

**A creative community at Royal Albert Wharf: new impact study shares five years of transformative achievements.**

*On Thursday 7 March 2024, Bow Arts Trust and Notting Hill Genesis release the findings of an impact study supported by the Royal Docks Team.*



The RAW Rainbow Bridge, Credit: Rob Harris

Royal Albert Wharf, a vibrant mixed-use housing development by Notting Hill Genesis, is a rare neighbourhood in London: along the historic docklands, homes sit adjacent to artist studios, creative businesses, exhibition space, and public art. Activated by artists, events ranging from public art programmes to makers markets keep the waterfront lively and strengthen the fabric of community life.

Leading with a strategy of 'Creative Placemaking' that recognises the value of dedicating space to artists, Royal Albert Wharf presents a compelling case of urban regeneration. Delivered as a collaborative initiative between the housing and creative sectors, it has proven to be the catalyst for ground-breaking success, leveraging tangible social, economic, and public gains.



Situated at the eastern end of the Royal Docks, this burgeoning neighbourhood has experienced remarkable growth: the first phases of the development alone delivered more than 800 new homes as well as over 30,000 sqft of commercial space. However, securing occupancy of newly developed commercial spaces in emerging areas, particularly within housing-led developments, can often pose significant challenges. To address the difficulty of vacancies or underutilised spaces appearing boarded-up, or inaccessible, Notting Hill Genesis engaged Bow Arts, a leading arts and educational charity, to design and deliver the 'Creative Placemaking' Strategy for Royal Albert Wharf.

Bow Arts responded by building 36 high quality affordable studios for artists, designers and makers. Within 8 weeks, the vacant spaces had been replaced by creative businesses. Focusing next on strengthening partnerships and empowering relationships, Bow Arts facilitated a programme of events with opportunities designed to encourage participation between artists and local residents and foster a sense of ownership of their local area.

Five years on and the 'Creative Placemaking' programme has ushered in social, economic and physical change. Recognising these successes, Notting Hill Genesis and the Royal Docks Team commissioned an Impact Study, authored by Dr. Michael Owens, released on Thursday 7 March 2024.

The study charts the social, economic, and physical transformations of five years of 'Creative Placemaking', highlighting successes, challenges and key drivers that provide a blueprint that can be adopted by other developments for their own success.

The Impact Study found that 'Creative Placemaking' delivered through the partnership was an effective solution. From adding overall financial value to the Royal Albert Wharf development, positively impacting sales and lettings, to empowering communities through apprenticeships, skills and training, the impact study paints a vivid picture of multi-faceted and far-reaching achievements that open exciting possibilities and pose real challenges to more traditional approaches to occupying space. Embedding the arts into the fibres of community structure proved to be a credible and viable alternative to the management of commercial space in new developments.



The partnerships nurtured by a 'Creative Placemaking' strategy led to life-changing outcomes for local people and residents alike. Breakthrough moments include the V&A announcement for artist residencies<sup>1</sup> at Royal Albert Wharf; establishing new social enterprise, such as Well Bean Café; attracting new occupiers to the area, such as Café Namaste with renowned chef Cyrus Todiwala; and winning two international Dezeen awards for our community led art installation, RAW Rainbow.

These impacts directly contribute to Royal Docks Cultural Placemaking Strategy<sup>[OBJ]</sup>, which is rooted in local talent, ambition and community. The Creative Placemaking partnerships borne out of Royal Albert Wharf continue to bolster cultural and creative production, highlighting community spirit and creative talent that helps to realise the Royal Docks' bold ambition: to become London's cultural engine.

In summary, positive outcomes of the 'Creative Placemaking' approach include:

1. **Financial Case:** Overall financial return leveraging value for the Royal Albert Wharf development with the Bow Arts presence generating a positive uplift reflected in residential sales and commercial lettings.
2. **Management Case:** An events programme has supported estate management, promoted stewardship where Bow Arts have worked actively with artists and tenants to shape the place making activities part subsidised through commercial revenue and income.
3. **Commercial Case:** Multiplying the development's visibility through marketing and promotion enabled Bow Arts to fill one-third of all commercial space within the development within three months, attract new occupiers, and successfully trial interim uses in vacant premises.
4. **Economic Case:** A positive economic impact is detailed in the study by PRD Consulting Ltd. PRD estimate that Creative Placemaking at Royal Albert Wharf has so far added £15.7m gross value to the local economy and £7.2m in salaries supported.
5. **Strategic Case:** Multiple social impacts; demonstrable skills and employment outcomes, including apprenticeships and training; building community capacity and resilience; delivering outputs aligned to Mayoral strategic

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<sup>1</sup>Bow Arts Trust, 'V&A X Bow Arts Fellowships: artists Adam Moore and Laura Wilson to engage the community in exploring materials & local ecologies in Newham': <https://bowarts.org/va-bow-arts-fellowships/>



objectives, and in so doing, Bow Arts have inspired change and show continued leadership.

