mutual aid networks allows people to live in areas they wouldn't normally live and do a profession that they wouldn't normally be able to do. There is more money for speculators and developers in single unit luxury apartments."

To meet these requirements, mixed land use that includes co-living could be a promising solution. Ideally, the area could have a mixture of residential, commercial buildings and infrastructure. The need for communal spaces and green spaces should also be addressed, for example, using the co-housing method of co-design and co-production where people who share the same vision (e.g., creative practitioners) live in a community that has good connectivity, collaboration, the spirit of looking out for one another and is environmentally-conscious (Community Led Homes, 2018).

It is important to recognise that there have been historic issues with live-work housing products. Paintworks, a live-work project in Bristol did not turn out as expected: it resulted in live or work spaces only with no mix in between (Miao, 2019). Although the results of this research highlighted the hyperlocal economy, there is still a mismatch between live and work in the East London area (i.e., people who bought the houses or flats were often not those who worked there). More research needs to be done before coming up with a solution. One interviewee mentioned that this work could be better conducted "with effective input early on from creative community", in other words, co-development by local residents and stakeholders is essential. Tenants, developers, local communities, development trusts and councils must join forces at an early stage in the development process to enact change and meet the local housing demand of creative practitioners and businesses.

In addition, warehouse living seems a promising solution. Most of the interviewees are in favour of this type of housing for various reasons; the communal space inspires them, interactions with other creatives gives them creativity and improves their mental health, warehouse living gives them a sense of community and belonging, they feel free and safe to express themselves. However, various issues need to be addressed and this cannot be done without the support of local authorities. Many interviewees mentioned the lack of facilities and poor warehouse maintenance.

“The fact is that there are some people who appreciate and want warehouses but they wouldn’t necessarily want to live in there. It’s not because they don’t like it. It’s just because it requires a lot of renovation upkeep. Sometimes the landlords don’t even properly sort out the heating and double glazing, but it’s not something that they’d want to eradicate and stop.”
—Josephine, Citizen Scientist.

Hence, the local authorities need to make an effort to regulate the warehouses better and make sure the landlords fulfil their obligations.

Secondly, although valued by most interviewees, warehouse living is not currently supported by local planning policy. The local authority must listen to the needs of residents to work out an alternative model to address this issue. Because warehouse living is unregulated with little security of tenure, tenants are often exploited by speculators.

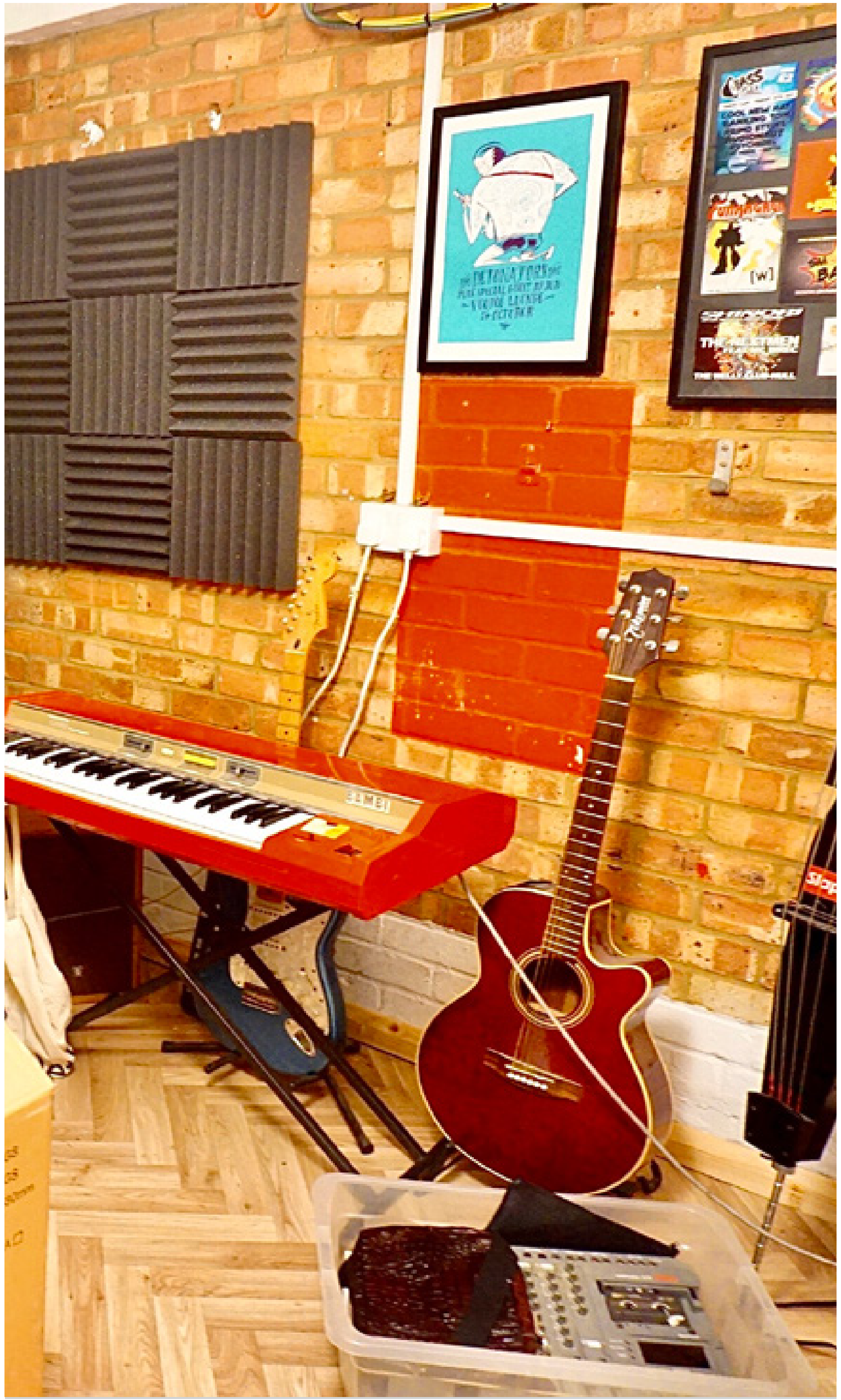
As a citizen scientist mentioned:

