

Urban Backstages

Fieldwork Journal #1: London

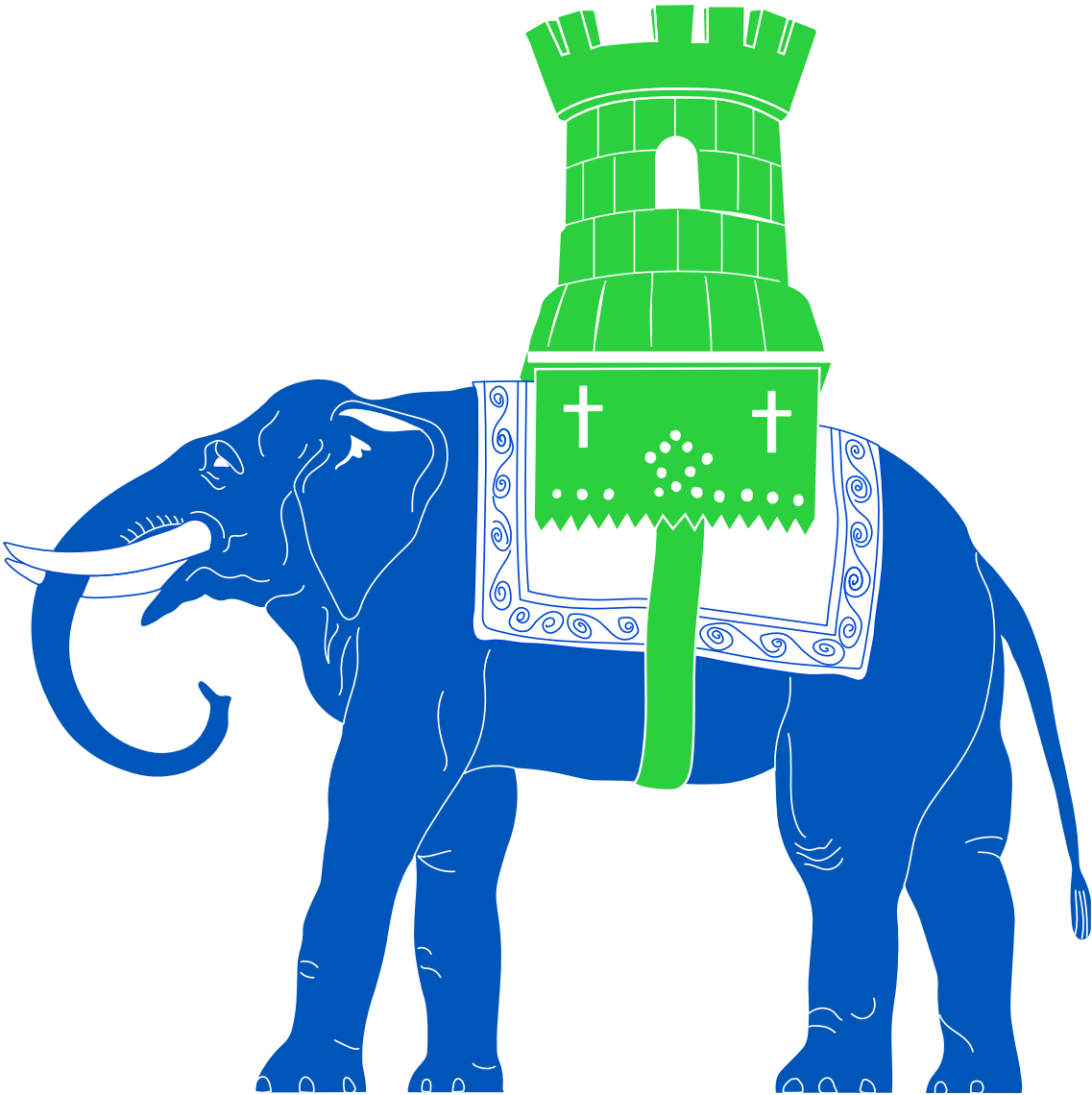


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1 Prelude

In 2016 we set out on an intellectual adventure. At workshops, roundtables, and panels in London, Sheffield, and Edinburgh, we asked dancers, publishers, intellectuals, architects, and urbanists one question: Can we design the conditions for culture?

The material we collected from these discussions led to a first publication edited by Adam Kaasa and John Bingham-Hall, published in 2017 by *Theatrum Mundi: Making Cultural Infrastructure*. Its release was not the beginning of the end but the end of the beginning. It opened the way for myriad follow up questions, new discussions, new projects and connections.

This publication is part of our fieldwork journal that follows the development of Urban Backstages research project and continues the work we started three years ago. Thanks to the support of the Ax:son Johnson Foundation and KTH Center for the Future of Places in Stockholm, we seek to study the conditions for culture in four European cities: London, Paris, Glasgow, and Marseille.

2 Setting the Scene

If cultural display is what happens onstage, what is the urban backstage, where production, experimentation, and rehearsal take place? Our investigative approach aims to document the ‘urban backstage’—the often-invisible spaces in which culture is produced before it meets the public eye.

The journal reflects a work-in-progress, our ongoing reflection, the first reaction to our incoming data and the first few months of our research. It's an invitation to further contribution, critique, and encouragement.

The first issue focuses on the neighbourhood of Elephant and Castle in London. It offers a window into rehearsal rooms, food production, makers' studios and creative workspaces, asking what makes these places to work and how they are used?



Figure 1 The Brutalist Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, Europe's first covered shopping complex built in 1965. Its decline over the last few decades has led to its appropriation by London's Latin American community. It is now home to numerous businesses, restaurants, cafes, shops and market stalls.





Figure 2

Facing the Elephant and Castle roundabout is the University of the Arts London Campus, part of the London College of Communication.



Figure 3

Elephant Road. The railway arches occupied by Latin and other non-Latin small businesses sit opposite the Elephant and Castle's major regeneration project, Elephant Park.



Figure 4

Part of the 1960's regeneration of Elephant and Castle, Erno Goldfinger's Hannibal House and Alexander Fleming House sit alongside the new residential tower, Two Fifty-One, by Allies and Morrison.

The stage: Elephant and Castle

We chose the neighbourhood of Elephant and Castle, located in the London borough of Southwark, for our pilot study because it brings together a number of different dynamics for cultural production within a distinct urban landscape. Not really a neighbourhood but a loosely-defined territory that has come to be known after the major transport hub of the same name, it is one of the most centrally located and fast-changing areas of the city. It is served by both the London Underground and National Rail networks, and more than 30 bus routes, featuring the highest Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) score (6b)¹.

Spatial

The high accessibility of the neighbourhood is visually attested when modelling its spatial relationship to the wider urban grid. Network analysis of the entire of London within the M25 peripheral boundary² highlights an area that lies on the intersection of main thoroughfares in the city, and constitutes one of the anchor points that serve both as a destination as well as a shortcut to move through it. Together with the City of London, which represents the business centre of the capital, and Oxford street, the commercial centre, Elephant and Castle spatially forms the third point in a triangle of core locations that prescribe central London—a latent cultural centre. In other words, Elephant and Castle itself (the road junction and transport node) is not the ‘backstage’ of the city in the way a segregated industrial zone would be, but a highly public front-stage that stimulates co-presence and social interactions between people moving at a number of different scales and in different modes.

Cultural

The area around the junction has become home to a dynamic mix of different socio-cultural practices, infrastructures of production, and built forms—some of them more hidden from the public realm than others. Among the most distinctive ones are:

- The Brutalist Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, Europe’s first covered shopping complex built in 1965 by the architects Boissenvain and Osmond of the Willetts Group. The building accommodates numerous businesses,

restaurants, cafes, shops and market stalls, as well as events held by Britain’s largest Latin American community. Still, it has received fierce criticism for its design, building aesthetics, and current poor condition, and in 2005 Time Out readers voted it as the ugliest building in London.³

- The railway arches occupied by Latin and other non-Latin small businesses whose tenancy is jeopardised by gentrification and their imminent sale by Network Rail to private investors.
- The local high street of Walworth Road which foregrounds a microcosm of independent and chain stores, entertainment venues, pubs, bars, cafes, and public buildings.⁴ It features an architecturally diverse built landscape which consists of a collection of 19th century public buildings and Manor public baths; Georgian terrace houses; and 21st century high-rise developments which aim to pump investment into the area and create opportunities for financialised housing assets or high-value retail.
- The post-war Heygate Estate, which was recently demolished as part of the major Elephant and Castle regeneration programme, displacing one-third of the tenanted households.⁵
- Two multi-building university complexes for London College of Communication and Southbank University
- A number of smaller cultural and educational institutions such as Southwark Playhouse, Siobhan Davies Studios, the Cinema Museum, Art Academy, and Imperial War Museum.
- Workspaces and rehearsal facilities aimed primarily at workers in the arts and creative industries, including Pullens Yards, Abacus Arts, and Artworks Elephant.
- Nightlife venues including Corsica Studios, Mercato Metropolitano, Ministry of Sound, and until 2017 the Coronet Theatre, scheduled for demolition as part of the area’s redevelopment.

In other words, this territory offers a diverse set of cultural dynamics: old and new, planned and emergent, fine-grained and large-scale, public

and private, political and artistic. It may be a surprise, given all of this, to hear the “depiction of the Elephant as a place of environmental degradation and poverty, stigmatised through a discourse of ‘ugliness’”;⁶ a depiction mobilised to justify the massive and controversial regeneration programme initiated by the local authority. Over the last nine years, Southwark Council has sold the publicly-held land of the housing estates and shopping centre to developers such as Lendlease and Delancey. Their joint £3bn privately-funded plan is due for completion in 2025.⁷ It proposes 21 projects in total (currently either complete, underway or in the pipelines), which among other things, propose the replacement of the shopping centre with a new town centre, the provision of new housing, green and open spaces, and the commercialisation of the railway arches.

Historical

An important crossroad since the Roman times, Elephant and Castle's urban growth began during the Victorian period when the industry in the area started to flourish. This attracted higher densities of cultural uses, movement, and people, and by the turn of the century, it was dubbed as the ‘Piccadilly of the South’.⁸ During the Blitz of WWII, the majority of department stores, music halls, theatres, and entertainment venues got destroyed, and the area got earmarked for redevelopment as part of a slum clearance initiative. A new urban plan was developed by the city and masterminded by Erno Goldfinger in the 1960s.⁹ It included high density housing estates (Perronet House by Sir Roger Walters in 1969, Heygate Estate by Tim Tinker in 1974), office buildings (Hannibal House, Alexander Fleming House by Erno Goldfinger in 1959), the UAL London College of Communication (by London County Council in 1964) and the shopping centre. The aim of the post-war plan was to alleviate the housing crisis and make the neighbourhood of Elephant and Castle attractive again by promoting visions of urban modernity. In the image of this, the standardised massively-produced concrete architecture was a perfect fit.

However, the area was soon written off as bad urbanism for its appearing brutality, and was neglected by public administration. Where successive governments failed to see the potential, new arrivals to the city found a home. In the 1990s, Latin American migrants and immigrants installed

in the area, and they have ever since exploited the local physical, social, and economic infrastructures to create a vibrant place for living and working, while enhancing the consistency and solidarity of the community. BAME commercial and other micro-firms in the area gradually concentrated to form eventually the largest and oldest Latin American business cluster in London with 96 businesses.¹⁰

Demographic

Especially within the premises of the shopping centre, independent small-scale retail places, mainly run by immigrants from Latin America, flourish;¹¹ places that provide affordable food, internet, and community services—all of which are vital infrastructures (in its broader sense) for the social life of the area. The clustering of workplaces in one place and the synergy this implies is an infrastructural condition for the good operation of not only the shopping centre but also the entire neighbourhood. Yet, a 2018 LSE report noted that the New London Plan does not consider the shopping centre to provide sector specialist activities even though it constitutes “a crucial economic and social anchor for comparatively low-entry retail and service activities”.¹² Although the building is not the focus of our study for it has been richly documented elsewhere and there is an ongoing community-led struggle for its protection, it forms an important set-piece for Latin American business and community life in London, and its influence in terms of appropriation is felt in the ways surrounding spaces including the railway arches have been adapted for particular modes of cultural production.

Public authorities have indeed been timid in recognizing the cultural, ethnic, and economic potential of the neighbourhood of Elephant and Castle. The current implementation of the London Plan¹³ designates Elephant and Castle as an ‘Opportunity Area’ (OA) with potential for growth, while the New London Plan¹⁴ includes the area within its ‘Central Activities Zone’ (CAZ) for it stands for “an agglomeration and rich mix of strategic functions as well as local uses, [which] should be promoted and enhanced”.

However, the reality is that the activities of around 100 independents, mainly BAME traders within the shopping centre, are now under threat. Firstly,



Figure 5

Accessibility: Space syntax analysis focusing on the area around Elephant and Castle: Segment angular integration measure or spatial accessibility at the global scale (entire London). Bluer and thicker lines represent higher accessibility potential, while greener and thinner ones lower.

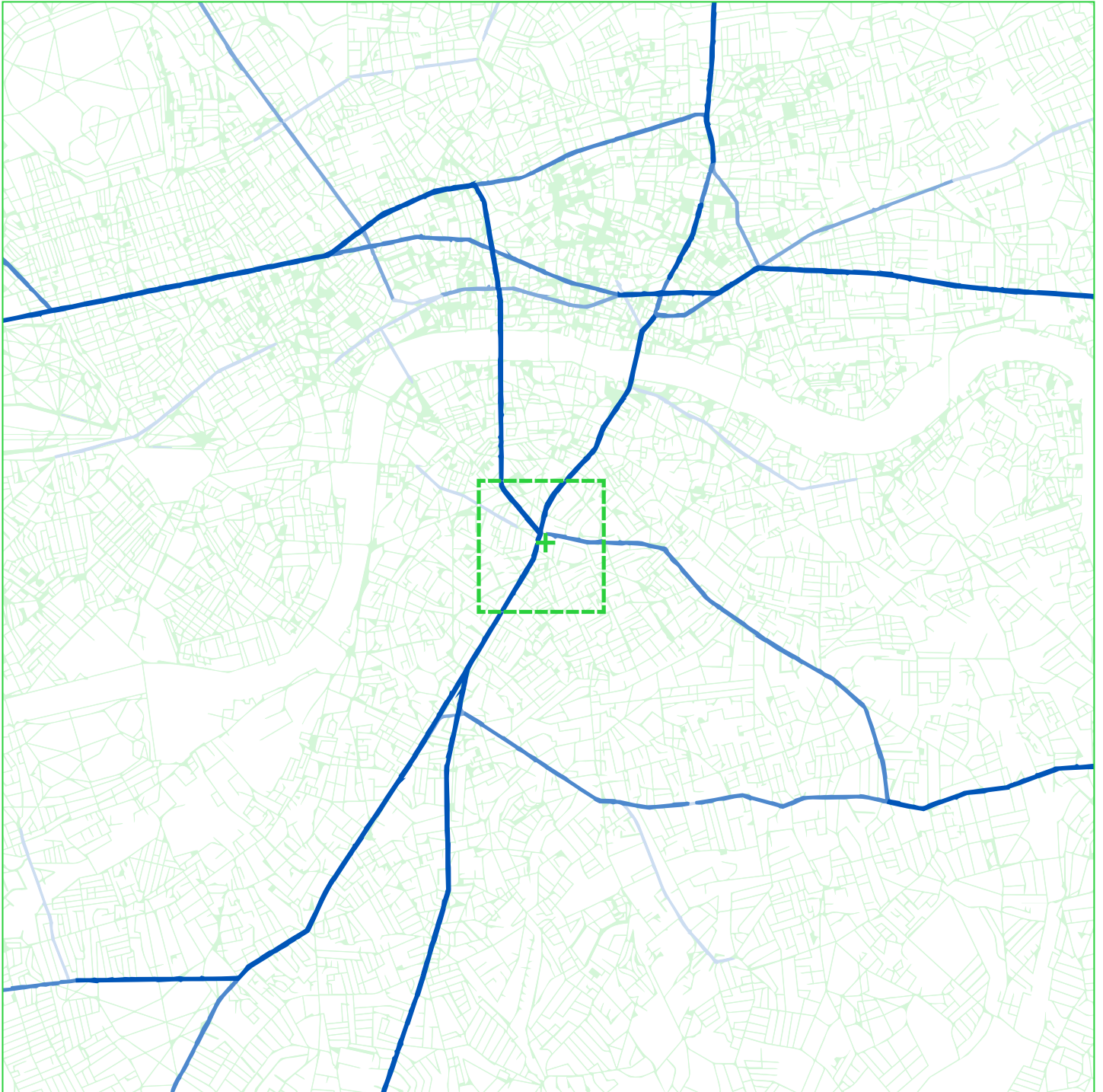


Figure 6

Shortest paths: Space syntax analysis focusing on the area around Elephant and Castle: Segment angular choice measure or shortest paths in through-movement at the global scale (entire London). Bluer and thicker lines represent higher potential for through-movement, while greener and thinner ones lower.

due to lack of floor space. The Greater London Authority (GLA) has already projected that Elephant and Castle will be severely impacted in terms of consumer expenditure and retail floorspace in the next 22 years.¹⁵ Secondly, due to limited maintenance that leaves no other solution than demolition at least to the eyes of property investors and public authorities. This negligence has long undermined the daily functioning of economic and creative activities, discouraged public investments, and precluded numerous opportunities for cultural growth in the area. Thirdly, even though Elephant and Castle has been excluded from Permitted Development Rights (PDR) (which allows turning office space into residential use) until 2019, the affordability of production spaces is jeopardised due to the regeneration plan and the recent sale of 5,200 railway arches to private developers—some of which are located in the area. In view of an imminent displacement, individuals and small businesses are going through significant stress and uncertainty over the future of their production spaces. This fear is exemplified in a 50% reduction between 2013 and 2017 in National Insurance Number applications among the nationalities that operate in the area such as Colombians and Nigerians.¹⁶ Interestingly, a recent article reported that less than half of the traders in the shopping centre and far less from those that operate outside the centre have been offered temporary relocation space in the new development;¹⁷ which once again proves how vulnerable small actors are in relation to larger industries in urban transformation scenarios.

The set: London's railway infrastructure

This pilot study focuses on one architectural typology: London's railway arches. Some estimate that there may be up to 10,000 such arches in London.¹⁸ Built in the second half of the 19th century, they are mainly present in South and East London where marshy lands made it difficult to 'cut and cover' and build semi-buried railway lines. As Francesca Froy and Howard Davis explain: "By building rail tracks on elevated platforms, the railway developers preserved existing road routes and minimized the need for compensation to property owners due to loss of land [...]. The arches supported the heavy railway uses efficiently while also allowing water to drain. To give an idea of

scale, the London and Greenwich railway involved 878 railway arches, with 10 km of viaduct running through the south-central London area [...]."¹⁹ Some tried to develop the arches—a by-product of the railway tracks on top of them—as housing, but quickly gave up because of the noise, pollution and vibration that one can easily imagine. Marginal spaces, the arches were progressively used in the late 19th century and throughout the 20th century for light industry, 'dirty' and 'low-class' trade businesses. Blacksmiths, stables, farrier, mortar fabrics, tanning in the Victorian era and then mechanics, garages, storages, amongst other similar businesses have occupied the premises in the 20th century.

As commercial rent increased steadily in the 1990s and onwards, arches provided relatively cheap business spaces in sought-after central and/or gentrifying areas such as Hackney, Bermondsey, and Brixton. They now house breweries, bakeries, cheese cellars, coffee roasters but also architects, co-working spaces and retail. Their low rents often constitute the sole opportunity for these businesses to survive in Inner London as rents keep soaring: between 2011 and 2016, commercial property rents increased by 70% on average across London, with former poor and de-industrialised areas of London, such as Shoreditch, increasing much more rapidly by 181%.²⁰ With time, property developers and portfolio managers have become fully aware of the new identity of railway arches: they have become desirable properties identified as trendy spaces with an industrial patina.

