

## Here East: from Olympic broadcasting centre to hub for creatives

Tour Leaders: Nicola Rutt, Hawkins Brown  
David Bickle, Hawkins Brown

Travelling out to Stratford is no longer as arduous and lengthy as it once was - it took a mere 35 minutes from Gloucester Road station - and at our destination we were rewarded with a most fascinating visit.

Here East once housed the press and broadcasting centre for the 2012 Olympics. It is now an inspiring hub for creative businesses. The three buildings surround an open-ended courtyard, which welcomes visitors with deckchairs, outsize jenga and electric scooters.



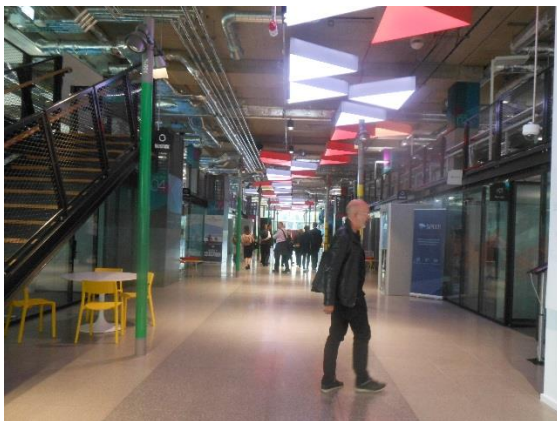
We were met by **Gavin Poole**, CEO of Here East, who introduced us to what can fairly be described as his baby. Ex RAF and an engineer he was keen to use this gigantic space - 1.2m sq ft: larger than the Canada Square tower - for innovative projects. The plan was to turn rather functional buildings into a buzzing campus which would mix local businesses with start-ups with an innovation centre acting as a catalyst. Mixing business with academia, the team reasoned, could incubate collaborative projects to benefit all the occupiers. Seven years on and the huge spaces are 70% let - there is still 300,00 sq ft to go but Here East is selective about who they take on, reckoning that it is better to improve the eclectic quality of occupiers rather than simply going for quantity.

At this point **David Bickle** and **Nicola Rutt** of architects Hawkins Brown, who over the last six years have worked on the transformation, aiming to bring life to the 'ugly child' of the Olympics, took over with a brief explanation of their involvement before setting off on the tour.

We were in the smaller building, the Press Centre, so that is where we started. It houses the Plexal co-working space designed as a mini-city which attracts a variety of tech and culture: - start-ups, early stage companies and innovation programmes. An internal 'street' gives on to rows of small offices housing businesses from grime music to hi-tech.

The centre block which closes off the courtyard provides an enormous space for events and exhibitions while the largest building, once the broadcast centre, now houses BT Sport, a huge auditorium and seminar rooms for University College London alongside architecture and engineering departments, and the V&A's collections and research department.

On the back of the back of Broadcast Centre is the Gantry, once housing the a/c plants, which has been completely transformed. The open decks now carry an astonishing mix of small buildings, which look rather like a mad collection of imaginative beach huts. Of plywood (because weight could have been a problem) and clad in a variety of coverings they offer flexible space. Accessed by brilliantly orange-painted external staircases, there are 21 freestanding single and double storey studios - we visited one double height, home to a firm of lighting designers who love it, and the views over the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, which are astonishing.



This was a truly inspiring visit - well worth the trip!

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