“Unfortunately, one of the main problems related to the topic of the warehouses is that more and more people just see these spaces as an opportunity to make profits. Almost every unit I am aware of has a leaseholder making profits from the rent of the room in the space, raising the prices and making these places not as affordable as they could be.”
—Matthew, Citizen Scientist.

Key Worker Status for Creative Practitioners in the Creative Enterprise Zone (CEZ)

Interviewees mentioned that social housing provided by the local council or housing associations is “pretty cheap” in this area, while most interviewees do not have access to social housing and are renting from private landlords. Data shows that the main reason for this is not the lack of social housing, but many creative practitioners are not eligible to apply for social housing (Hackney Council, 2019). Thus, it is suggested that the equivalence of key worker status could be awarded to creative practitioners in this area. This would make more creative practitioners become eligible to apply for social housing. Evidence from a previous research project in the HWFI also stressed the importance of providing special support for creative practitioners in the CEZ (Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2021):

“The central difficulty agencies face in supporting local creative communities in areas such as HWFI is recognising that the precarious conditions in which they have grown organically are often at odds with existing regulation. To overcome this barrier, special regulatory frameworks could be adopted, such as those that might be feasible within designated Creative Enterprise Zones. This would allow for a higher degree of policy experimentation whilst acknowledging that some of the factors that made the formation of those creative communities possible are linked to market failures and other difficult-to-replicate contextual conditions. To that extent, adopting more agile and experimental policy-making skills and resources, and making more effective use of vehicles such as CEZs could help develop more effective policy instruments and interventions.”



Conclusion

This research explored the housing pressures faced by creatives and young people within the Hackney Wick, Fish Island and wider East London area.

The data shows that creative practitioners have very specific housing needs. They need flexible, adaptable space that suits their needs to create. They also need access to a local network of other creatives.

It comes as a surprise that the majority of interviewees think their rent is affordable, although the quantitative results suggest otherwise. This confirms that affordability is not always easy to measure and depends on many things other than price to income ratios. There is still a gap between what some interviewees consider fair and affordable and the rent they are currently paying.

It can be seen that most interviewees love warehouses in the area because of their striking features, such as shared communal space and large live-work spaces to inspire creativity. However, many issues still need to be addressed to make warehouses a better place to live, including maintenance, basic facilities and regulation.

A potential solution is that the current use class system could be more flexible, particularly in a CEZ to deliver genuinely mixed land use across a range of price points to address the need for a vibrant mix of local shops, restaurants, pubs, amenities, green spaces and communal areas. Any alternative housing model to be developed should also meet the needs of different groups by including a range of different sizes, numbers of bedrooms and options of housing tenure.