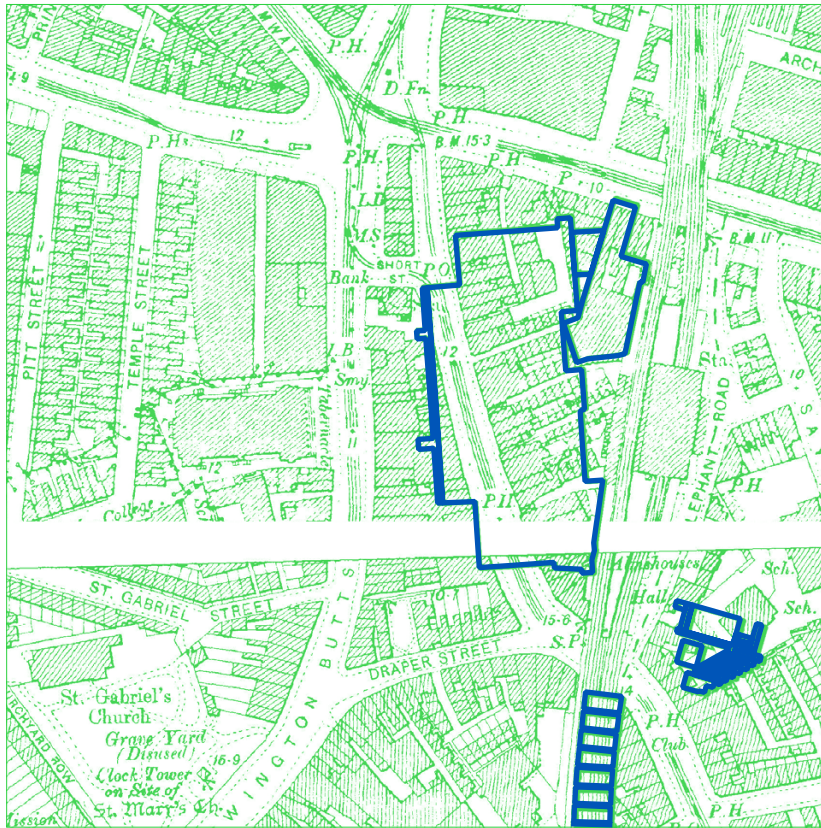
Furthermore, these arches have constituted a socio-economic ecosystem of "pragmatic urbanism" and "industrial streets".²¹ In the words of Ben Mackinnon, founder of the E5 Bakehouse located in one of Hackney's railway arches: "it [is] the combination of start-up creative businesses and traditional manufacturing that [makes] the area so interesting. This mix of enterprise can be found in railway arches in many other parts of London and the UK. Now this is at risk. As landlords hike up rents and it becomes much more difficult to start a grassroots creative business, there is a homogenisation of culture."²²

Amongst those tenants whose presence and socio-economic activity is key for resilience and against the "homogenisation of culture" described by Mackinnon, are multi-ethnic and migrant

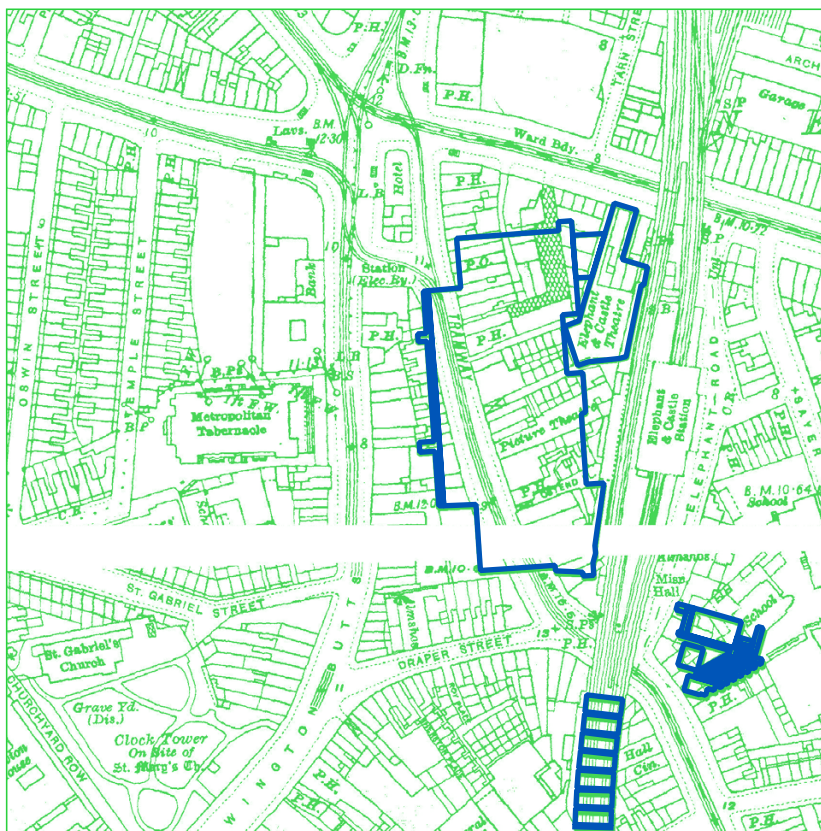
tenants. The hybrid and agile spaces they have developed, have been key in our research and we explore them largely in the body of this study. Studies by Suzi Hall^{23,24} and Laura Vaughan²⁵ have demonstrated the complex socio-economic tissue of retail, service and light industry developed by migrant and multi-ethnic communities; their flexible and agile use of the built environment; and their economic resilience whilst serving very fragile and underprivileged communities of customers.

Local planning authorities have developed strategies to promote these 'untapped' commercial opportunities, inspired by Paris's Promenade Plantée, but most especially by New York City's Highline. In Southwark, the borough of our pilot study, this translated into the 'Low Line' strategy developed in 2015,²⁶ accompanied by controversial refurbishments and rent hikes across the Network Rail portfolio.²⁷ In September 2018, Network Rail, which is said to own most of the arches in the country, has sold its portfolio of 5,200 properties to

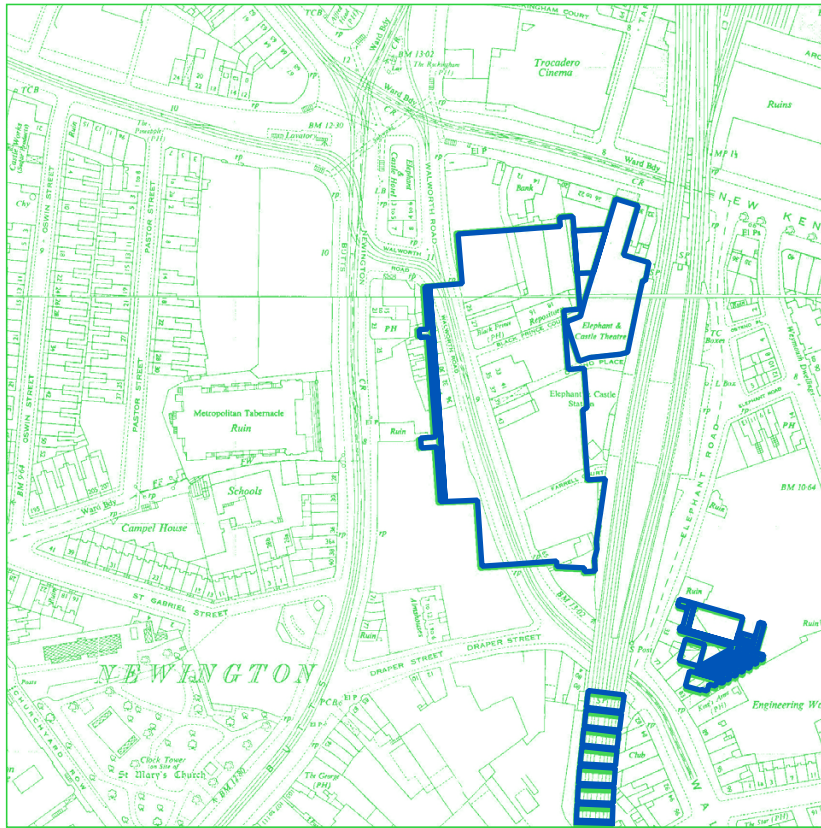
Telereal Trillium and Blackstone Property Partners for £1.46 billion in a move that will bring "major improvements for passengers and reducing the need for taxpayers to fund the railway" according to the public infrastructure operator.²⁸ The move sparked fears amongst tenants that the rents will soon become unaffordable, as Network Rail already increased significantly rents in the run-up to the sale. In a report released in May 2019, the National Audit Office evaluated the sale as "value for money" in respect to the "government's policy to sell assets where there is no policy reason for continued public ownership" but also acknowledged that it is of "some concern that the impact on tenants was not an explicit sale objective and was only considered late in the sale process. The long-term value for money of this transaction will depend upon several factors, including how Network Rail manages its ongoing relationship with the leaseholder and the impact of the sale on stakeholders, including tenants, and local economies."²⁹



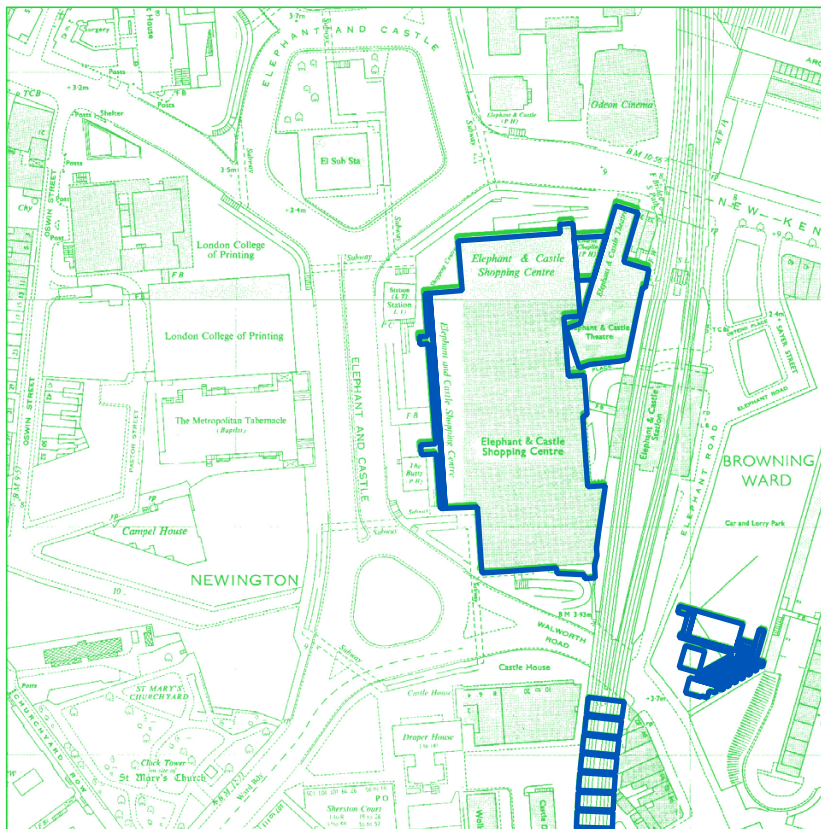
1890s
Town Plans 1:1056 1st Edition 1875-76



1910s
Town Plans 1:1056 1st Edition 1895-96



1950s
National Grid 1:1250 1st Edition 1951-52



1970s
National Grid 1:1250 1st Edition 1970-76

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3 The Characters

In Elephant and Castle, part of the backstage of London's cultural production, there are a few characters at play: a Victorian tenement where artists have taken over industrial workshops, a social and economic beehive for Latin communities, a co-working space for 'creatives', and an Aladdin's cave of dance studios, fashion design and audio-visual storage supporting London's catwalks and museums' exhibitions.

The selection of case studies is based on fine-grained knowledge of the area—through ethnographic exploration, interviews, hearsay—rather than statistical or representational sampling. It is also based on our own personal relationship to the area—four out of the six researchers in this project live in South London. We have over time developed an intimate relationship to this part of London: shopping, going out, cycling through.

By selecting the cases, we observe a range of different dynamics spatially proximate to one another, covering both purpose-built and adapted buildings in London. We also highlight situations in which activities do not fit well within policy-driven definitions of culture but relate to the creative industries through direct interaction, proximity, or the use of similar infrastructures. Our aim is to reveal their relationship to the tangible and intangible conditions of the built environment that is often missed by the kinds of big data and mapping approaches adopted by public authorities and institutions. As we will move across the four cities of this research, we will also aim to focus on case studies that represent different spatial typologies and modes of provision and are supported by different conditions, collecting thus a variety of urban approaches and suggesting ways these can inform one another.

In Elephant and Castle, our case studies are three clusters of railway arches located on Maldonado Walk, Spare Street and Robert Dashwood Way, alongside a yard of London's last Victorian tenements, the Pullens Estate.

On the one hand, the three clusters of railway arches share the exact same spatial typology and built form, but differ on their design, management, funding, the activities they support and the extra-economic values they produce for their surroundings. They were never intentionally built to accommodate traders, artists, small and medium-

sized enterprises which support other businesses. Yet, without becoming aware of it and as a side effect of the above-ground railway infrastructure, Network Rail also provided the infrastructural conditions for such 'marginal spaces' to be appropriated for hybrid uses as a result of a truly 'pragmatic urbanism'.³⁰ All three cases feature arches arranged side-by-side forming a strip that opens onto either a back alley, pedestrian path, or low-traffic street. This linear development along a street and their subsequent inter-dependence to sustain local socio-economic activities can explain why arches have been regarded as the industrial 'high streets'; a fact that also explains how they get their names: Maldonado Walk, Robert Dashwood Way, and Spare Street.

On the other hand, Pullens Yards is a 19th century purpose-built space for makers now joined by artists. Since its conception, it was designed to serve exactly this purpose: living and making in the same premises. Programmatically, it accommodates cultural and economic backstage uses similar to the ones found in railway arches. It also shares the same urban fabric and benefits from the same highly-networked system of cultural actors and creative industries. However, Pullens Yards differs in all other terms, such as spatial configuration, built form, management, operation, public facing, modes of production et al. In that sense, the inclusion of this case study broadens the research's definitions, offers a comparative perspective to the study, and enriches the discussion around stages of cultural production in the city.

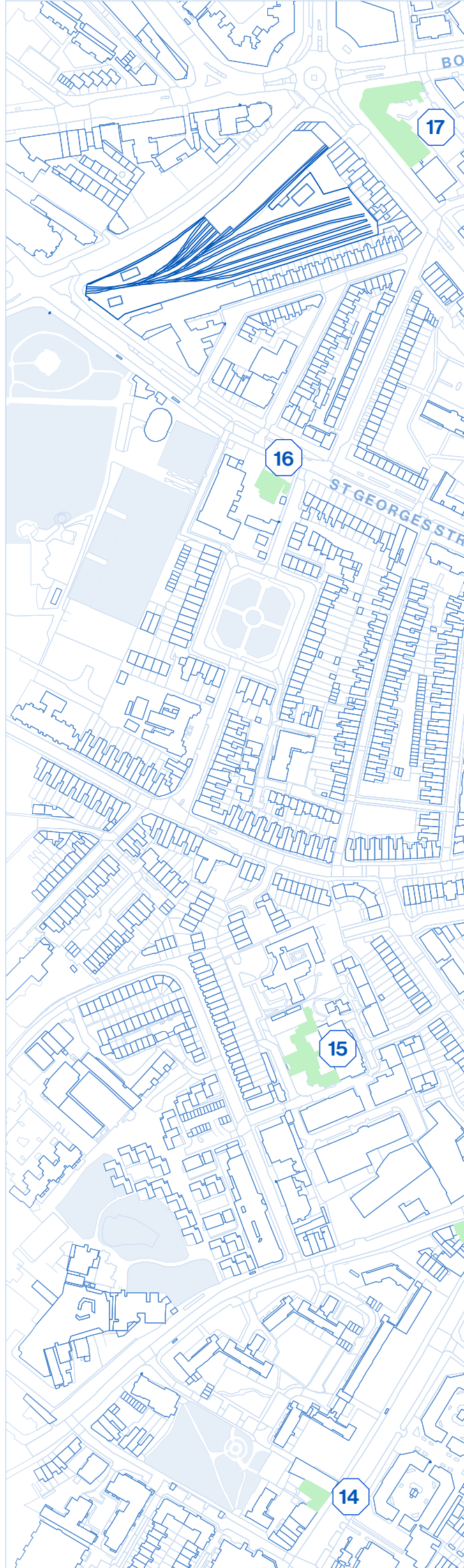
The following part of the report will expand on each of these case studies and discuss the material, immaterial, ecological conditions that helped cultural production to emerge and be sustained in all cases.³¹

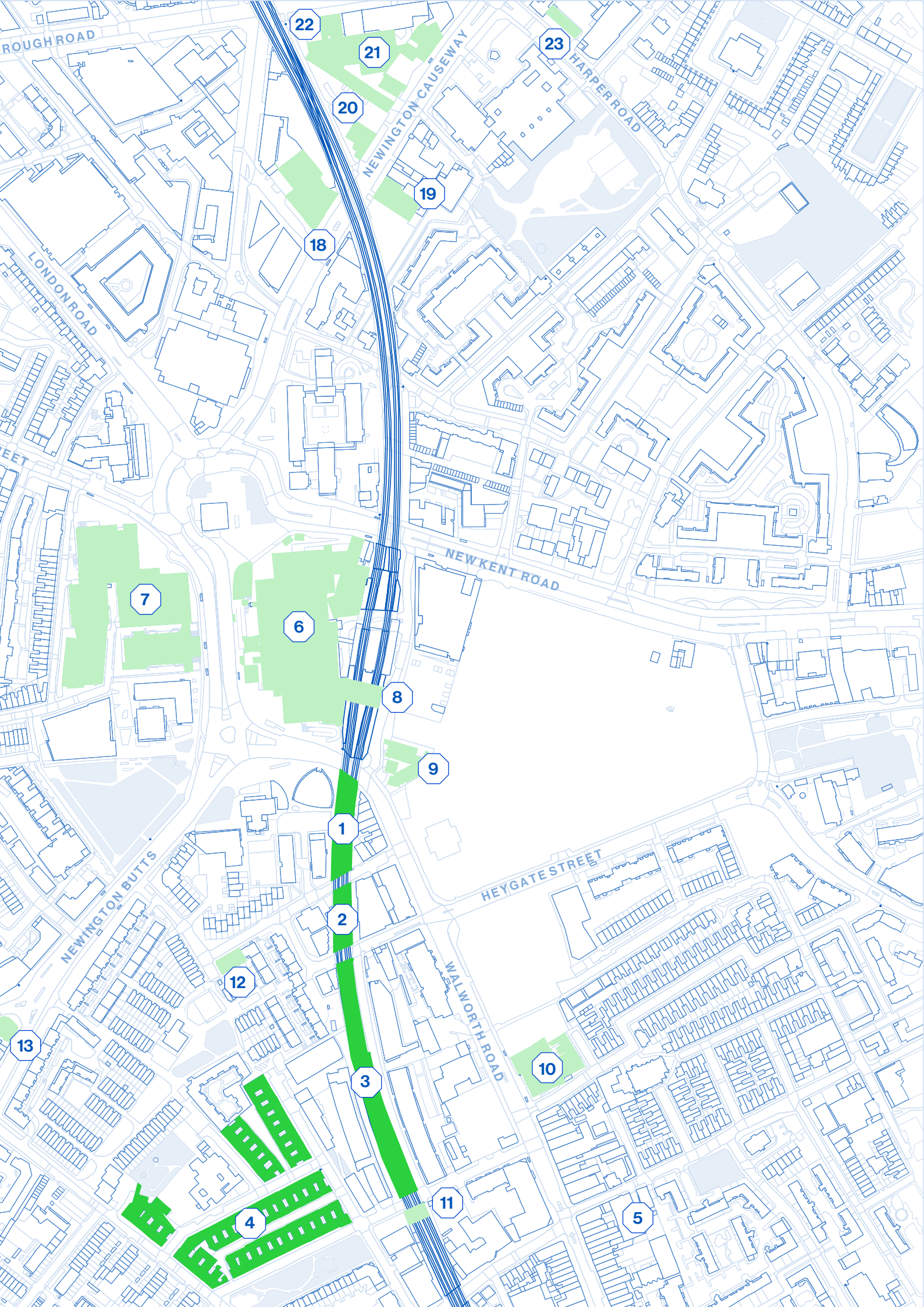
Case Studies

- 1 Maldonado Walk
- 2 Spare Street
- 3 Robert Dashwood Way
- 4 Pullens Yard

Related Projects

- 5 Browning Street
- 6 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre
- 7 London College of Communications
- 8 Corsica Studios
- 9 Artworks Elephant
- 10 Art Academy
- 11 Husky Studios
- 12 Hampton Court Palace Hotel
- 13 Brasserie and Wine Bar Toulouse Lautrec
- 14 Old Red Lion
- 15 Cinema Museum
- 16 Siobhan Davies Studios
- 17 The Clarence Centre for Enterprise and Innovation
- 18 Ministry of Sound
- 19 Southwark Playhouse
- 20 The Paperworks
- 21 Mercato Metropolitan
- 22 London School of Musical Theatre
- 23 Pipeline





