

# Eastside Alternative Development Corporation: The Birmingham House

February 2017

Housing is at a critical moment.

Within our city, across the country and throughout the world access to affordable, secure housing is one of the biggest problems we face. Eastside Alternative Development Corporation is a new partnership between Eastside Projects and Impact Hub Birmingham. We have committed to working together to approach the housing crisis in a holistic, systemic manner, from land identification, financing and planning approval, to home design and ultimate construction.

We are ready to get our hands dirty.

Artists are often seen as drivers for urban regeneration, as a marker for the progress and success of communities and big city plans, welcome in an area until land values increase.

As a collective of active citizens we want to offer an alternative to the standard version of housing as real estate, instead producing housing as home, workspace and public artwork. Our vision is one which sees participation and engagement as core principles rather than post rationalisation add-ons and we are working towards a model which is financially sustainable but focused on the creation of social, cultural and environmental capital.

Housing is key to creating security, building better communities and transforming cities into vital and diverse places. Artists are the public who make art, citizens like everyone else with families and responsibilities who very often struggle to make ends meet. Being an artist is a job and the work of an artist is key to a healthy society. As a key worker, an artist is well placed to find solutions towards creating more equitable communities. Like other key workers, artists are suffering from a lack of suitable and affordable houses and workspace to rent or own.

We see home as a key site of production, as an extension and expression of our ability to create. Without the domestic sphere all other production would be impossible. Artist housing should confirm an ability to produce social power, allowing both the form of your home and the way you pay your rent to be creative. The Artist House is proposed as a mutual support system, where rent directly supports and is reinvested into cultural infrastructure, rather than ending up as profit in private hands. Luxury housing is anti-social. Artist housing is social housing.

Eastside Alternative Development Corporation aims to unlock underused land to build, sustainable, adaptable homes and live work spaces, using open systems and design processes to create models which can be replicated by self building communities elsewhere.

We have started by imagining a staged approach, beginning by responding on a hyper-local level, moving from a prototype phase through to the construction of a new neighbourhood with the aim of working in partnership with Birmingham City Council to create the city's first Community Land Trust. We believe this can be done by looking at new building technologies and new ways of identifying and using land. Bringing the values of openness and transparency into this process brings with it new hope for citizen involvement, beyond responding to twelve week consultations. By combining the power of open design, artist led practices, existing statute and open data we can create new ways to live in our city.

Artists know that the way to solve a problem is to begin.

## The Prototype Birmingham House

We propose to utilise small, empty urban sites, to develop a housing system - both in a physical and organisational sense - that can house artists and other creatives on a short or longer term basis.

The means of production, and income, would remain in the cultural sphere, offering an opportunity to provide artists with affordable bespoke housing and live-workspace, within a dispersed but connected, self sustaining

community, in the heart of the city. Ideally we will offer artists the security of a fixed term lease of at least five years, and the possibility to move onto another site, into a new or relocated Artist House, at the end of the term.

This will necessitate the development of a 'light' building system - in terms of its contact with the ground, use of materials, environmental impact and cost. Rejecting a conventional 'asset based' approach means materials would only be required to perform in the medium term, allowing new ways of thinking to be investigated with regard to housing design and build.

The idea of medium term housing and a more nomadic approach to living, supported by affordable rents, long fixed term leases, security of future tenancy and quality, 'light' and suitable accommodation, could grow into a new way of approaching how we live in the twenty-first century.

## STAGE 1

We propose to begin by building a house to live and work in on a small plot owned by, or leased to Eastside Development Corporation. We would use this test site to explore new building methods and gather ideas, strategies, co-designers, co-developers and future tenants. The building will be the first iteration of the Artist House for Birmingham. Built as a full-scale prototype using Eastside Projects as an impromptu workshop, marketing suite and 'show home'. It will embody the notion of 'lightness' and act as a physical and conceptual framework for other artists, designers, builders and thinkers to develop.

## About Us

### Eastside Projects

Eastside Projects makes art public.

We are an artist-run multiverse, commissioning, producing and presenting experimental art practices and demonstrating ways in which art may be useful as part of society. Eastside Projects provides vital infrastructure, supports best practice and works to expand the role of the artist-run space. Alongside imagining, testing and modeling a free public gallery, we are increasingly engaged in an expanded range of public activities – we devise public art strategies, serve as commissioning agents, produce national public art programmes and create structures to support artists locally, nationally and internationally.

Our influential Extra Special People programme develops regional talent positioned in a hyper-local and super-international context. Eastside Projects provides vital infrastructure and supports best practice by establishing and exercising new models for artists and curators to research, produce and thrive.

We believe in working collaboratively towards change and do so to support the cultural growth of Birmingham. We do not make art for the public. We are the public.

### Impact Hub Birmingham

We believe those that are willing to dream, dare and have a heart for a better Birmingham need a place where they can realise these dreams. A place to collaborate and discuss, challenge and be challenged, provoke and be provoked; a place where paradox and contradictions can cohabit with ease. A platform where they can meet like minded creators and disruptors and where they can continually challenge themselves and others. Innovating around solving systemic challenges in our city and beyond. This place is Impact Hub Birmingham and it is many things all at the same time.

We want to empower a collective movement to bring about change in our city, embracing a diverse range of people and organisations with a whole host of experiences and skills.

We work on a range of systemic issues including housing, childcare and civic justice.