The local authorities could better support creative practitioners by awarding the equivalent of key worker status for those operating in the CEZ. This would enable these creative practitioners to have access to more affordable social housing in the area. However, any preferential treatment for certain groups is a separate issue and ultimately needs some more thought. It might be better to talk about the preservation of 'distinctive local industries" as a starting point for a wider conversation.

Moving forward and providing more secure, affordable and enriching tenure in HWFI and the wider East London area, it is clear that collaborative efforts in planning, design and management of the housing and local community are essential. The limitations of this research include: 1) the small sample size; 2) no location of interviewees was collected for reasons of data anonymity and these issues would need to be addressed in any future research. We also highlight the need for further research on 1) the housing size, number of bedrooms and tenure needs of different age groups, 2) detailed space usage and needs of the warehouse living community. The Living Lab hopes that there will be more opportunities in the future to conduct more detailed research in this area.

The importance of any community-led housing initiative and/or affordable housing is the way it enables places to be more productive and sustainable – in every sense of the word. Ultimately, healthy, happy and secure people are what make any area prosperous.

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Appendix

Creative Wick Living Lab: Housing Survey
SECTION 1: Housing and Work

1. What type of home does your household live in?
- Flat
- Terraced house (including end terrace)
- Semi-detached house
- Detached house
- Warehouse
- Other

Which of the below describes your household?
- Shared student home
- Family home
- Specialist shared accomodation (e.g retirement home, student accomodation)
- Shared with other professionals
- Shared with other households
- Single occupancy
- Other

3. How many bedrooms does your home have?
- 1 bedroom
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

4. How many people make up your household?

5. What is the average age of your household?
- 18-24
- 24-44
- 45-64
- 65-75
- 75+

6. How many young peple (under 18s) live in your household?

7. How long have you lived in your home?
- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 to 10 years
- More than 10 years

8. How long have you lived in your neighbourhood?
- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 to 10 years
- More than 10 years

9. How long have you lived in your borough?
- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 3 to 10 years
- More than 10 years

10. What are the top 3 things you look for in your neighbourhood?

11. What are the top 3 things you look for in your local community?

12. What are the top three things you look for in a home?

13. Where do you work?
- Only at home
- Combination of home and place of work
- Only at your place of work
- Other type of workplace
- Other

14. What do you work as?

15. If you travel to work, how long does it take you to get there?
- Less than 10 minutes
- 10 to 20 minutes
- 20 to 30 minutes
- 30 to 45 minutes
- 45 minutes to an hour
- More than an hour

16. How do you get to work?
- Walk
- Cycle
- Motorcycle
- Car
- Public transport
- Boat
- Other

17. How important is it to you to live close to work?
- Very important
- Quite important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Not very important
- Completely unimportant

18. Of the adult members in your household, how many worked from home during the pandemic?

19. What benefits were experienced working from home during covid?

20. What problems were experienced working from home during covid?

21. Would the type of housing available in an area affect your decision to take a job there and why?

22. Would you like to be able to live and work in the same area and why?

23. Which of these options best describes the home you live in?
- Owned outright with no mortgage
- Owned with a mortgage
- Shared ownership (part rent, part mortgage)
- Renting from a private landlord
- Renting from Council or Housing Association
- Other

24. Thinking about the amount of rent or mortgage you are responsible for each month, roughly how much does this take from your net monthly income (after tax and deductions)?
- About a quarter
- About a third
- About half
- About two thirds
- N/A
- Other

25. Do you consider your current rent affordable and why?

26. What do you think a fair and affordable rent for you would be as a percentage of your monthly disposable income?

27. Would paying a more affordable rent influence the amount you would work and why?

28. Do you think people in creative occupations have particular housing needs? If so, what are they?

Hackney Wick and Fish Island has a large warehouse community. In one research study, Brown (2013) described the large, formerly industrial spaces as "creative factories" where people live and work. His study found that these self-managed spaces were different to commercial studio blocks. People organised life and work collectively, making "collaboration more frequent, studios more affordable and the neighbourhood more active."

29. Are you aware of the warehouses in Hackney Wick and Fish Island? If yes what are your impressions of them?

30. How do you feel about living in this type of housing?

31. Any further comments or points of discussions:

32. Would you like to be contacted about the progress of this project?

SECTION 2: About you
For equal oppurtunity monitoring

1. What is your gender identity?

2. Is your gender identity different to your sex at birth?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

3. What is your age?
- 18-24
- 25-44
- 45-64
- 65-74
- 75+

4. What is your ethnicity?

5. What is your sexual orientation?

6. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

7. Do you look after, or give any help or support to a family member, friend or neighbour because of long term physical disability, mental ill-health or problems related to old age?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say


E6