ROUGH ROAD

22

21

23

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19

18

7

6

8

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1

2

HEYGATE STREET

12

WALWORTH ROAD

13

3

10

4

11

5

NEWINGTON CAUSEWAY

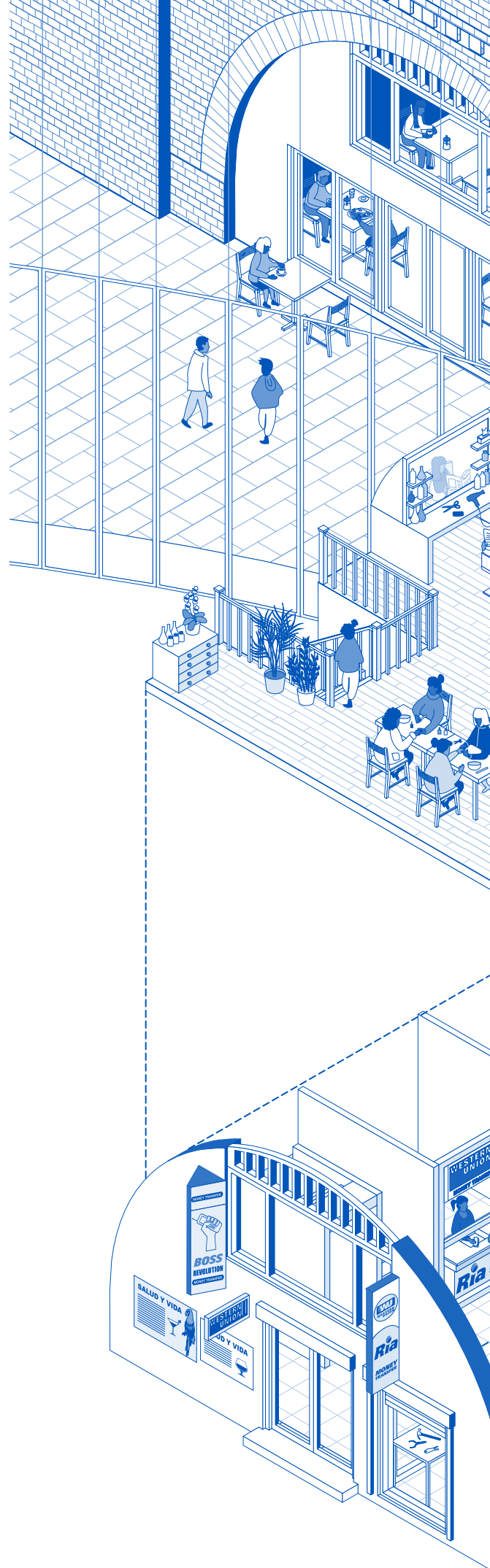
HARPER ROAD

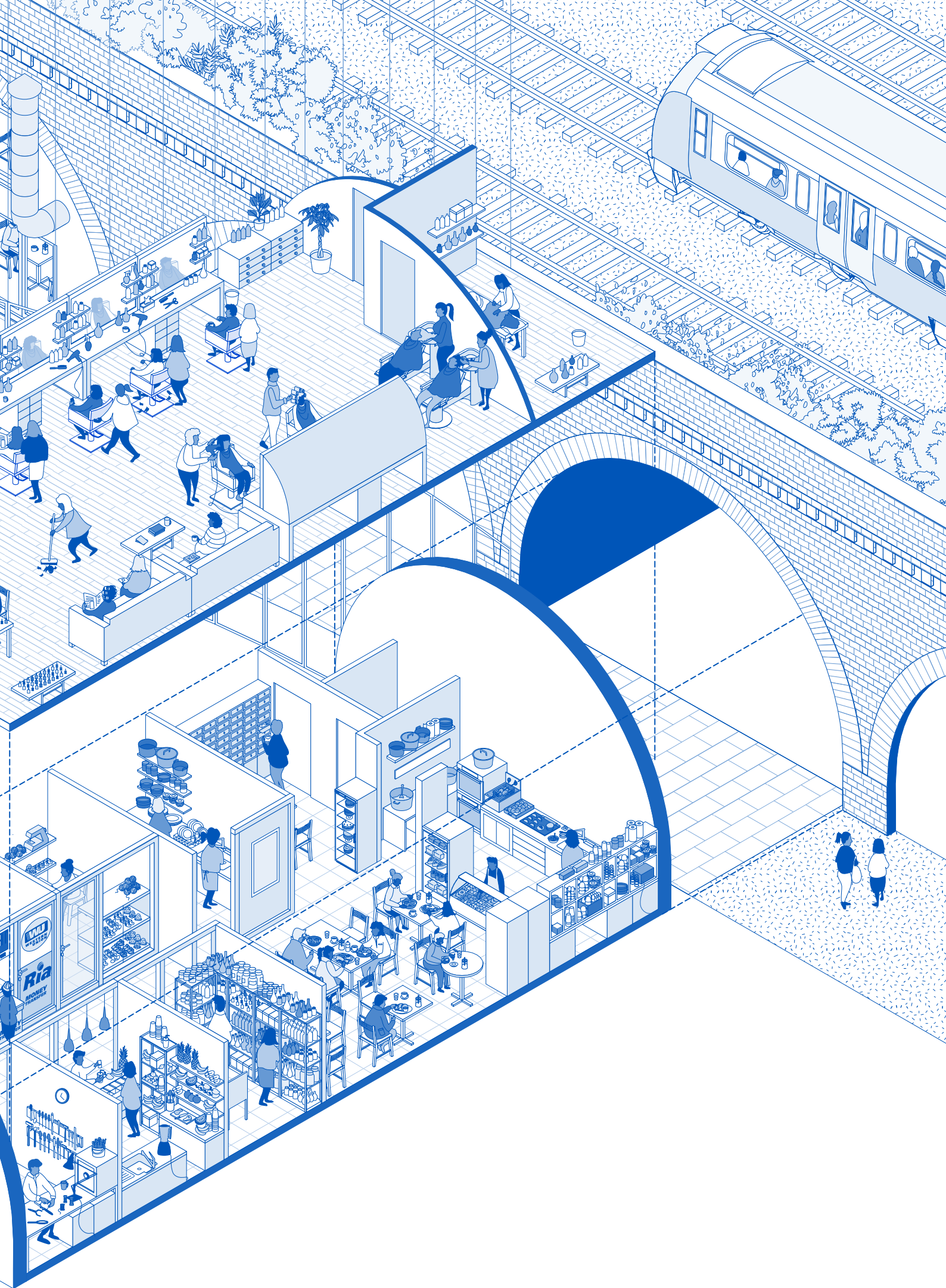
LONDON ROAD

NEW KENT ROAD

NEWINGTON BUTTS

Act I: Maldonado Walk





Act I: Maldonado Walk

Landlord
Network Rail

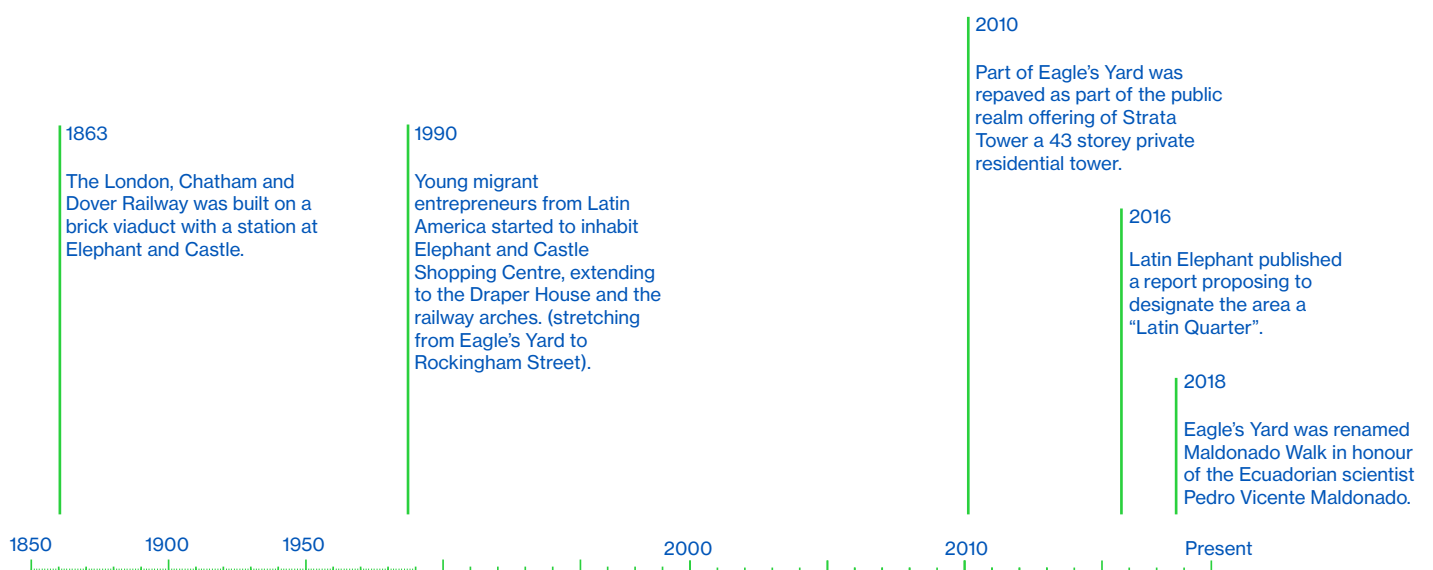
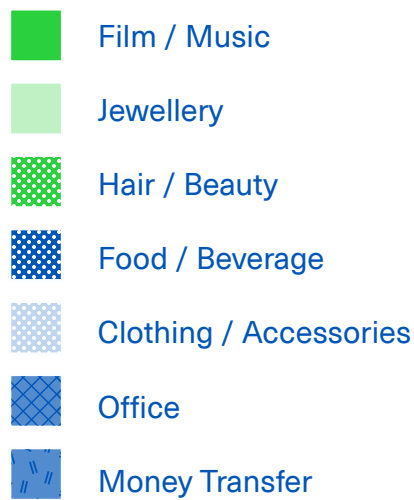
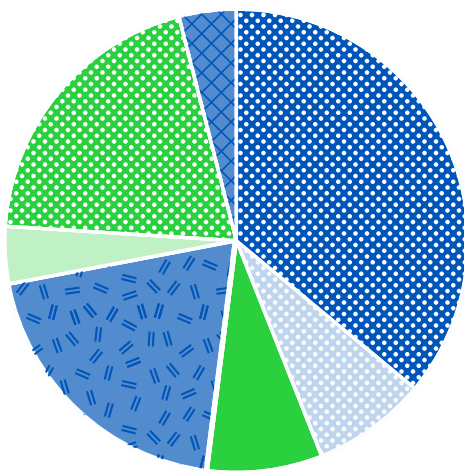
Price
100 £/m²

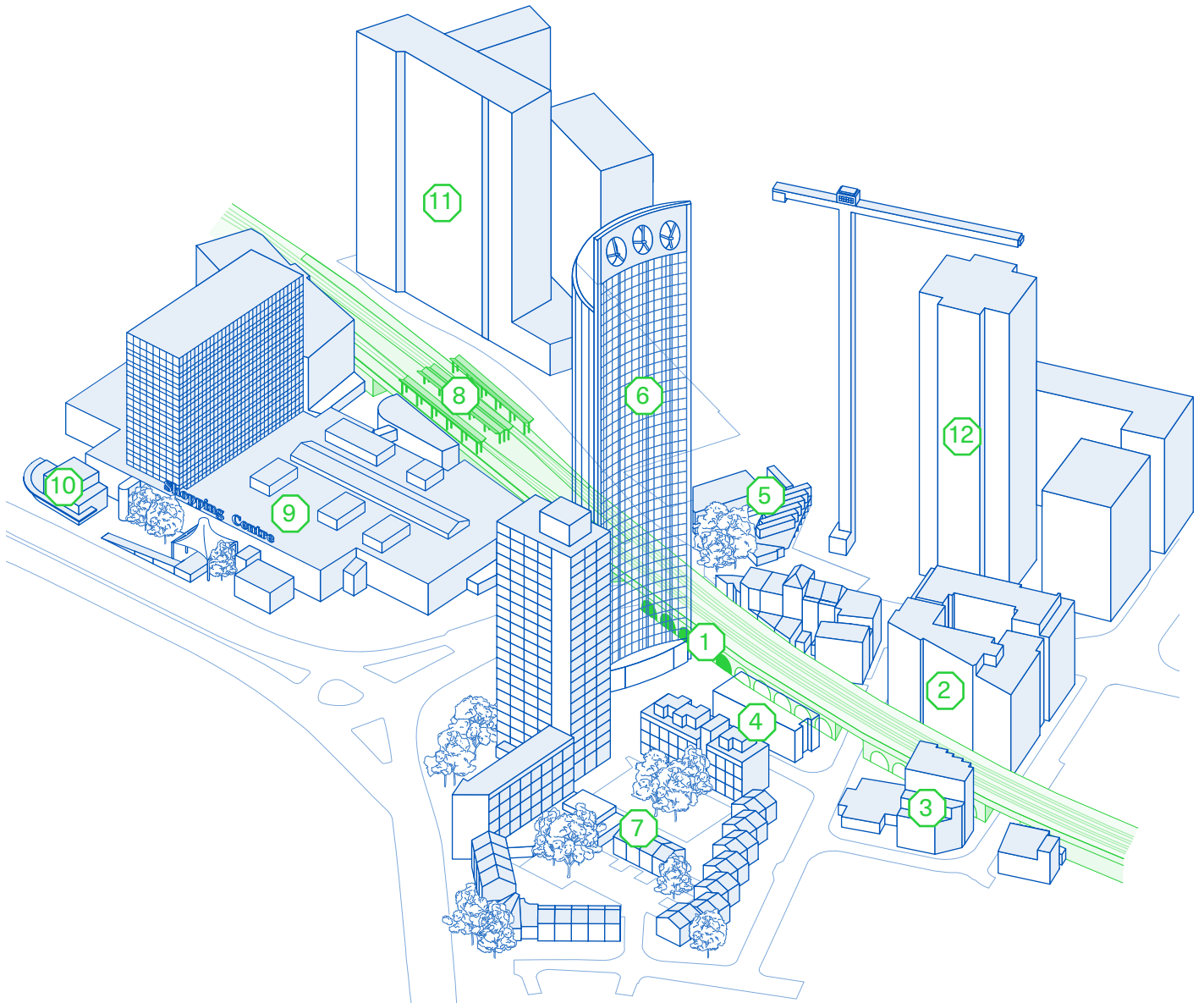
Number of Units
8

Planning Use Class
A1 Commercial / Retail

Number of Businesses
25

Lease Type
Long Term





- 1 Maldonado Walk
- 2 Highline Student Housing
- 3 Elephant and Castle Day Nursery
- 4 Crossway Christian Centre
- 5 Artworks Elephant
- 6 Strata Tower
- 7 The Draper Estate
- 8 Elephant and Castle Railway Station
- 9 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre
- 10 Elephant and Castle Underground Station
- 11 Elephant Park West Grove
- 12 Elephant Park West Grove Square



Maldonado Walk

The eight arches in Maldonado Walk are the first stretch of the railway arches in Victorian brick construction style. This strip accommodates roughly 25 workspaces which were, until recently, owned and rented by Network Rail with informal rolling leases.

They contain different types of businesses including food production, jewellery making, fashion design, hair, beauty, film, music, and clothing. The arches fall into A1 planning use class, meaning they are intended for use as or use as shops, retail warehouses, outlets, and showrooms.

The Latin American community

Located opposite the 43-storey residential Strata Tower, Maldonado Walk is a section of pedestrian walkway running along the west side of the railway viaduct between Walworth Road and the Crossway Christian Centre on Hampton Street. A satellite of the Latin American businesses clustered in the shopping centre, the many small industries they contain, seem like something of a hardy outpost surviving in the face of intense speculative development.

While local authorities have determined the arches suitable for commerce and retail, the fact remains that they are culturally idiomatic forms derived from the home countries of the migrants, and require more attention in classification. Activities such as food, arts and crafts are, as local activist and scholar Patricia Roman-Velazquez describe: "extremely important and defining elements of any culture, which bring communities together and attract others to join in and understand more."³²

The spatial, cultural and social history of Maldonado Walk is part of the story of the larger area of Elephant and Castle. Latin American immigrants in the 1990s inhabited the Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, spilling out to the Draper House and the railway arches, stretching from Eagle's yard to Rockingham Street. In 2010, part of Eagle's yard was repaved as part of the public realm of Strata Tower. In 2018 Southwark Council decided to change the name of this stretch of railway arches from Eagle Yard to Maldonado Walk after an Ecuadorian scientist named Pedro Vicente Maldonado. Whilst the council has a

controversial and fraught relationship with the Latin community over current plans to demolish and regenerate the shopping centre, the choice of renaming the street is a timid nod to the existing community as a "source of pride not just for Ecuadorians, but for Latin Americans all the way from Mexico to Patagonia."³³ The change of spatial marker from 'yard' (indicating a working space besides the street) to 'walk' (indicating a thoroughfare and destination) is in line with the council's ambitious 'Low Line' strategy. The 'Low Line' aims to "facilitate economic growth and improve access and permeability along the rail viaducts" to attract among other things, small independent commercial businesses to encourage economic vitality.³⁴

In the light of the Elephant and Castle redevelopment plan, the Latin Elephant group³⁵ has collaborated with local retailers and community groups across several sites including the railway arches at Maldonado walk and the shopping centre to propose an alternative development agenda for the area. Based on these initiatives, Latin Elephant works for the integration and recognition of Latin Americans and champions the rights of existing Latin American businesses.³⁶ In 2016 it proposed a strategy to designate the area a 'Latin Quarter' with the aim of increasing the legitimacy and visibility of migrant traders through a series of public realm upgrades. However, its propositions have not been adopted by the council so far. Whilst the fight to retain the shopping centre has been lost, the future of Maldonado Walk hangs in the balance due to the recent sale of the railway arches, which threatens the affordability for the occupant micro businesses.

Visibility from the street

The micro-businesses and activities that operate within Maldonado Walk have generally low visibility from the street and poor active frontages. These depend on the size, materials, and the location of doors and windows as well as the interior configuration of spaces which vary in each arch. At the same time, the breeze block construction limits the amount of glazing possible in the facade, obstructing the visual engagement between those in the street and those on the ground and intermediate floors of the arches. As noted by our interviewees, the choice of materials, for example, was made entirely for financial purposes. Whilst some of the activities inside are production-

based rather than retail-focused—the jewellery designer and repairer, and children’s clothing maker—the majority of them such as restaurants and cafes, could benefit from a more direct and transparent public/private interface.

This lack of visibility is a challenge for the businesses, some of which overcome it by using alternative mediated forms, like social media, local news, and consumer sites. For example, one trader who runs a hair and beauty salon in the strip mentioned: “I use Facebook, LinkedIn, and also for Latin News. Now we are on Groupon.” Others choose to put up signs to attract customers and brand their retail premises.

Their strategies differ based on the design, interior arrangement, and fit-out of each arch, which are typically decided by the lead tenants, and are reliant on easily installable and standardised solutions. These leaseholders are the ones responsible for subdividing the premises and renting them out for different types of activities. This way similar activities along the same stretch of arches feature differing levels of visibility and accessibility. For example, one restaurant has a partially glazed facade and outdoor seating whilst another one has only one door with a menu beside it that invites passers-by to enter, order and sit upstairs.

The spatial positioning of businesses in an arch has further implications concerning views and access to natural light; but again, “there’re ways round it.” In one case of limited glazing, a beauty parlour owner has configured her activities in such a way that, hair colouring happens at the front while waxing and massage are offered at the back.

Managing networks and spaces

The increase of business rates in the area makes it difficult for independent traders to remain; one tenant noted that business rates tripled over the last three years. One way to combat this has been for the lead tenant to further subdivide the arches, creating smaller but more affordable spaces. An example was given by one tenant whose hairdressing salon occupied the whole upper mezzanine level of one arch. She has split the lease between her and another lead tenant sharing the cost of bills, rent, and business rates: “I bought the sharing lease, so I do not charge a

monthly rent. Sharing lease has no limit, and leases are updated every ten years.” Whilst she occupies the whole top floor, the ground floor tenant (with whom she shares the lease) has further subdivided his space, subletting it to eight micro-businesses. The following drawings show these two different layouts, with the salon above, and the ground floor sub-divided into small shops on each side of a tiny passage.

Although the lead tenants of the arches at Maldonado Walk take control of the subdivision and subletting, the design and adaptation of each workspace is a process mediated between tenants. Due to the lackadaisical attitude of Network Rail, the internal alterations to the arches are not subject to planning permission, which allows a level of flexibility for changes. For example, the salon owner noted: “Nobody ever checks. This [space] was so dark, the floor had no ceiling, there was no emergency door, the window was super tiny and there was one inside. I built the main door, a separate entrance. The light is much better now, especially for colouring hair. I did everything myself.”

Effectively, the businesses are self-managed with informal rolling leases and the traders are mostly part of Elephant’s wider Latin community. The colourful Spanish-language signs, flags, and food menus celebrate the presence of the Latin American community in the area, which one tenant described as “a big family”. One of the business owners emphasised her relation to the rest of traders: “I know my neighbours and feel part of the community. In my case, I get along well with everyone, and we help each other [...] I do leave my keys with other people.” The sense of community among the traders support a level of informality of leases and contracts. The working hours in these arches are also flexible and self-imposed based on the business demands, as the business owner in one arch stated: “it depends on how much work there is, especially on weekends we work late.”

The adaptation of the arches has happened gradually in response to the requirements of particular businesses. A lack of infrastructural provision from the landlord has meant both an onus on, and liberty for, the business owners to adapt their spaces and ways of operating specifically to their activities.

Legacy of empowerment

Sites such as Maldonado Walk play an important role in allowing migrants to enter formal employment in the country. The arches offer affordable workspaces and support diverse forms of socio-economic exchange for their tenants. The flexibility of spaces and contracts, the rent being negotiated by workspace size, and a close-knit community have all provided independent individuals the opportunity to start, grow, and expand their businesses over time. For instance, we interviewed a hairdresser and beautician from Ecuador who has been living in the UK for 22 years and working at Elephant and Castle for 12 years. She started by renting a chair as a hairdresser whilst learning English, and over the last eight years, she has been earning enough to take on a lease for the whole top floor of one arch, convert it into a salon and take on two employees.

Self-management is an important aspect of the way the Latin arches are run and the individuals are empowered. It also indicates that cooperation does not necessarily need a market top-down model and poses the question of how much planning and exogenous intervention is needed. Maldonado Walk has already been directly impacted by the large-scale social housing demolitions that have happened as part of the area's regeneration, redistributing communities and fragmenting these hard-won social and economic relationships. The stability of its model depends on the actors working together, sharing infrastructures, and disseminating information among their networks.



Figure 7

Loose planning regulations and a lack of interest in controlling and managing the railway arches of Maldonado Walk allowed a number of small businesses to grow and adapt the space based on their needs. The owner of this hair salon and beauty parlour rents the entire mezzanine floor of one arch and arranges her activities according to access to natural light. All internal changes are made by herself.



Figure 8 Maldonado Walk accommodates Latin businesses and traders who exist at the coalface of redevelopment in Elephant and Castle. Directly next door looms the 43-storey Strata Tower, an early outlier for the area's increasing property speculation that is dramatically altering Elephant and Castle's skyline.





Figure 9

A money transfer office forms the lead tenant of this space subletting to a diverse mix of tenants including a tropical fruit juice stall, a jewellery maker and a dress shop that makes and sells baby clothes. These self-managed and self-organised structures allow different types of production to co-habit within the railway arch.