Bow Arts' study offers key recommendations for developers and placemakers to implement a valid and cost-effective approach in revitalising new developments.

**Jules Pipe CBE, the Deputy Mayor of London for Planning, Skills and Regeneration said:** "I'm pleased that Royal Albert Wharf is being celebrated as an exemplar development that meets the highest standards of creative placemaking and urban regeneration.

"In the space of five years, this development has transformed the Royal Docks into a thriving neighbourhood boasting over 800 new homes, 36 high-quality affordable artist studios, and commercial space, creating new skills and employment opportunities, and supporting community-building in the local area. This supports our mission to build a better, more prosperous London for all."

**Rokhsana Fiaz OBE, Mayor of Newham said:** "The creative industry has the potential to unleash great economic benefits for local economies and people. This impact study is a great testament of our joint community wealth building agenda that we are keen to progress in Royal Docks, the first London Enterprise Zone, bringing so many visible benefits already for residents while increasing outward investment. We'll continue working with all the partners involved to build on this great success already achieved."

**Lizzie Stevens, the Managing Director, for Places & Estates at Notting Hill Genesis said:** "The experience of Creative Placemaking at RAW has helped NHG rethink its approach to neighbourhood development.

"We have removed some of the artificial lines between former business departments, and we are now more experienced and confident in how to work with an external stakeholder like Bow Arts, bringing specialist expertise that strengthens our sales, lettings and estate management. I feel that we have been ambitious at RAW, but we have managed the risks of establishing a new market and building a new community. We have a model that can be replicated in further phases at Royal Albert Wharf. Creative Placemaking is now a viable option in our toolbox for future developments."

**Marcel Baettig, CEO of Bow Arts said:** "The creative economy is a vital part of the London economy. The best-performing sector for over a decade, 1 in every 6 jobs



offered in the capital is in the creative industries. Embedding artists and providing them with support in the form of affordable studios and ongoing opportunities is essential for a sustainable creative ecosystem and a long-term future for artists at the Royal Docks.”

**Visit the Bow Arts website to read the study’s full findings and find out more:**

<https://bowarts.org/about-us/impact-study-2024/>

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### **Notes to Editors**

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### **About Notting Hill Genesis**

A home provides the basis for a stable and healthy society, but London’s housing crisis means that for too many Londoners, a home is out of reach. Notting Hill are a not-for-profit organisation with a focus on providing quality homes at below-market rents for people who would otherwise struggle to afford them. They are both a landlord and a developer, with more than 60,000 existing homes and 10,000 more in our pipeline, and a well-established commercial business from which we reinvest surpluses to support the provision of below market-rent homes across the capital. Founded in the 1960s to address slum conditions in West London, they are now one of London’s largest charitable housing associations and a leading advocate and trusted partner to local councils and government, giving Londoners a base and community from which to achieve their potential.

### **About Bow Arts Trust**

Since 1994, Bow Arts has nurtured London’s diverse creativity and talent. They have provided artists and creative practitioners with affordable workspace, connecting them with local communities and supporting their professional development. They give communities throughout London greater access to and interaction with the arts, through our schools programme, Nunnery Gallery, workshops, exhibitions and events.



Bow Arts is an arts and education charity and a social enterprise; their services support the growth of sustainable local creative economies. Over 500 artists, designers and makers are affiliated with Bow Arts through their workspace, Nunnery Gallery, affordable housing for creatives, and award-winning schools and young people's learning programme.

### **About Royal Docks Team**

The Royal Docks Team is a multi-disciplinary team that brings together officers from across the Greater London Authority, the London Borough of Newham and the London Economic Action Partnership.

Home to London's only Enterprise Zone, the Royal Docks is one of the most significant regeneration projects in the UK. The team was established in 2017 to help deliver the cohesive transformation of the Royal Docks into a vibrant, mixed-use destination with culture and community at its heart.