Figure 10

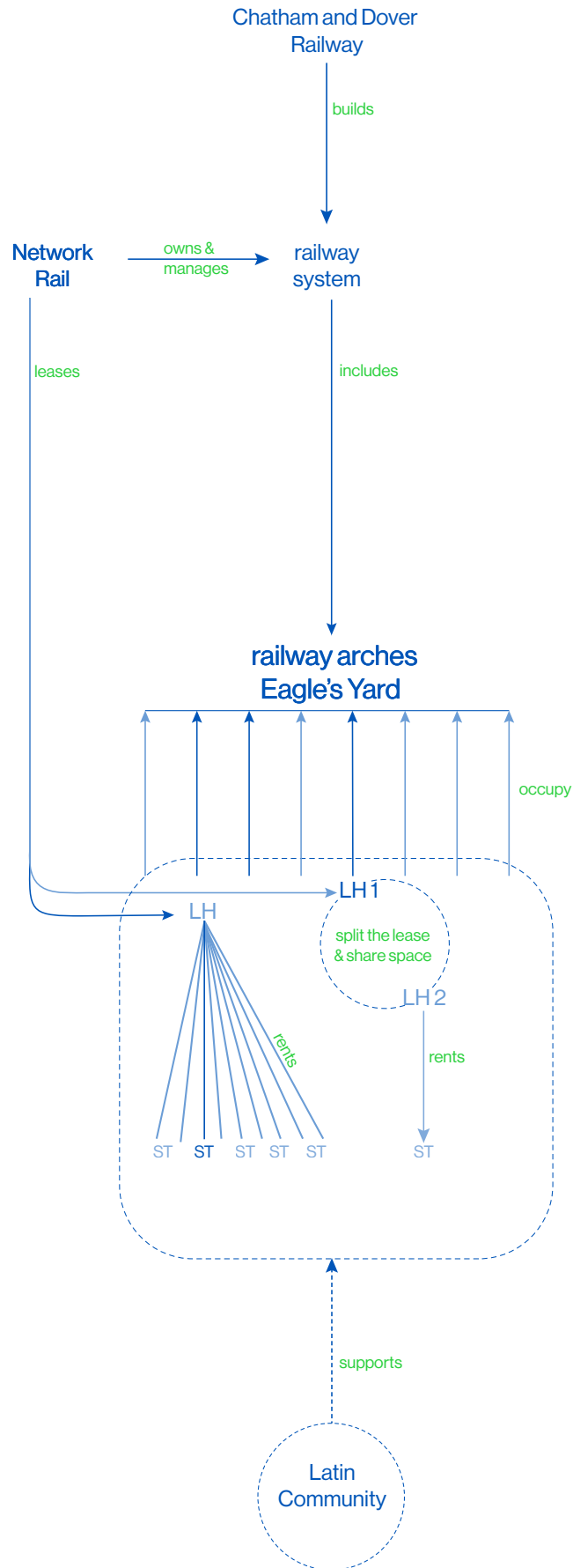
As most of the traders in these arches are immigrants, having a permanent address is essential, particularly when trying to find employment and housing. The post boxes in one of the arches play a social function in helping migrants take the first step towards being formally recognised as citizens.



Figure 11

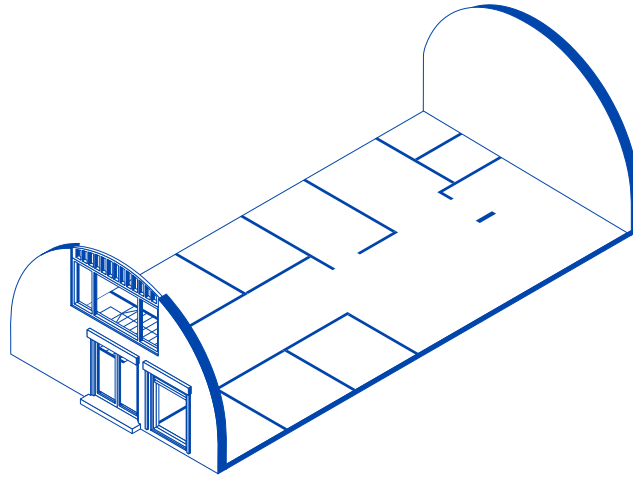
Food production is an essential expression of migrant cultures and a sensorial link to home. The restaurants and cafes rely on locally-based suppliers who import goods from Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile, while relying on their own knowledge to improvise the recipes. Even though these arches have low visibility from the street, their business serve beyond local customers and support the wider Latin community in the area, which creates a closed-loop of supply, provision, and clientele in a close-knit community.

Networks

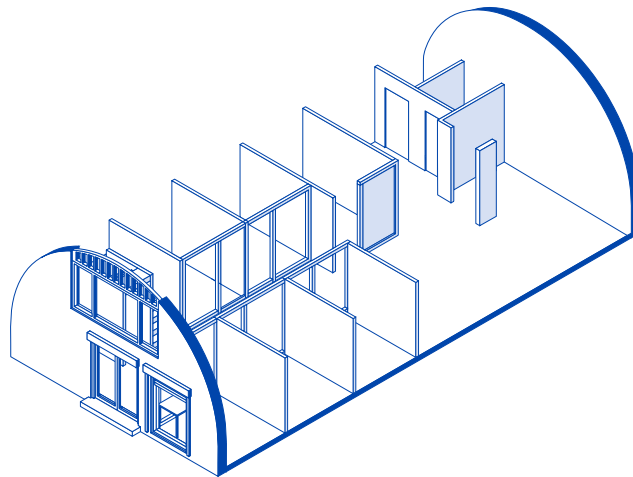


ST: Sub-Tenant
LH: Leaseholder

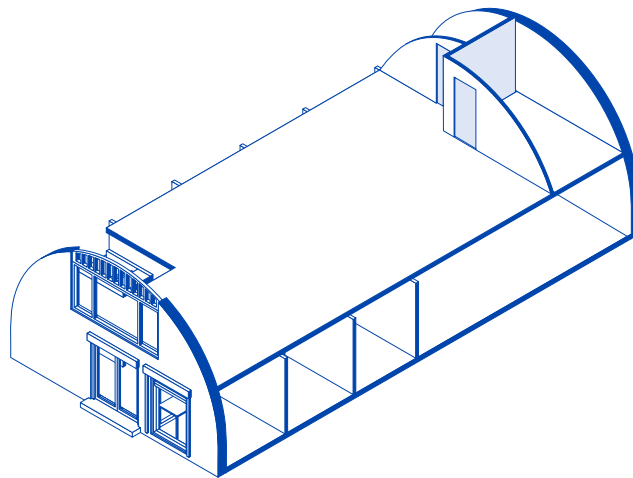
Adaptations



1. Lead tenant takes on the lease and sublets to several small businesses



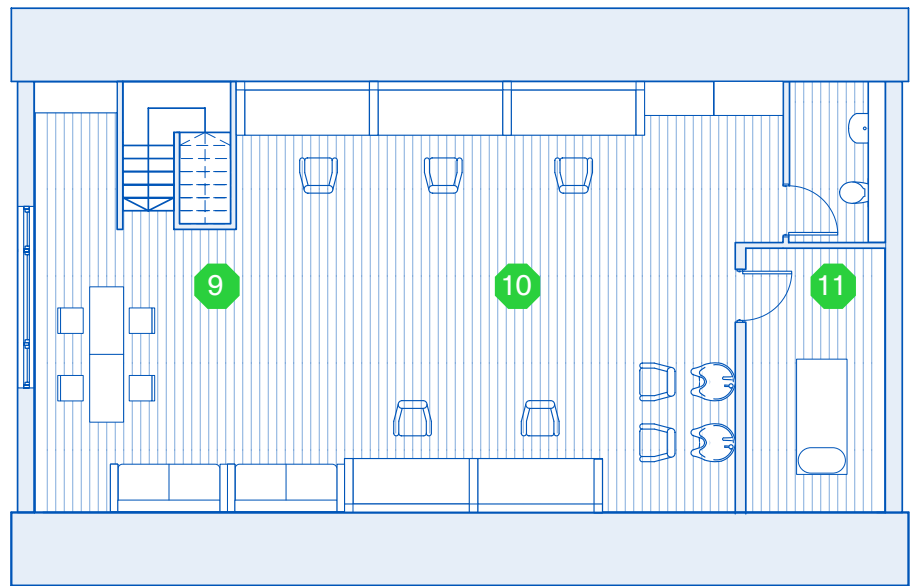
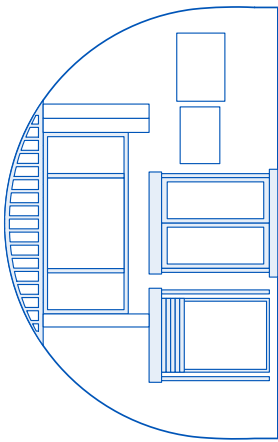
2. Internal subdivisions are self built by the tenants to create individual workspaces



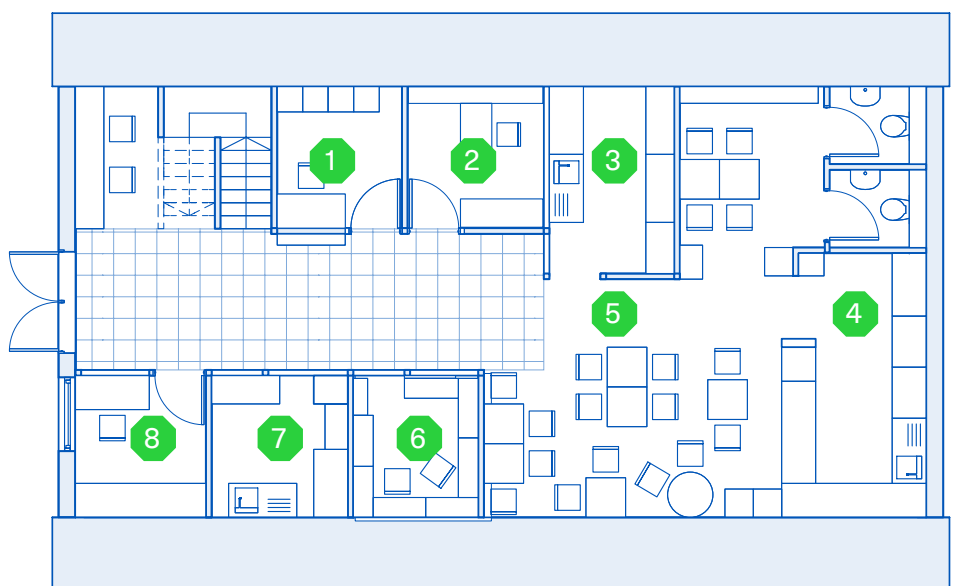
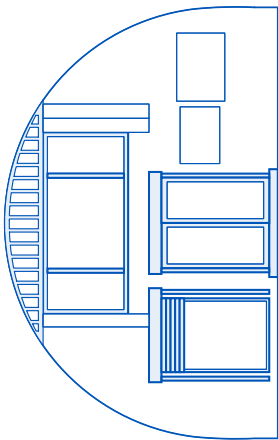
3. A second floor is added to accommodate a hairdresser's salon

Plans

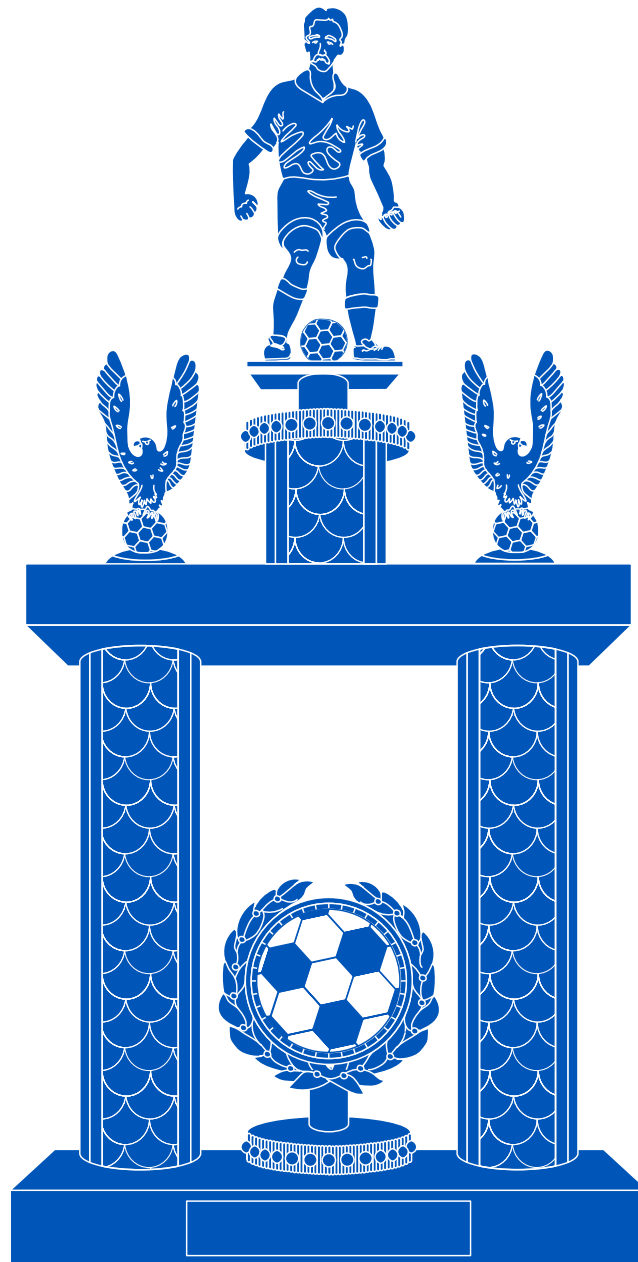
- 1 Money Transfer
- 2 Baby Clothing
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Bakery
- 5 Cafe
- 6 Pharmacy
- 7 Tropical Juices and Ice Cream
- 8 Jewellery Maker
- 9 Nail Bar
- 10 Hairdresser's
- 11 Treatment Room



Upper Floor

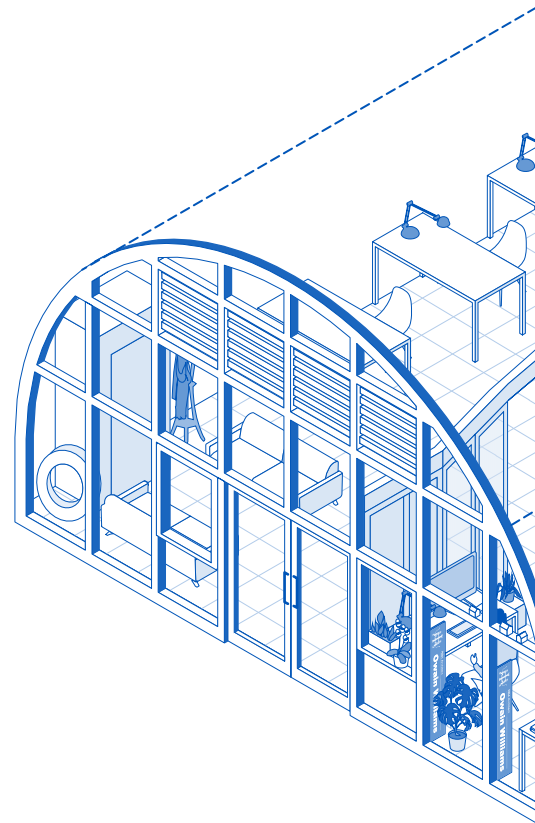


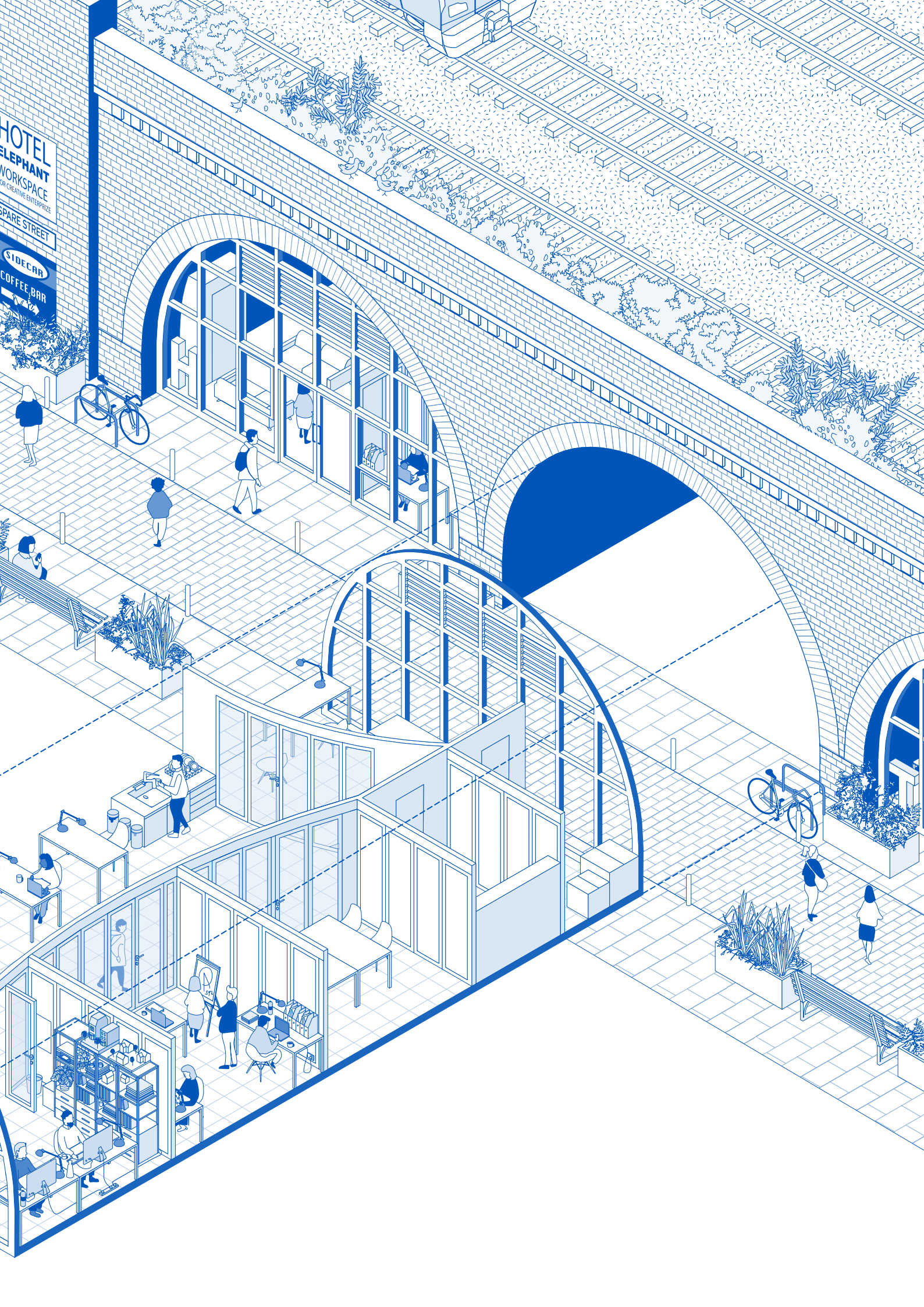
Ground Floor



A football trophy displayed in a bakery located in one of the arches at Maldonado Walk. It belongs to the business owner, an empanada maker who plays in the Elephant & Castle's 10 team strong Latin American football league. The teams are sponsored by local Latin business owners, some of which operate from the arches.

Act II: Spare Street





HOTEL
ELEPHANT
WORKSPACE
FOR CREATIVE ENTERPRISE
SPARE STREET
SIDECAR
COFFEE BAR

SPARE STREET

SPARE STREET

SPARE STREET

SPARE STREET

SPARE STREET

Act II: Spare Street

Landlord
Network Rail

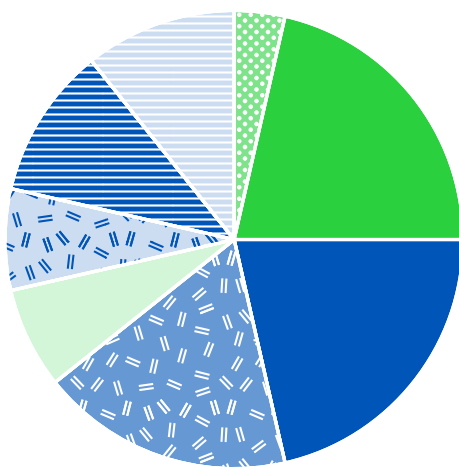
Price
250 £/m²









Number of Units
5

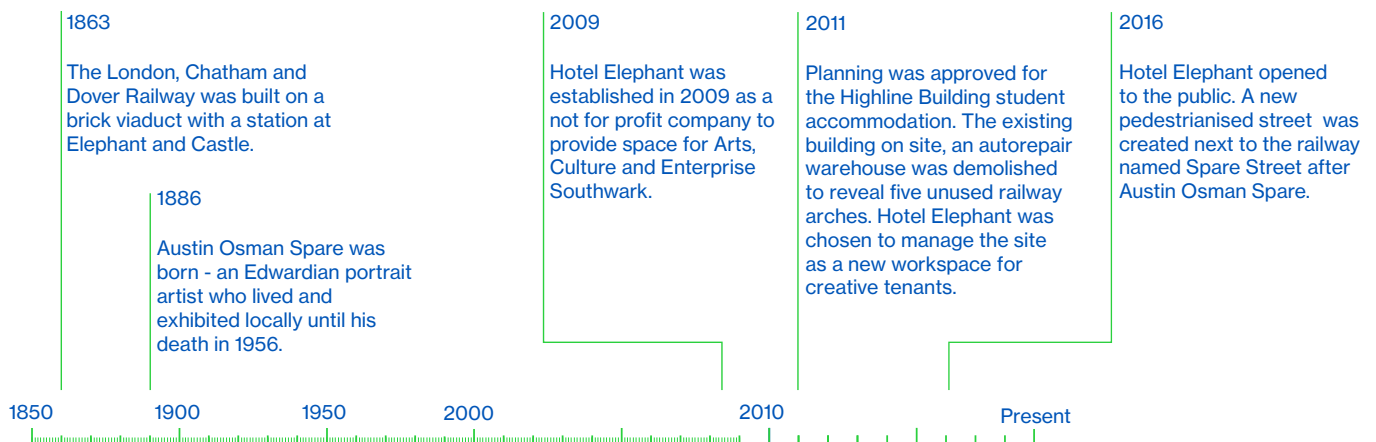
Planning Use Class
B1 Commercial / Industrial

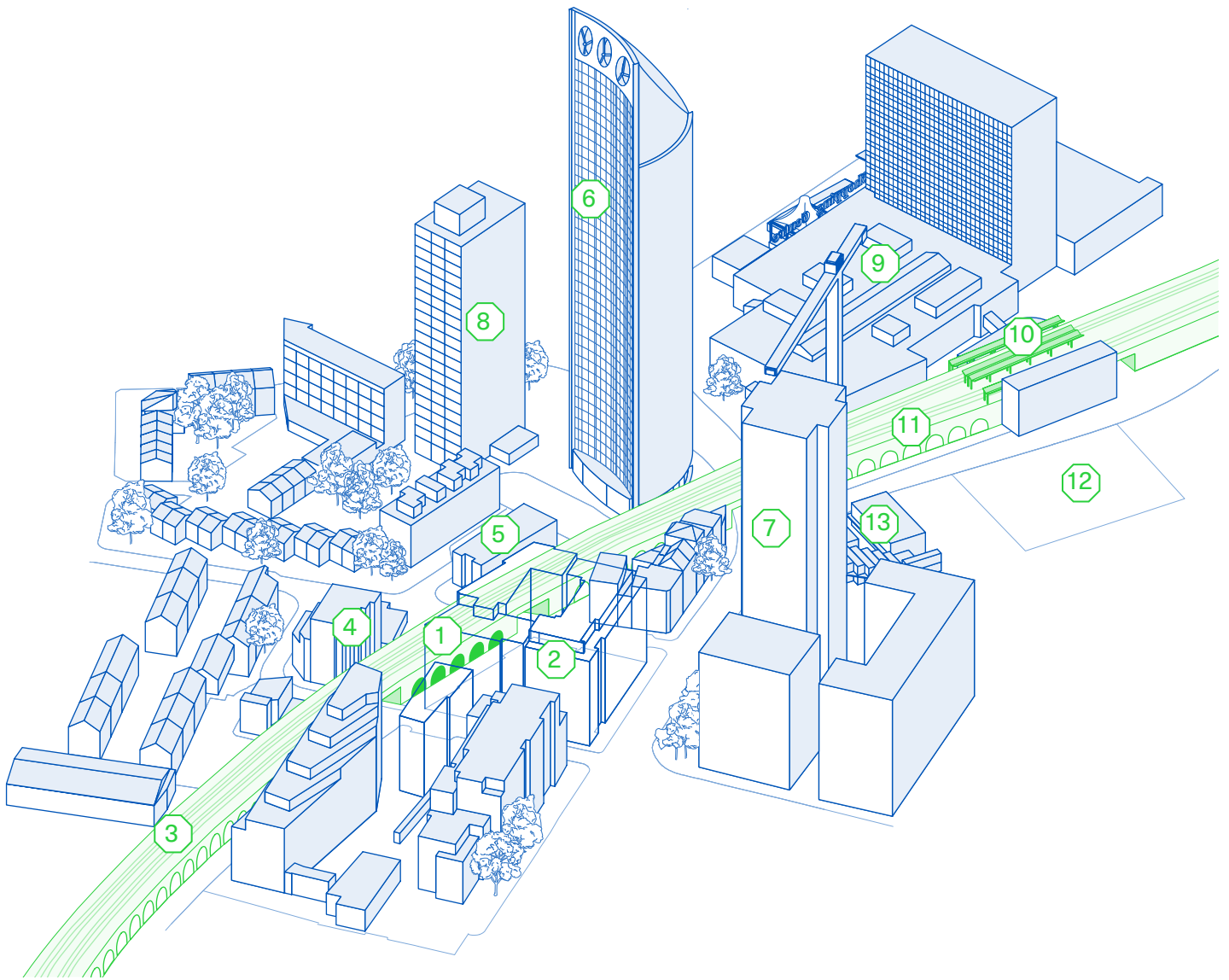
Number of Businesses
30

Lease Type
Short Term



-  Fine Art
-  Health
-  Architecture / Construction
-  Design
-  Vacant
-  Jewellery
-  Food / Beverage
-  Clothes / Accessories





- 1 Spare Street
- 2 Highline Student Housing
- 3 Robert Dashwood Way
- 4 Elephant and Castle Day Nursery
- 5 Crossway Christian Centre
- 6 Strata Tower
- 7 Elephant Park West Grove
- 8 The Draper Estate
- 9 Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre
- 10 Elephant and Castle Railway Station
- 11 Elephant Road
- 12 Elephant Park / West Grove Square
- 13 Artworks Elephant



Spare Street

Spare Street consists of five railway arches infilling the same Victorian brick construction with a modern fit-out including steel-framed glass facades. Internal translucent subdivisions reaching partway to the ceiling, and a painted metal interior surface has been added covering the brick. The workspaces here are managed by a single company, Hotel Elephant, which leases space directly to 30 users including individuals and small businesses, with a monthly rolling contract. The arches have slightly different planning use class than Maldonado Walk, meaning they are intended for use as Commercial Industrial Workshops (B1). They are located a short walk from the shopping centre and tube station, directly facing a new student housing development.

Purpose-built creative enterprise

Spare Street was newly created as part of the council-led strategy to open up the use of arches along Southwark's railway viaducts. Formerly covered by an auto-repair warehouse, this section of the railway siding was opened up in 2016, creating a new public thoroughfare connecting Steedman Way and Hampton Street as well as a 'new artists' and micro-business destination' inspired by New York's High Line, according to reporting of the time.³⁷ The new street opened around 6 years later than the rebranding and resurfacing of Maldonado Walk, and it references a historical figure in its name, this time the Austin Osman Spare, an artist and occultist who lived and worked in the area during the early 20th century.³⁸

Originally blocked by warehouses, these five arches became accessible during the demolition of existing buildings to make way for the new student accommodation. They were then handed to not-for-profit company, Hotel Elephant, to create and manage a mix of co-working and individual studio style accommodation. With a mix of funding from the Mayor of London through the London Regeneration Fund and from Southwark Council's Arts and Culture Grant fund³⁹ as well as a Section 106 fund allocation from private developers.⁴⁰

The start-up funding the project received is demonstrated in the fit-out of the arches, architect-designed, with higher cost, prefabricated materials. Tenants are offered a ready-made workspace,

contradicting Maldonado Walk which was not 'designed' per se but self-built through a process of mediation between tenants.

Hotel Elephant demonstrates a wider shift in interest to the use of railway arches with public-facing commercial spaces threatening the ability of traditional tenants, such as metal-workers and manufacturers, to remain in rapidly regenerating urban areas beset by rising rental prices.⁴¹ This is evidenced in Spare Street's inclusion in 'The New Southwark Plan' (2015), as part of the 'Low Line' strategy. Whilst such initiatives aim to improve pedestrian and walking routes, their strategy for increasing visibility and permeability exposes previously less-commercially-desirable sites that support forms of production without the need for a public interface, to a property market-dominated and fierce private-sector competition.

From grassroots beginnings, Hotel Elephant originated in 2009 as a collective of artists who managed studio space in the vacant remnants of Heygate Estate during its controversial redevelopment. In its present incarnation, Hotel Elephant manages Spare Street—dedicated to 'Creative Enterprise'—by providing two types of workspaces: co-working space and artist studios. The former, being much more commercially lucrative, subsidises the latter.⁴² In terms of users, it is aimed at activities falling firmly within the definitions of cultural and creative industries used to monitor and stimulate these sectors. Its main current activities are fine art and various forms of design including architectural, jewellery, fashion, and graphic. Thus, Hotel Elephant is an example of the type of project that can successfully negotiate space in a rapidly regenerating area, securing multiple forms of public funding in return for its role in creating the desirability that supposedly comes from having 'creatives' as neighbours.

Outward-looking, publicly visible

As part of the creation of Hotel Elephant's facility here, significant upgrades have been made to Spare Street's public realm. As mentioned above, these have employed higher quality and more expensive materials than the equivalent upgrades made to Maldonado Walk by its users, demonstrating the greater importance of this site as an outward-looking public destination within the council's strategy than the Latin American

business arches whose Spanish-language signage and opaque frontages tend to limit the public they can attract.

All five arches at Hotel Elephant have entirely glazed street-facing facades with deliberate signage, indicating a conscious design decision that the workspace advertises itself from the street. The first two arches, designated for co-working, have workspaces directly facing the street, with the tenants working there publicly visible. For the artist studios, more privacy is allowed, they are divided by light partitions and therefore invisible from the street. Although visible, the workspaces are not publicly accessible, with access for the tenants available through a keypad at the front door, which is advertised as monitored by CCTV.

A tenant in one of the co-working space described a psychological, if not practical, value to this visibility: “it’s really important to me actually to have like a shop front [...] to be kind of not like within a hive, bang in the middle of a bunch of other creatives, it’s not really what I’m looking for. The thing that’s great here is [that] it feels more like our office actually, because we’ve got a little window to the street and I’ve got daylight, it makes a difference.. The built-in blinds, which are often drawn, allow tenants some control over unwanted exposure, while offering the possibility to develop a relationship between activities inside and passers-by outside.

Hotel Elephant’s presence as a cultural space in itself, as well as the visibility of the creative activities taking place inside it, are presumably in response to its role not only as a production space but as a destination. The significant infrastructural investment in the provision of a glass facade seems to be playing more of a symbolic role than a practical one: beyond allowing for natural light, its value is to establish this location as a destination, for exposing these activities, even though there is no commercial need for that visibility. This is again compared to Maldonado Walk, many of whose businesses do rely on passing trade but did not have the benefit of council funding in the design of their spaces.

The fact that these arches are also managed by a single operator, which in itself is a cultural organisation, brings other kinds of visibility. Hotel Elephant organises special events, which provide

a time-limited opportunity for tenants to sell and display to the public. One of the users of artist studios shares his satisfaction of the possibility of exhibiting his work in the café, in a time when there was a Christmas fair as well. Hotel Elephant also runs a ‘Creative Enterprise Program’ described as a platform to support recent graduates, and creative start-ups to establish and grow their businesses including talks, networking events, skills workshops, and mentoring sessions.

Availability of workspaces at Hotel Elephant and organized activities are announced through their website, social media, and word of mouth. This is the only of the three stretches of railway arches to have a singular branded media presence, offering a concerted promotional platform that would commercially benefit the tenants of Maldonado Walk but in this case is arguably more directly serving a place-making agenda, given that the businesses and space users here are not generally reliant on local public to display and sell their products. Besides public visibility, the physical presence in such a branded working environment was considered by one of the tenants of the co-working space a kind of legitimacy for his business, which he had been previously missing due to working from home.

The café as part of Spare Street serves a dual purpose, both as an infrastructure for the users of these workspaces and as a public destination and interface. It is a meeting place for those working at Hotel Elephant, as one artist mentions: “we cross paths with lots of other people using the workspaces quite well, and you see them quite frequently, you do need a reason to cross paths with people [...] it doesn’t just happen really, cause people are busy. They [the café] offer free beers at 6 o’clock on a Friday, to everybody who’s in, there are a couple of quite neat ways they [managers] work out for people to cross paths quite passively, rather than doing like a meet and greet.” This is another example of the way that the overarching organisation brings benefits, though arguably this could also be seen as necessary mitigation of the lack of an informal development of a social network, as one of the artists in the art studios pointed out:

“I don’t really know my neighbours to leave my key to them... I’ve got a padlock with like a code on it. I mean I probably wouldn’t tell them my code...

Although we don't talk to people too much, there are sort of regular get-togethers and socials, so there is a community here...I know a couple of people. I mean people tend to sort of come and go. I've been here about a year and a half - but that's quite a long time, I think. Most people are here for like maybe five, six months."

In the interviews, tenants indicated that location was a key factor in choosing to work in Spare Street for different reasons. Some of them cited choosing the space because of its proximity to their homes: "I live in Peckham, so I'm local" or "I'm a 10-minute walk away". One of the artists in the art studios highlighted the importance of being close to Elephant and Castle area: "it's got quite a buzz about it, it's as an interesting place to be." Besides, the proximity to the public transport is a great bonus, as one of the users of co-working space noted: "just being within a shout of the Tube and being able to get on it whilst wearing a suit, basically is really important."

Built-in infrastructures

Hotel Elephant has been designed and determined specifically as a creative workspace. The spatial layout of each arch is designed specifically for the intended user group. Arches one and two are dedicated to co-working and are subdivided into individual offices through partitions and a row of desks for freelancers. Arches three and four are dedicated to artist studios and are further subdivided by a mezzanine level with smaller individual workspaces. Arch five is a publicly accessible café and exhibition space. Comparing the floorplans of this case with that of Maldonado Walk, it is clear how much less intensively the space is used. As we have shown, this has had different drivers and impacts. Firstly, the driver of establishing a cultural destination as part of the 'Low Line' strategy, requiring expensive public realm, facade materials, and partly a fully functioning space that does not demand any investment in adaptations by its users. As architect-designed space designated specifically for creative workspace, this external determination constitutes a fixed idea of how space must be used.

The workspaces come pre-fabricated and supplied with furniture—part of the appeal of Hotel Elephant's offer, which delimits the users of

co-working spaces as one noted: "we don't have any kind of influence really on how the space is managed." This means that spatial adaptation is minimal and due to the constraints in the size of some of the spaces fairly fixed. The impact of this is in the form of considerably higher rental prices than the other two sets of railway arches: averaging 250 £/m² Spare Street compared to £100 at Maldonado Walk and £85 at Robert Dashwood Way. When one of the tenants reports that "I don't think you can get much cheaper", we can see how inflated the market for spaces determined for 'creative' use, has become in comparison to other productive activities not included within these kinds of culture-led placemaking strategies.

Under one-month rolling rental contracts, Hotel Elephant offers an incubator space for small businesses looking for the next step on, from working at home on the kitchen table. The perk of a rolling contract with pre-provided amenities was mentioned by one of the users of artist studios: "I don't think you can get much cheaper"; at the same time he argues that "depending on how these go, I'm just sort of like churning them out at the moment, but I want to get big. If I want to go bigger, then I'll have to get a bigger space." Whilst this flexibility in contracts could prove as an advantage to sole practitioners and start-ups not yet ready to commit to a full-term contract, it has resulted in a high turnover of tenants with the average tenant in the artist studios staying only two months, which as we have seen has impacts for the possibility of developing any forms of organisational or social structure between the users. It also makes it untenable for some users to invest heavily in equipping or adapting their spaces in the way that other types of businesses in other cases have done. That explains the dominance of laptop-based work—for example, graphic or architectural design—in so-called branded creative spaces like Spare Street, for it has low infrastructural requirements besides a desk, power, and light.



Figure 12

Spare Street is a new street named after Austin Osman Spare, an artist and occultist who worked as both a draughtsman and a painter and lived locally. Through a public-private funding collaboration, Hotel Elephant was enabled to transform these railway arches into creative workspaces, opening up the street and upgrading the public realm.



Figure 13

Signage advertising Hotel Elephant as a 'Creative Enterprise'. The marketing strategy as well as the possibility to see the creative activities taking place inside the arches from the street, enhance its role as a public destination and a production space.



Figure 14

The significant infrastructural investment in provision of a glass facade seems to be playing more of a symbolic role than a practical one: beyond allowing for natural light, its value lies in making this location a public destination and establishing a sense of connection between activities, even though there is no commercial need for that visibility.



Figure 15

The café opens six days a week (Monday to Saturday) and endeavours to be a social space for Hotel Elephant's tenants, hosting exhibitions and events and offering incentives for social interactions like free drinks on Fridays.

Figure 16

Although highly visible from the street, the workspaces are not publicly accessible with access granted to tenants through a keypad at the front door, which is advertised as being CCTV monitored.

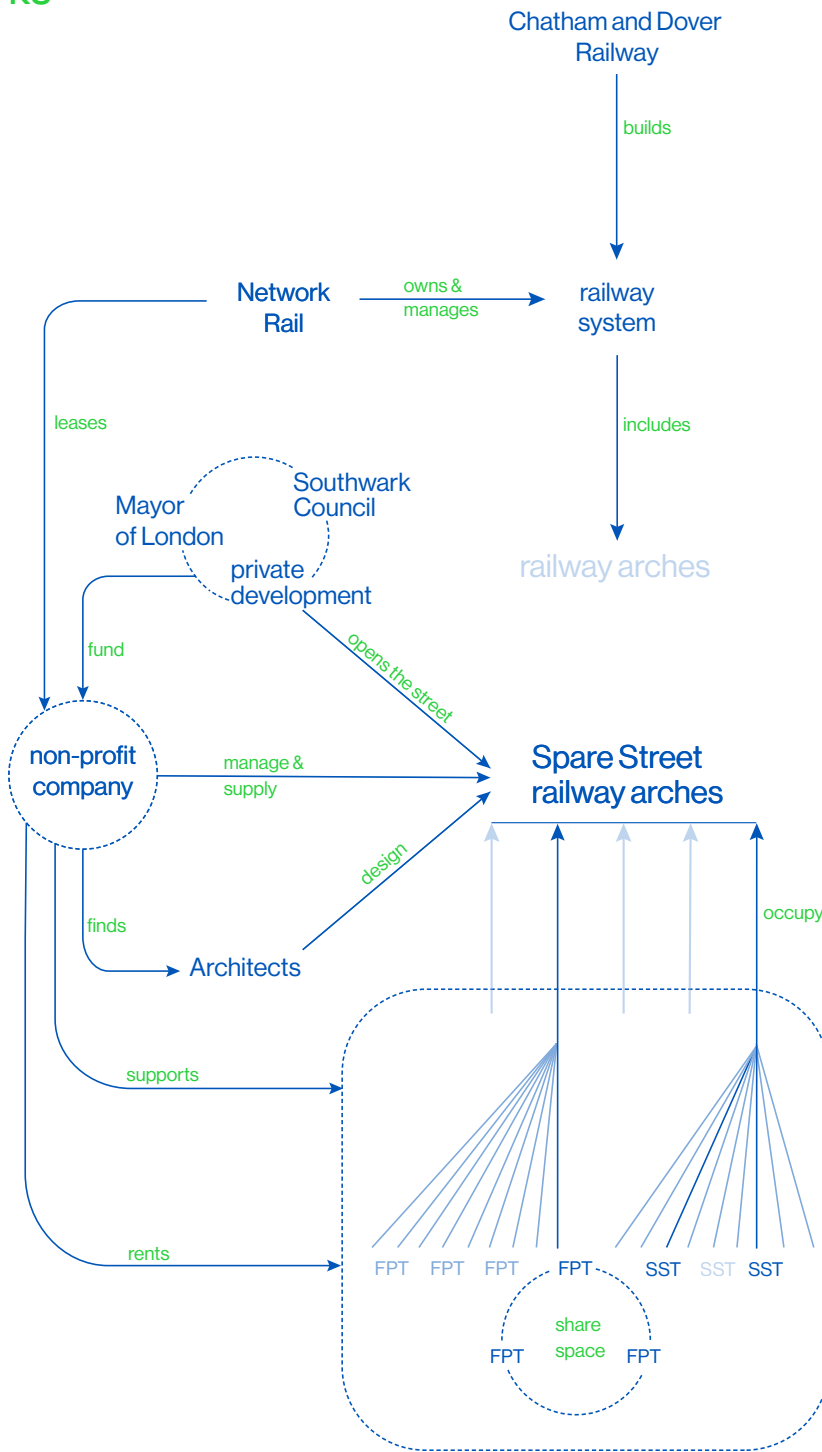




Figure 17

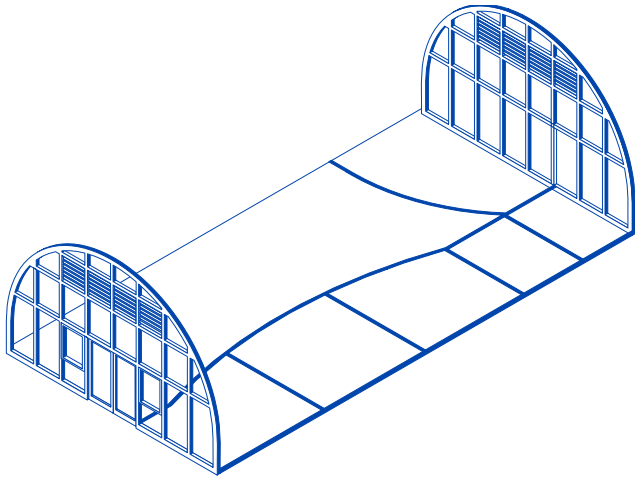
The spatial model of co-working space accommodates different types of workspaces such as hot-desking and small offices. Even though users share the space, they tend to demarcate their territory with light partitions and lockable doors, which do not offer acoustic privacy, but do create a visual boundaries.

Networks

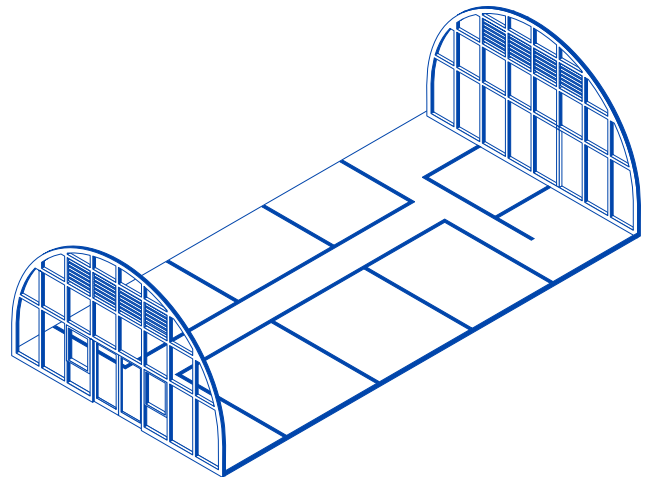


FPT: Full-Price Tenant
 SST: Subsidised Tenant

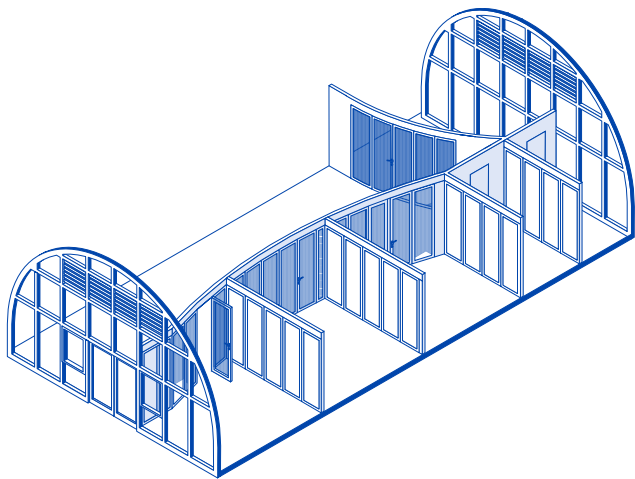
Adaptations



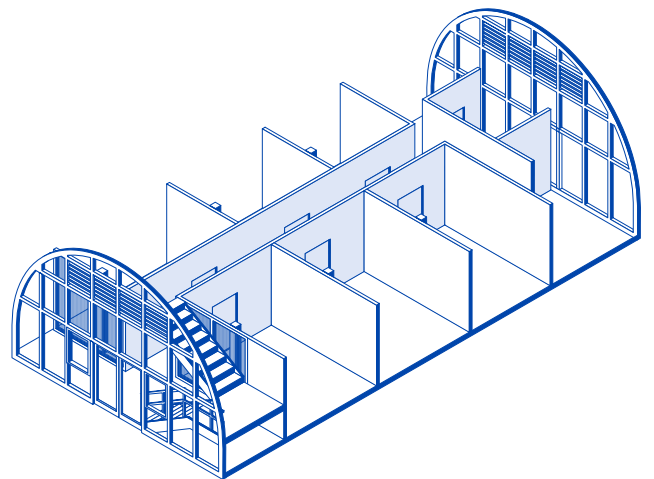
1. Co-working space is split into individual workspaces and hot-desking



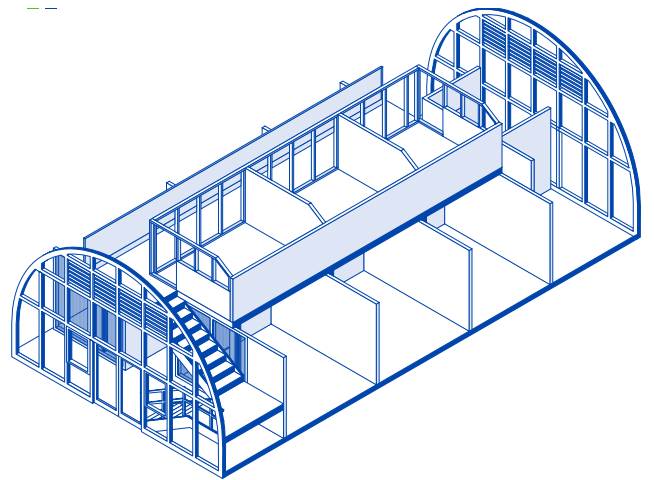
1. Artist's studio spaces are subdivided by the co-working spaces nextdoor



2. Internal subdivisions are architect-designed and prefabricated ready for tenants



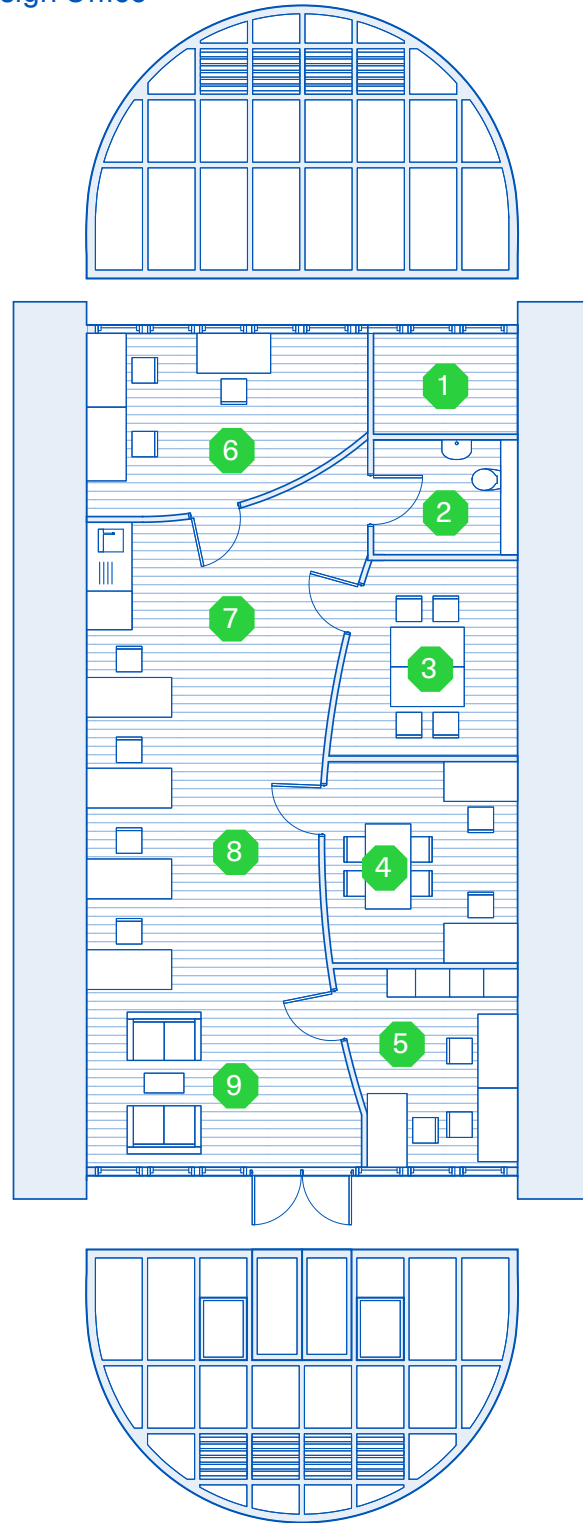
2. Internal subdivisions are architect-designed and prefabricated ready for tenants



3. A second floor is added to offer more units

Plans

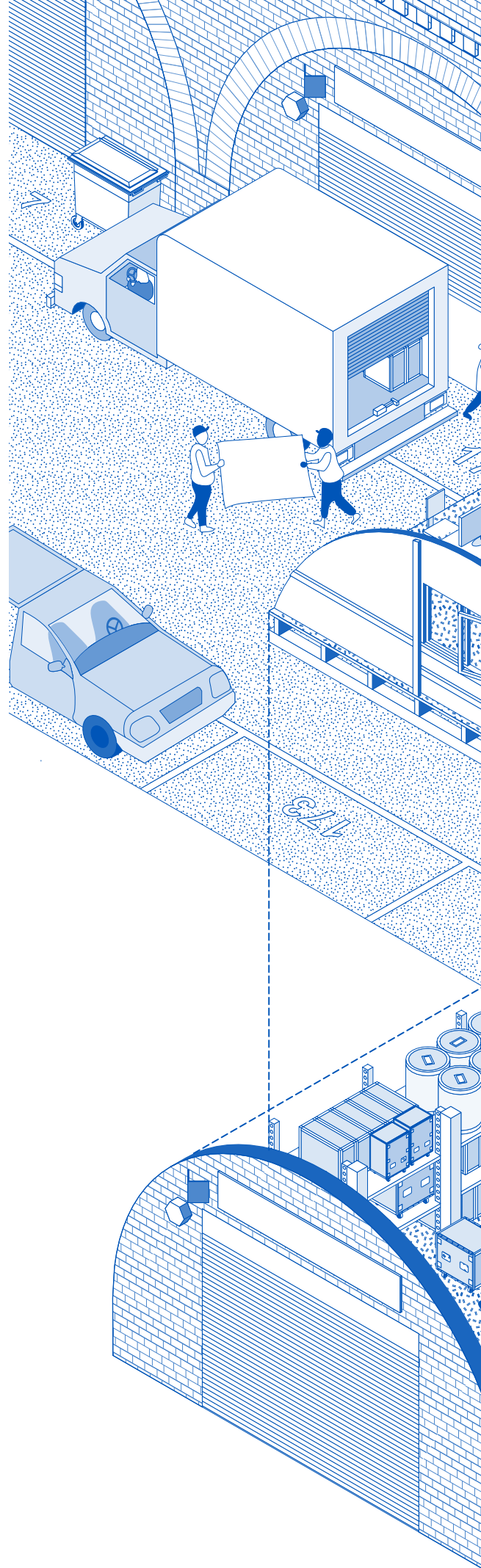
- 1 Storage
- 2 WC
- 3 Vacant
- 4 Construction Company
- 5 Architects and Lighting Design Office
- 6 Vacant
- 7 Kitchen
- 8 Hot Desks
- 9 Break Out Space

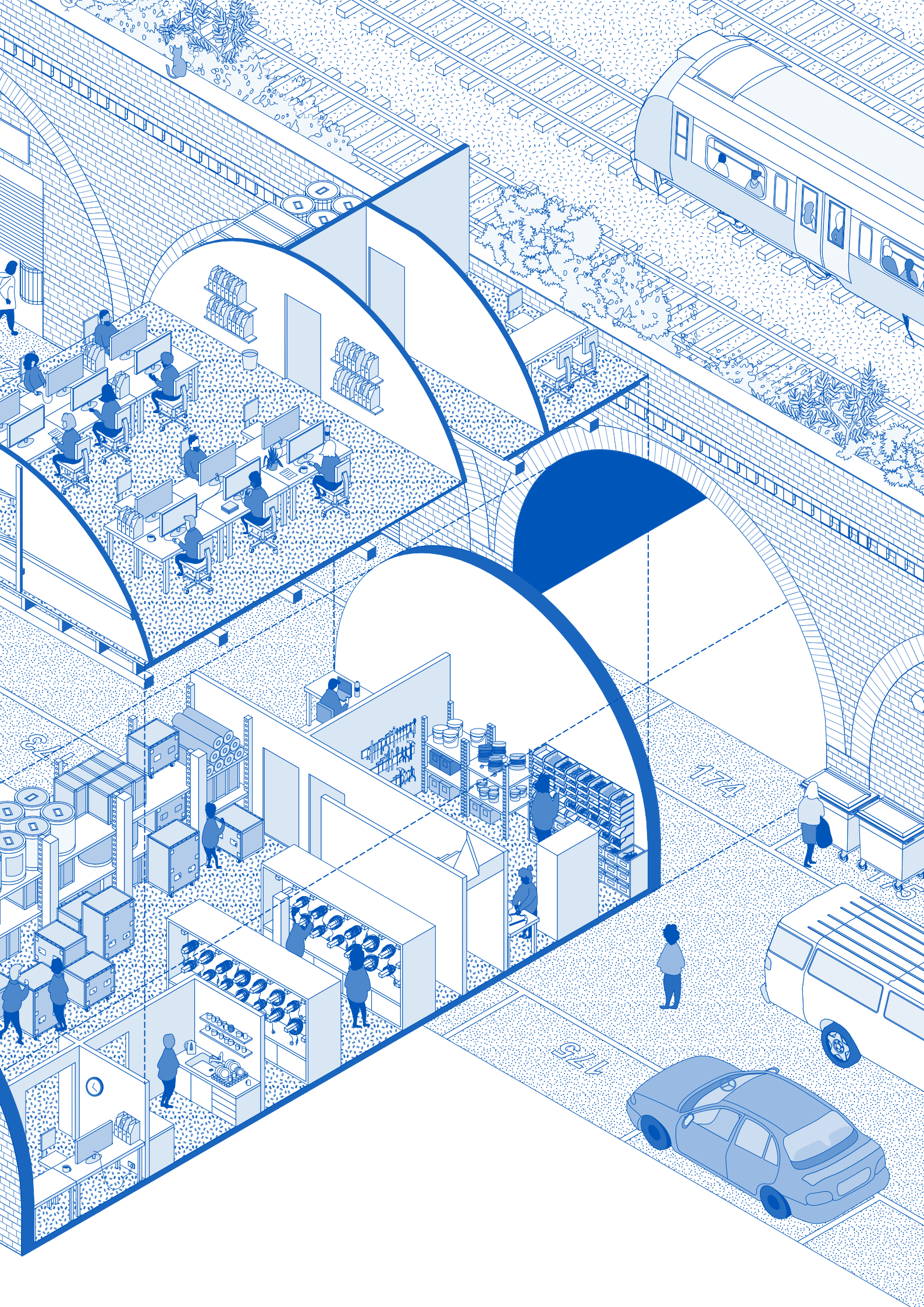




A model of a residential extension made by the architectural firm accommodated in Spare Street. Short-term one-month rolling contracts give small businesses a flexible workspace, providing the next step on, from working at home. Models are used as both a design tool and a means of communicating ideas with clients.

Act III: Robert Dashwood Way





Act III: Robert Dashwood Way

Landlord
Network Rail

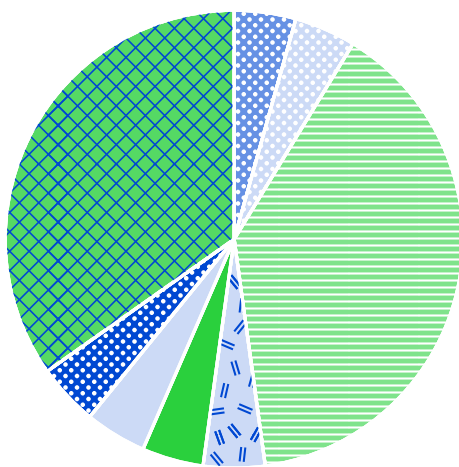
Price
85 £/m²









Number of Units
23

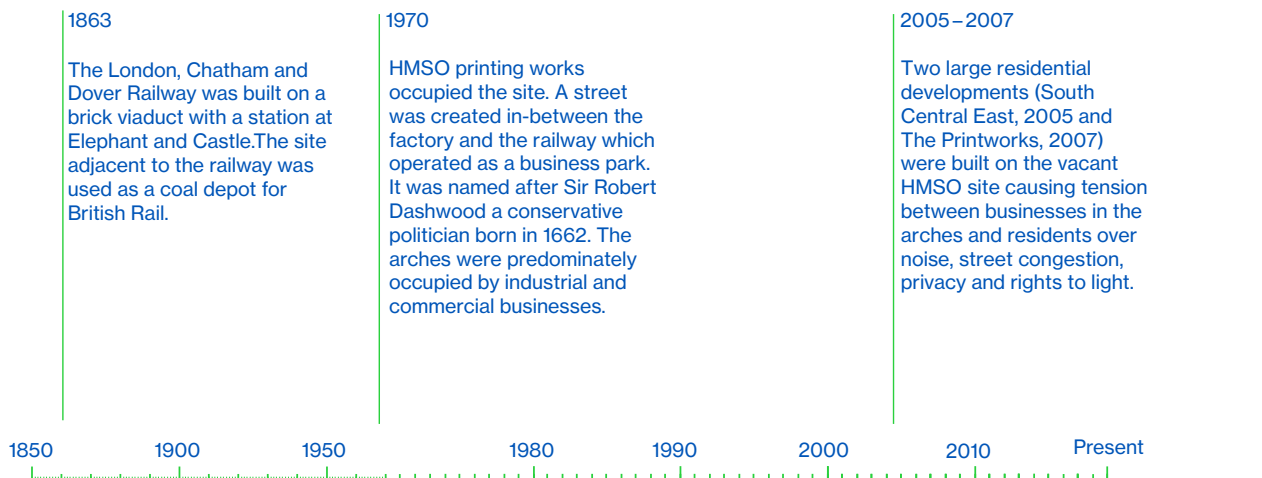
Planning Use Class
B1 Commercial / Industrial

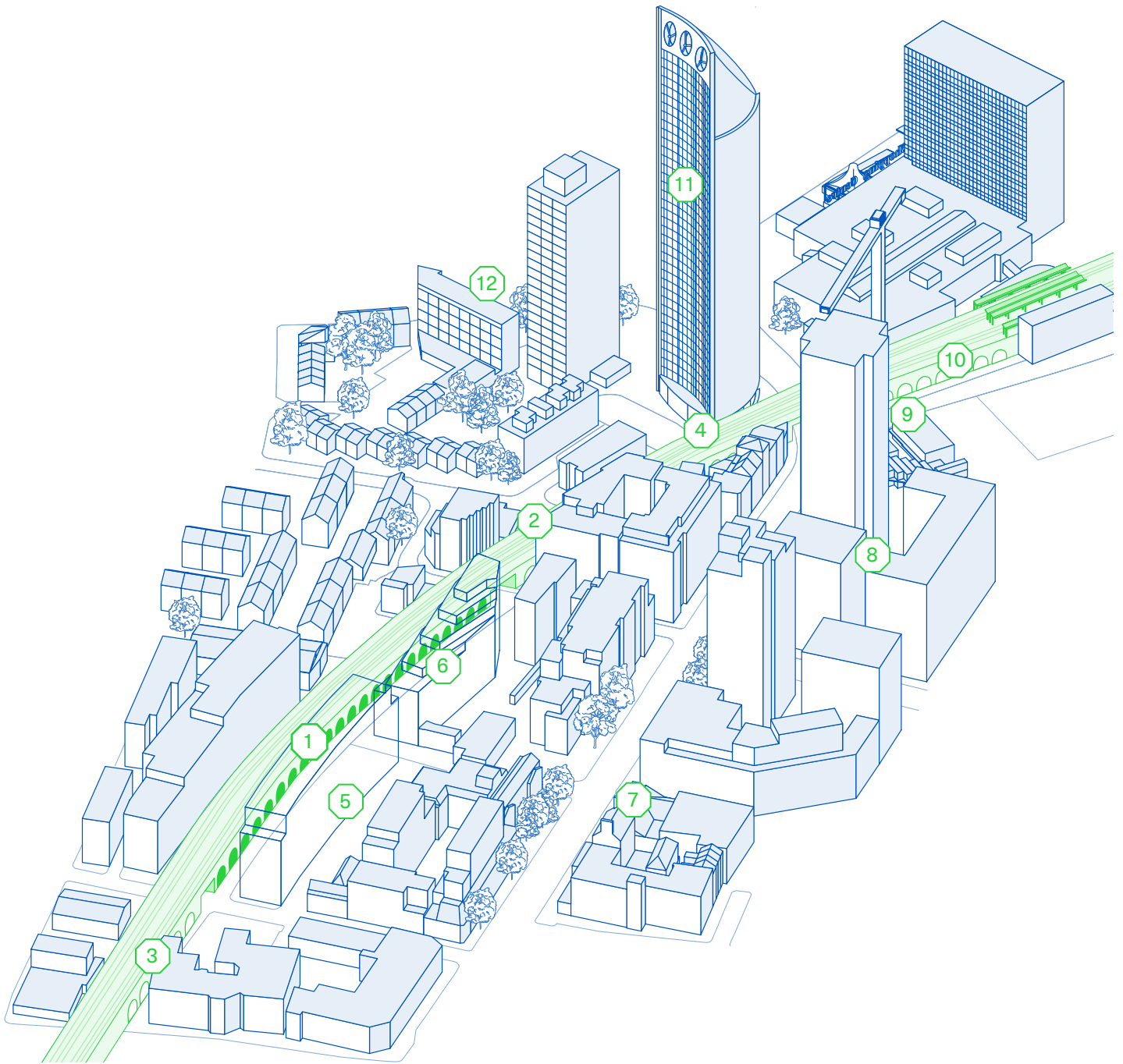
Number of Businesses
18

Lease Type
Long Term



-  Auto-repair / Valet
-  Equipment Hire
-  Money Transfer / Courier
-  Food / Beverage
-  Clothes / Accessories
-  Vacant
-  Music / Film
-  Architecture / Construction





- 1 Robert Dashwood Way
- 2 Spare street
- 3 Husky Dance studios
- 4 Maldonado walk
- 5 The Printworks
- 6 South Central East
- 7 Art Academy
- 8 Elephant Park Development
- 9 Artworks Elephant
- 10 Elephant Road
- 11 Strata Tower
- 12 The Drapers Estate



Robert Dashwood Way

Robert Dashwood Way is the southern continuation of Spare Street along the east side of the railway viaduct. The entire stretch is five times longer than Spare Street and three times longer than Maldonado Walk. It accommodates 18 businesses in 23 Victorian railway arches, with an average of 122m² of space.

Since 1863, when the London, Chatham and Dover railway viaduct was constructed, the wider site was used as a coal depot for Network Rail. In the 1970s, the site was occupied by the Her Majesty's Stationary Office (HMSO) printing works, creating a street in between the factory and the railway arches, named Sir Robert Dashwood after a conservative politician. The railway arches became a business park accommodating light industrial trades ranging from metal works to car mechanics. In 2006 after the closing of the printing works, the London Wide Initiative—in collaboration with the GLA, English Partnerships and First Base—redeveloped the site, as one of the first projects in the Elephant and Castle's regeneration campaign.⁴³ The new Printworks project situated on the eastern side of Robert Dashwood Way, was comprised of 164 apartments and available workspace for small businesses (use class B1 or D1).

Tensions of uses

According to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987—most recently amended by the 2015 Use Classes Amendment Order—the arches of Robert Dashwood Way fall within the 'Business class', specifically 'Commercial Industrial Warehouses' (B1).⁴⁴ Our data, however, signifies that a large proportion of arches serve as 'Storages and Depots' (B8 class), offering audio-visual and theatrical equipment rental services to support major cultural institutions in the city.

Unlike Spare Street, which is a purpose-built facility operated by a cultural organisation with a public-facing and marketing strategy, Robert Dashwood Way—both the arches themselves and the street outside them—is managed directly by Network Rail. In comparison with Spare Street which is designed to serve as a destination and attract visitors, Robert Dashwood Way is a purely functional space, operating only for the businesses that inhabit it. While local authorities have determined the arches

suitable for light industry close to residential areas, there have been ongoing tensions between the tenants of the arches and the residents over noise, street congestion, and rights of light. One of the interviewees, who co-runs an audio-visual hire business said: “since we've been here, those flats have been put up in front of us, and since they've been put up, they've been a lot of complaints about our shutters going up and down, the noise. [...] But still we've sort of been here before them, and now they're moaning about us - which is fine, I understand they've got to live here, but we're an operating business and we can only operate out of here cause all our clients are in central London.”

This hints at issues of compatibility between different activities in the area and of contradiction between the interests and views of different actors. While it reveals possible tensions between neighbours, it raises the questions of whether light industry and residential uses can coexist and how to ensure a diverse mix of uses in an area that undergoes intense redevelopment.

Accessible backstage

The above statement, “we can only operate out of here because all our clients are in central London”, throws light on the main reason why light industrial businesses have clustered at Robert Dashwood Way, namely the location and relative affordability compared to London standards. Several interviewees talked about the convenience of running a business from this particular location. The director of an event logistics company explained that he set up the business in Elephant and Castle to be close to central London because most of the clientele is located there, including banks, venues, universities, hotels such as those in Old Street or West End, museums like the V&A and markets like Borough food market.

Building a professional network, whether with competitive companies or clients, based on close proximity and easy accessibility is vital for the economic prosperity of a business, especially when this business supports others. Not only is it convenient in terms of delivering the services, but it is also economically beneficial in running the logistics and charging the clients. For example, it was pointed out to us that if the business is asked to do a set-up very early in the morning, the employees would need to get up and arrive in the

venue even earlier, which if the business is far from London, they would need to spend more time on the job and charge the client a lot more. We can also say that the inverse is the case too, meaning it is vital for the kinds of organisations these businesses serve, including large public-facing cultural institutions, that such backstage services are located within a distance from their central London locations, making costs and logistics feasible.

Yet not visible

It is interesting to notice that while accessibility to Central London is important for the businesses that inhabit Robert Dashwood Way, visibility in the sense of maintaining a public interface is not. This is because, as most suppliers told us, event and service businesses work with local contacts and clients in other parts of the city. “All our work is on the marketing side so it’s mainly the internet, we’ve got a very good website, we get lots of visitors and then it’s just us grabbing the phones here, grabbing chats coming in and we’re dealing with them directly, and then we get a lot of repeat business.” This is the same for other micro-firms too which do not rely on the footfall of passers-by and therefore do not need signs or other physical indications to display their work. One tenant mentioned: “There is [a lot of word of mouth] beginning in the last few years [...] people use us for that, and they spread the word.”; and a second one agreed that they get work through “just word of mouth. I’ve never advertised.”

It seems that low visibility is not an issue, even a perk, for those running their businesses digitally. The owner of a fashion atelier in Robert Dashwood Way described how she adjusted her business model to use the arch solely as a production space and sell her designs exclusively online. “We spend a lot of money on internet marketing because that’s the only way [to sell] really.” A shift to digital operation and customer service means there is no longer need for a publicly visible shopfront. This can be easily noticed when looking from the outside. The arches’ entrances are equipped with roller shutters, which are mostly closed, and there is an absence of signage indicating the activities that are within.

Such indifference to public interface has its advantages. On the one hand, it allows individuals

and independent businesses to be flexible in their working hours like the fashion designer who holds down two jobs and works on the production of clothes in the night-time. On the other hand, the low visibility suits well the primary function of many of these businesses, which is often to store expensive equipment. Of course, there are a few exceptions including the auto repair and car washing workshops, which have a more public-facing denomination with their roller shutters mostly open and one solo café catering to workers within the estate. As a result in contrast to Maldonado Walk, low visibility and isolated working conditions mean the tenants don’t know many of their neighbours, as our interviewees noted.

Overall, the arrayed and inward-looking configuration of the arches in Robert Dashwood Way does not seek to establish any relationship with the public realm. On the contrary, the street is predominately used for loading and unloading vehicles. There is also a gate at the entrance to the passageway, meaning it can hardly be considered a ‘street’ as part of the public network or as a destination, and its lack of pedestrian paving reinforces this. Yet, the street has not enough capacity to accommodate all the traffic of supply businesses: “Because it’s a private road, it belongs to Network Rail; there’s no traffic wardens or the like; they do have some parking regulation on it, but they give us permits, and we can use it, but unfortunately I’ve had 30 vans parked around here.” Another supplier states, “we only get, I think, two allocations per unit. luckily, we’ve got three units now, so we get six, but we’ve got four vehicles. And then plus staff vehicles. That’s a lot of in and out.”

Infrastructure of sorts

Effectively, the indifference of businesses to establish a public-facing denotes their operation at the backstage of the city. This backstage character is evident in the material qualities of the street and how it interfaces with the wider street network. This is unlike Maldonado Walk and Spare Street, which have both, to a varying degree, received resurfacing treatment to facilitate public use. In other words, they are intended as ‘onstage’ parts of the city, even though the arch units support a mix of public-facing and production-based uses.

Given how this investment in the public realm and public-facing improvements is linked to—if

not probably the cause of—high rental values at Spare Street, we might suggest that the rough, working road surface within the business park of Robert Dashwood Way and its metal shutters are not only material infrastructure supporting these businesses we observed, but also immaterial conditions that protect the affordability of the arches for these high space-consuming activities. These spaces serve as infrastructures for other businesses and are called on an if-and-when needed basis. This becomes evident from their working hours. As one of the suppliers said: “we are open whenever we need to be.”

Based on the interviews, the size and shape of the arches are not suitable for some types of businesses. For instance, the curved ceiling is not fit for storing equipment vertically and the small floorspace limits the growth of the operations. As a result, tenants have over time adapted their spaces by installing shelf racks or adding a mezzanine to maximise storage options, or they have adapted their businesses by expanding to multiple adjacent arches. However, moving equipment between different arches is inconvenient and time-consuming, as a couple of tenants noted. Furthermore, other passive infrastructures like services and utilities do not seem to function well inside the arches. As one tenant describes: “phone signal is a problem, cause you get no signal in here [...] heating and cooling is also a problem cause you can’t put air conditioning in it or anything like that, so we’re working in sort of tough conditions sometimes when it’s really cold or really hot.”

Room for adaptation

The degree of adaptability within the arches is not only spatial but also functional. It is manifested by the different ways the same arch-like form is appropriated for different uses and by different agents, be it the owner or user. It also derives from both the flexibility of an empty shell and the way the regulatory framework let possibilities to emerge.

Many of the spatial transformations in the interior of the arches were made without permission from local authorities or the landowner, Network Rail. Especially after the 2008 amendment of the General Permitted Development Order, minor architectural interventions no longer require formal authorisation due to their unlikely effect on

neighbours and the environment. There are not many spatial restrictions, as one tenant observed: “everything that we do we’re allowed, but you’re not allowed to do like car mechanics, spraying and things like that, but we’re generally fine.” Self-built mezzanine floors are creatively done by tenants as an easy way of increasing floorspace, which due to their unrecorded nature, do not translate into taxable floorspace and higher business rates. There are ways to expand the space avoiding a rental increase, as one tenant mentioned.

Additional loopholes in the planning system also increase the likelihood of new types of activities to settle down. Case in point is the change of use class from B1 (commercial or light industrial use) to B8 (storage or distribution) without planning permission in floor areas lower than 500m².⁴⁵ Averaging around 50m², the arches are thus subject to less scrutiny. In combination with their low visibility and high accessibility, this explains why there is a concentration of certain types of businesses in Robert Dashwood Way.

Location as a trade-off

Ultimately whilst the railway arches offer some challenges to the way the businesses operate, overall the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. One business owner felt that they prefer to adapt the space, and even the way their business operates, rather than moving out of the arches: “we’d tailor what we do to the space we’ve got because it’s more valuable to be here than it is to try and move somewhere bigger but further out of town.”

In that sense, the location of the arches works as a trade-off for paying higher rents compared to those available in outer London. This was the case for one of the suppliers in Robert Dashwood Way: “I’m still sticking with this location because it’s so convenient. [...] You may be paying more in rent but you’ll get the clients.” The truth is though that in comparison to London standards, the rent of these arches is rather affordable. With an average of 85 £/m² and £24,000 annual rate (plus £4,800 in business rates), it is significantly lower than their estimated equivalents 910 £/m² for office space in Soho and £90,500 for the same work area in Waterloo or London Bridge.⁴⁶ Furthermore, these light industrial and supply industries spend less on business rates than shops. As an example, we quote a business owner that reported “business

rates here are about £4000, something like that, but a shop is fantastically expensive. [...] They'll pay sort of £30,000 a year." This difference in business rates is once again related to the infrastructural condition of the planning use classes—within the B categories at Robert Dashwood Way, denoting business-to-business activities, versus A classes for public-facing retail at Maldonado Walk.

Although comparatively affordable, rents have fluctuated over time. One tenant observed that the rent has increased almost four times in the last 15 years. "When I first came [in 2003] I don't know, it was probably about £3,000 a year or so, maybe it was £6,000. [...] Now they asked £24,000 for the one [arch] that's empty and they sort of offered it to me for about £20,000 cause I was a long-standing tenant in the area, but anybody new who comes would have to pay 24,000, plus rates." A second tenant, even though he thought the rent was fair and affordable for the time being, he pointed out that the rent is not secure and could change anytime: "when they [rents] do come up, they're sometimes double the price of what we're paying here, so they are going up rampantly. [...] this unit is 50% cheaper than the other unit, and that unit it's 50% cheaper than the recent unit we've got, so they've doubled."

Of course, the affordability of renting an arch in Robert Dashwood Way becomes uncertain in view of the local regeneration and the upcoming privatisation of arches, which one tenant speculated they "will force out a lot of creative companies, [...] I know there are a few guys down here that do like woodwork and things like that, and they're just about paying a salary for each other and the rent could really sort of cause more problem - a lot of small companies that are starting out here, they don't make much money, so they'll end up getting forced out of here." Due to this threat, some tenants have started to change the way they operate: "we're trying to change the style of business we do, so we can do more work out of London, because we're dependent on the location we are, right now."



Figure 18



Running along the east side of the railway viaduct, the activities happening within the arches of Robert Dashwood Way are invisible from the public realm. The life inside these arches behind the closed blue shutters remains a mystery.



Figure 19

These arches house different types of services, which vary in terms of spatial and social requirements. Some of them serve clients and regulars directly, such as a car-wash, café, or mechanics, while others are used predominately for storage. The use of the street for loading, unloading and parking is regulated.

Figure 20

Since the new flats were completed on the site opposite of the street, there have been increasing tensions between the tenants of the arches and the local residents about the noise from the shutters going up and down as well as issues over the shared access of the street. It raises the question of whether light industry and residential uses can coexist.

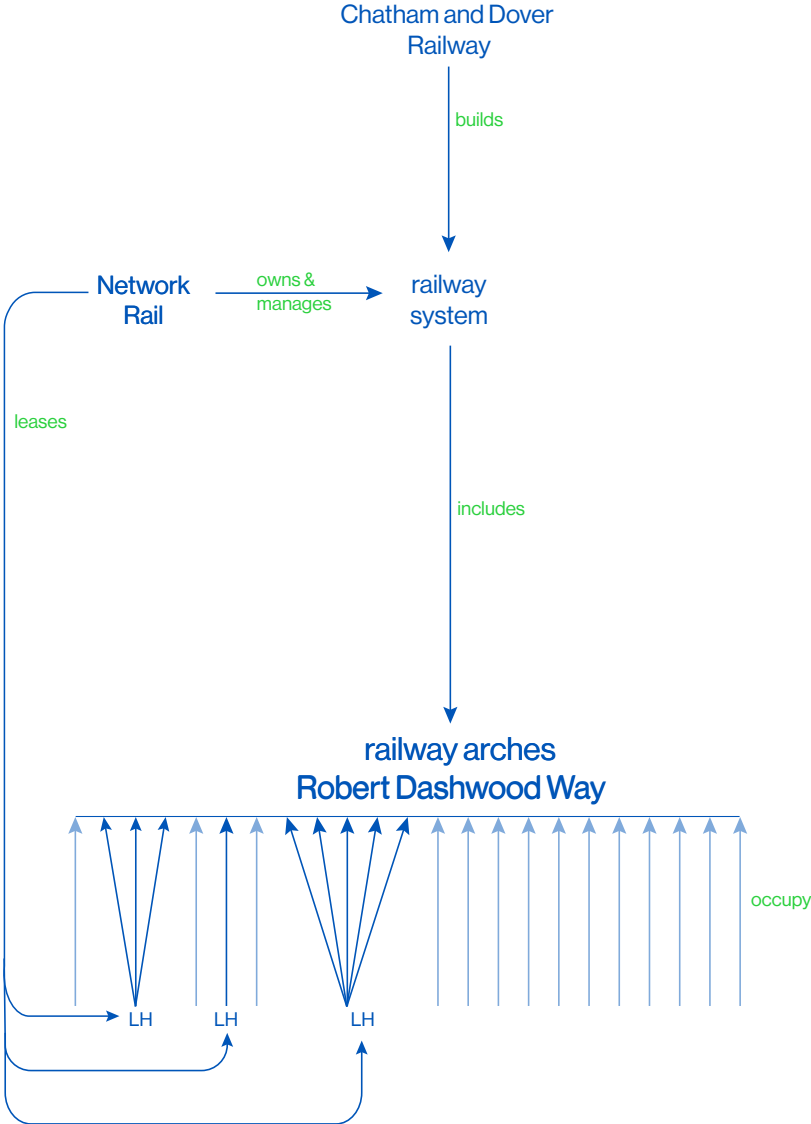




Figure 21

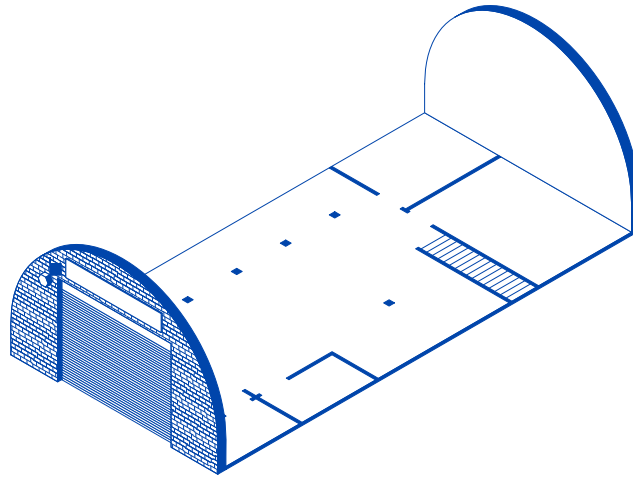
The railway arches offer poor ecological conditions, i.e. no windows, or air conditioning, which are subject to overheating in summer and sub-zero temperatures in winter. Even though the curved ceiling limits the storing of large equipment and small plot sizes restrict the growth of businesses, the tenants have no limitations on internal adaptations. This audio-visual company has added shelf racks and a mezzanine, and has expanded their business into other arches.

Networks

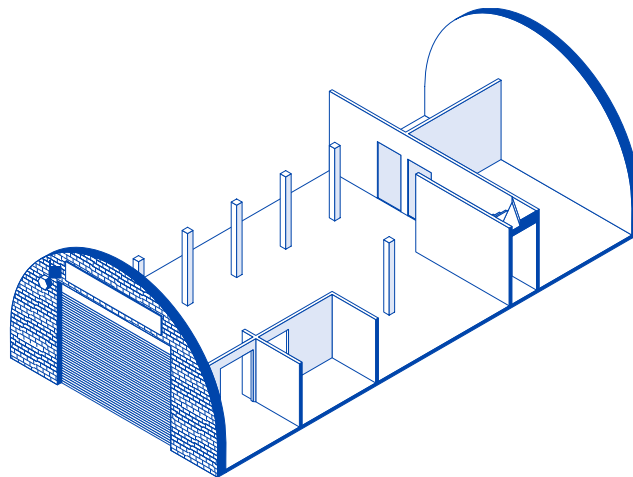


LH: Leaseholder

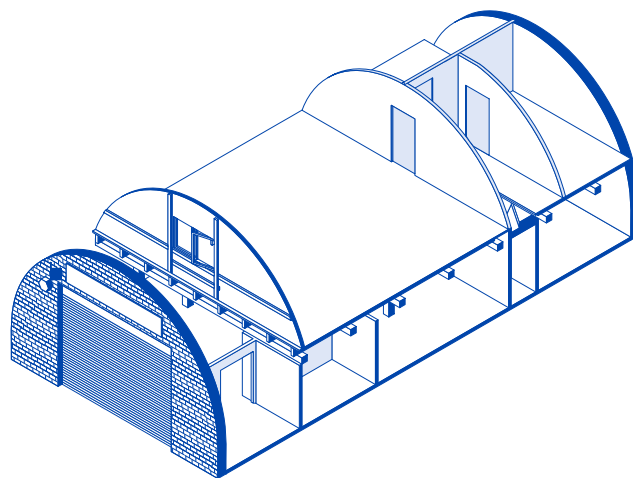
Adaptations



1. The arch is rented by a single business, an audio-visual company



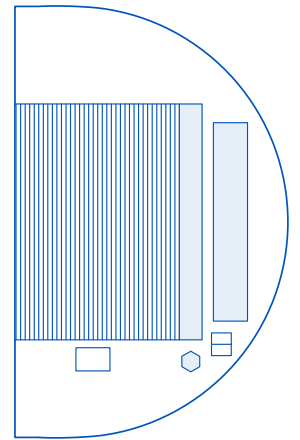
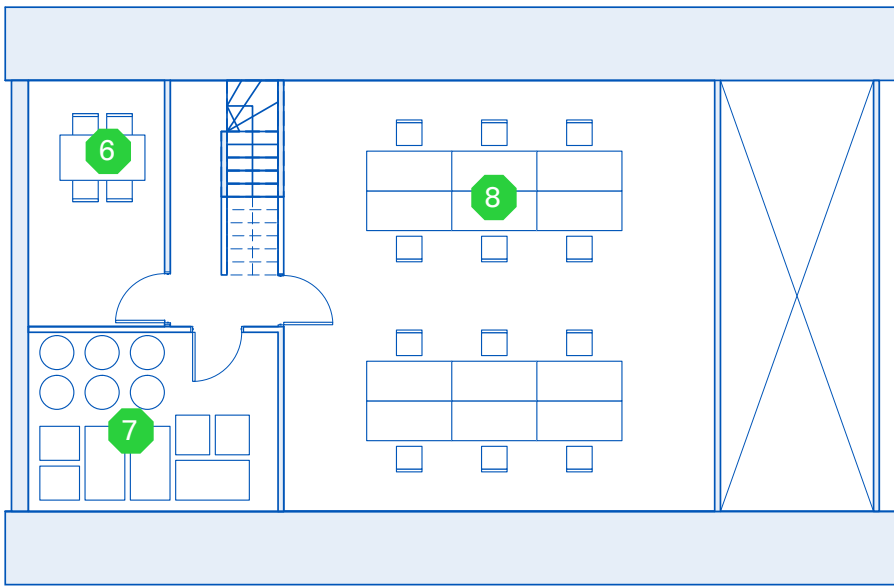
2. Internal subdivisions are built by the tenant to provide storage



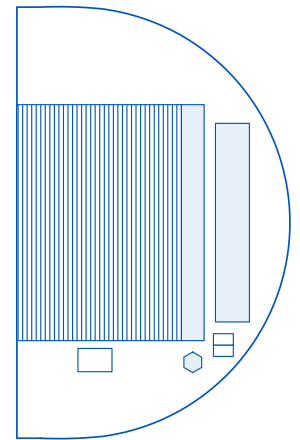
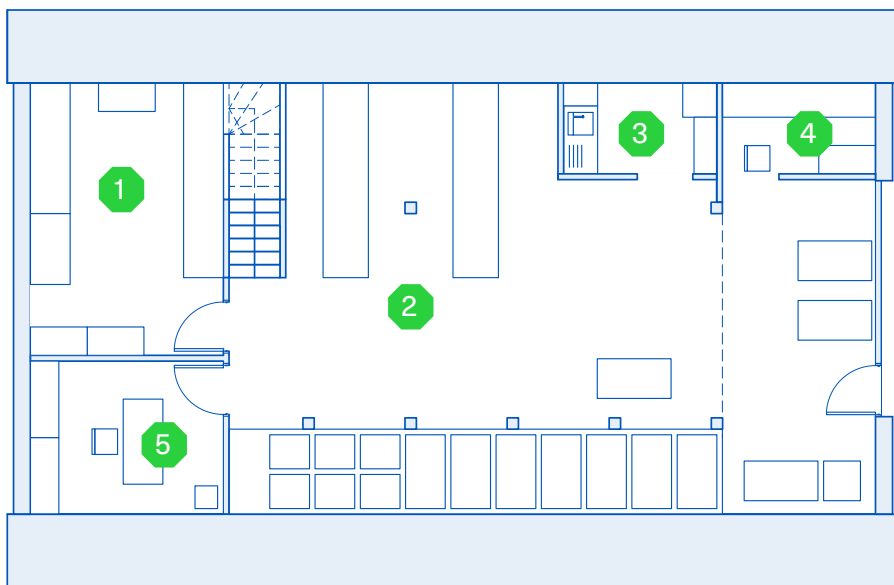
3. A second floor is added to accommodate office space for the business

Plans

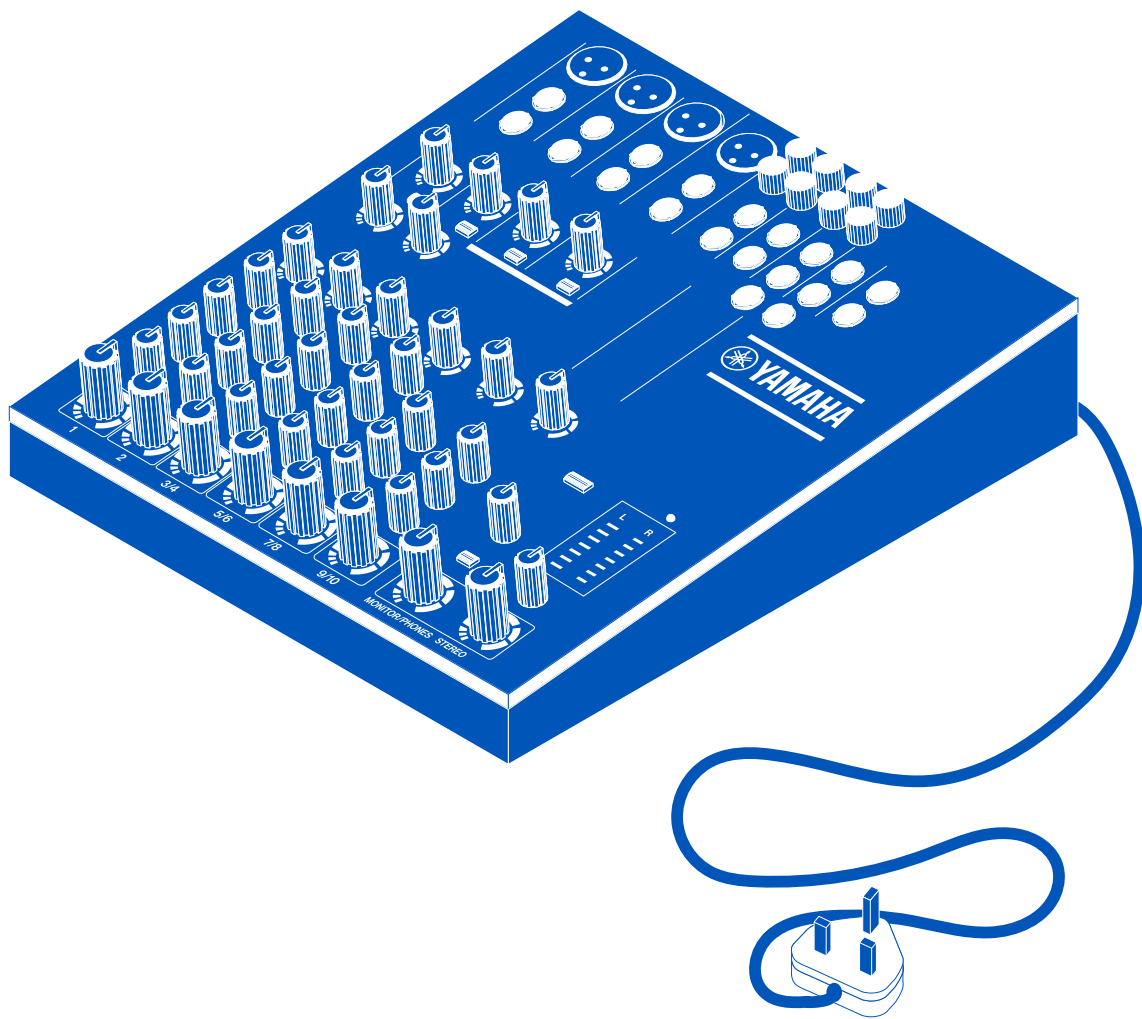
- 1 Repair Workshop
- 2 Equipment Storage
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Office
- 5 Office
- 6 Meeting Room
- 7 Equipment Storage
- 8 Office



Upper Floor

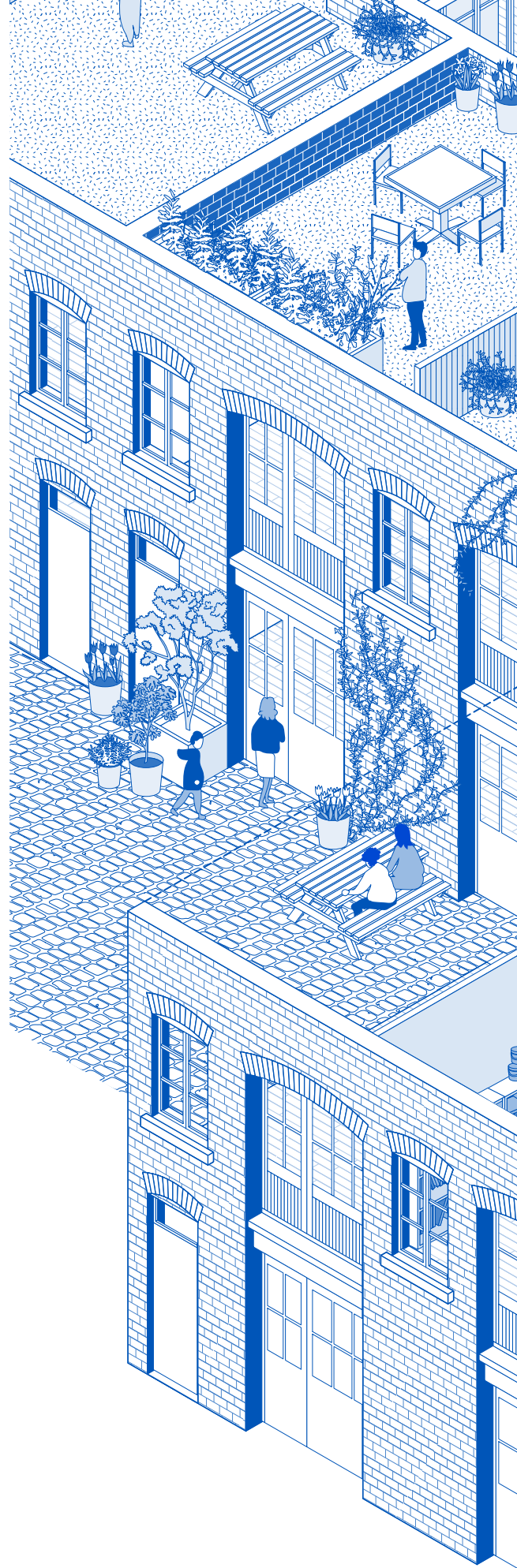


Ground Floor



A Yamaha MG10 Mixer, an example of the rental equipment available for hire from the audio-visual company located at Robert Dashwood Way. These companies supply some of the major sites of cultural consumption and display in the city including established institutions such as the V&A.

Act IV: Pullens Yards





Act IV: Pullens Yard

Landlord
Southwark Council

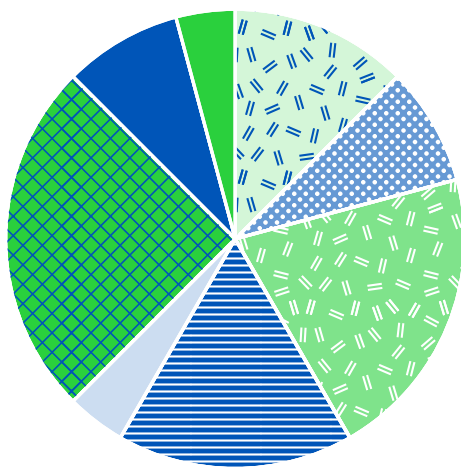
Price
160 £/m²









Number of Units
81

Planning Use Class
B1 Commercial / Industrial

Number of Businesses
106

Lease Type
Long Term



-  Design
-  Fine Art
-  Photography
-  Architecture / Construction
-  Clothes / Accessories
-  Office
-  Jewellery
-  Health

1886

The Pullens Estate was built by James Pullen who acquired the land and developed it over a 15-year period from 1886.

1944

Some of the buildings were damaged during German bombing in World War II. The V1 fighter pilot demolished six houses in Crampton Street and four in Manor Place

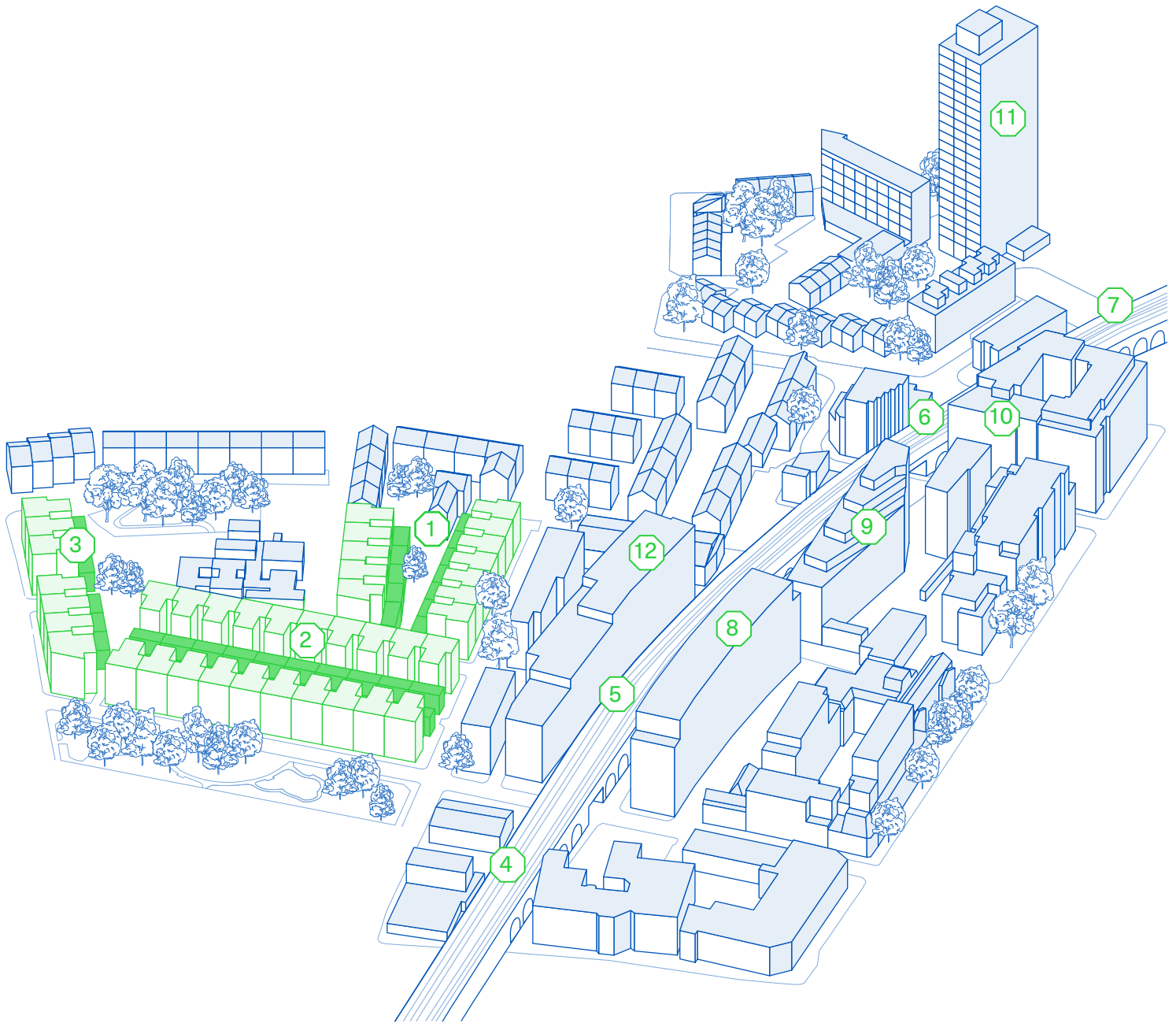
1970s

In the 1970s, the council planned to demolish the buildings but were stopped in the 1980s by an alliance of tenants and squatters who campaigned and fought successfully to save them with a campaign of direct action and solidarity. Artists were encouraged to rent the workshops at subsidised rent.

2005

The Pullens Estate was designated a conservation area by Southwark council an indication of the Borough's revised approach to its preservation and enhancement.





- 1 Peacock Yard
- 2 Iliffe Yard
- 3 Clements Yard
- 4 Husky Dance studios
- 5 Robert Dashwood Way
- 6 Spare Street
- 7 Maldonado Walk
- 8 The Printworks
- 9 South East Central
- 10 Highline Student Housing
- 11 The Drapers Estate



Pullens Yard

The workspaces in Pullens Yards consist of two-storey blocks constructed from yellow London stock brick laid in Flemish bond. The four-storey tenement buildings are Victorian style, three bays wide, and the flat roofs are used as roof terraces. The tenement buildings define the urban edge of the site. The site is one block behind the railway arches, away from the buzz of Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre. The planning use class falls within B1 Commercial Industrial Workshop, like the arches in Spare Street and Robert Dashwood Way. The tenants have a 15-year long lease with an average of 160 £/m², and the space is owned by Southwark Council.

Pullens Yards is an example of a working-class housing scheme with workshop spaces directly connected to homes. The model was popular in the 18th and 19th centuries, as many industrial processes were still carried out in the home in this period.⁴⁷ The original plans comprised of 684 dwellings arranged around four yards, including an original total of 106 workshops. Of these, 81 units and three yards (Peacock, Iliffe, and Clements) remain today, containing 106 businesses. The three yards form a complex with workspaces opening onto them behind houses whose entrances face the street. The tenement buildings at the edge share a common central entrance.

Purpose-built production site

The site was built from 1886 and over a 15-year period by the local builders, James Pullen and Son, as part of the Pullens Estate. Some of the first buildings were damaged and demolished during World War II. In 1977 Southwark council bought the estate through a compulsory purchase order with the plan to develop a new council estate, demolishing the blocks on Crampton Street, Amelia Street and Thrush Street whose flats were in poor condition and lacking basic amenities such as hot water and bathrooms. The project stopped in the 1980s by an alliance of tenants and squatters under the umbrella of the Pullens Squatter Organisation with the full support of the Residents' Association.⁴⁸ In his historical review of the Pullens Estate Batchelor describes that the architecture of the mansion blocks helped to barricade and to stop police and bailiffs entering the buildings, due to the layout of each flat and the narrow doors

accessing each stairway. Spurred on by the radical resistances, the Pullens Estate was designated conservation area on 19 April 2005, demonstrating the council's revised position on the preservation and enhancement of the heritage.

Historically intended for 'dirty' industry such as blacksmithing, smelting and carpentry, the focus of the production shifted towards more artistic activities after the 1980s when the yards moved into public ownership.⁴⁹ The council incentivised artists to move into the working spaces of the complex based on subsidised rents, transforming thus the demographics of the tenants. Until today, the workshops are used for artistic practices and creative purposes. Our land use data shows that half of the businesses in Peacock Yard are design, fine art, or architecture businesses while the rest of the units accommodate businesses that deal with photography, offices, clothes and accessories, health, and jewellery.

The legacy of Pullens Yards' radical past lives on in a cluster of social amenities, which still exist on site. Fareshares Food Co-operative, occupies a shop unit at 56 Crampton Street, with volunteer workers providing cheap wholefoods to the local community. At the rear of the unit InfoShop opened up, a voluntary DIY social centre and archive, which commemorates the site's history of resistance to top-down modes of development.

A gradient of visibility

Pullens Yards was designed as a specific live-work model with integrated public and private spaces. From the street and the yard to the workshop and the flat there is a gradation of spaces from public to private with the former two spaces being more accessible to the general public than the latter ones. The yards are open to everyone during the day, but accessible only to the residents at night.

For the majority of the interviewees, the workshops in the yards do not feature customer-facing elements. Their spatial configuration in the scheme turns them invisible from the street and passers-by do not have an opportunity to cast an eye on the activities that take place in the interior of Pullens Yard. In that sense, the workshops serve as the 'backstage' of cultural production without street-facing signage, glass facades, or online presence.

This invisibility is pretty conscious, even desirable as one artist states: “apart from the Open Studios, nobody here cares or wants, or expects passing trade. Visibility in that sense just doesn’t arise. Nobody is producing stuff here that they would expect local community to want to come in and buy. [...] There have been people here who’ve sold stuff to Fortnum & Mason, for instance, they don’t care [to be visible. This is] not a shop front, it’s a factory.” At the same time, the tenants have appropriated the yards with benches, planters and homemade seating that spill out into the shared spaces, creating a rather communal and convivial environment—something that would not be possible were the yards made fully public.

Whilst the workspaces are hard-to-see spaces, the original plan has provided for a few spots at the entrance of each yard to be directly visible and accessible from the street. These are entirely outward-looking spaces, currently used as a florist, furniture shop, a small gallery, and a café. Besides these, the only opportunities that the artists, craftspeople and designer-makers of Pullens Yards have to discuss, display or sell their work to members of the general public *in situ* is through events like the Open Studios organised twice a year by Pullens Arts Business Association (PABA). These are advertised on the Pullens Yards’ website with the aim to give exposure to the entire scheme and its activities.

Physical constraints and assets

The initial idea behind the live-work spaces in Pullens Yards was that the users of the workshops would live in the flats connected to them. But the doors between the two spaces have been long bricked up due to a much higher demand for housing than for workspace. Since its conception, the live-work ideas in Pullens Yards—except for a few cases—have never been aligned. One reason for that is that the types of productive activities and the technologies associated with them, have changed over time, and the relationship between living and working has evolved.

As a result, several physical adaptations have been carried out by the inhabitants and lead tenants of the spaces throughout the years. These are mainly internal changes to individual units that happened piecemeal, in an organic and unregulated fashion thanks to the benign neglect of the council. Also,

the integrated live-work typology does not leave much room for extensions of the workspaces, with residential flats being tightly-packed to the rear and above.

One of the driving factors for adaptation has been the need to make the spaces more affordable. Sharing the workspace is a compromise some artists make to continue working in Pullens Yards. As stated by one of our interviewees, the increase in rent was the impetus for subdividing his space and renting it out to subtenants. Sharing a space also affects the process of production in terms of deciding the size, equipment and materials used for the work as well as archiving and storing the pieces. An example was given by an artist who observed that the cramped conditions delimited her working process: “If things were different, I would be working on two or three of these things [pieces] at the same time, but it’s not easy.” Another artist observed that the space imposed some restrictions on the scale of the work he could produce in the studio: “I definitely would like to have a space 10 times this size ... because I have pieces which are 10 metres long ... I haven’t done them here, of course, I’ve done them in different spaces, but then I’ve rolled them up and then they went to stored away.”

Still, the surveys highlighted the importance of the central location of Pullens Yards within the city. Similar to the arches in the above case studies, the interviewees mentioned their workspaces being close to their clients, suppliers, and other services. Especially people who had two jobs, could easily move from their studio to different work commitments. Case point was an artist who shares a studio in Pullens Yards and holds a teaching position at a nearby university. Another example was that of a few artists who are part of the Bermondsey Art Group (BAG) and often have exhibitions in the neighbouring Bermondsey area.

Self-organisation

The history of resistance and unionisation in Pullens Yards has set an example by showing that participation and self-management can be “a major force behind dealings with the council and all sorts of other things for a very long time”.⁵⁰ In this case, it is the Pullens Tenants and Residents Association, which manages and maintains the common spaces of Pullens Yards in negotiation

with the council. The make-up of the association was described by one tenant as “a group of people who more or less, are voted in, but they more or less vote themselves in, because only people who want to do something turn up to the Annual General Meeting [...] there’s a head of our service responsibilities, that gets passed around, from year to year.” Only a few individuals actively take responsibilities in each yard, sometimes based on their expertise, and sometimes based on their interest to organise and manage the space as a community. The task of self-organising takes a huge amount of resources, motivation, and dedication, that changes in structure from yard to yard with a great dependency on individuals. As one tenant pointed out “at one stage the self-management notion was a very big deal [but] it was mostly about day-to-day management [...] trying to come up with a viable way of organising.”

That being said, there are tensions between the residents of the flats and the tenants of the workshops regarding the maintenance of the buildings. Due to the relaxed attitude of the local council, there is low maintenance towards building damages that affect the quality of workspaces. One tenant mentioned issues of persisting moisture and mould as the residents in the flats above are using the roof of his studio as a garden and the council has no access to it.

Generally, one can rent a space in Pullens Yards through the council, and there are no specific requirements with regards to the type of productive work undertaken by the prospective tenants. However, the units are in high demand due to their central location and historic charm, and vacancies are rare and often filled by word of mouth. Furthermore, some yards, like the Clements which features the least visible workspaces, have a special agreement with the council to let spaces exclusively to artists and craftspeople. This prioritises certain ‘creative’ industries more than others in terms of accessing space where unincorporated productive activities can take place.

Recently, the move away from craft and making-based practices towards virtual and desk-based labour has resulted in a change of population within Pullens Yards; a concern raised by one of the long-term tenants. The flexibility and agility of this new form of work provide a way to squeeze

greater value out of a small space, threatening more space-consuming activities.

A set of conditions

Nevertheless, the long-term rent contracts in combination with a tightly-knit tenants association and the physically close working conditions with shared amenities have cultivated a sense of community and a tradition of knowledge and skill exchange. An artist in Iliffe Yard, for instance, described a neighbour photographer often helping artists to take photos of their work for their websites at a subsidised rate, and the neighbouring IT business offering tech support and hot-desking space.

Whilst the Pullens Tenants and Residents Association exists to safeguard rents and negotiate with the council to lobby for the yard’s preservation, with time the conditions of these workspaces have become precarious.⁵¹ One of the changes noted by one of the artists was the shortening of their lease: “There was a period of two years when people like us who’d been here for some time were able to sign up for the 15-year leases, the five-year lease was still available, but nobody in their right mind would take it.” At that time, there was no yearly rent review and thus, no increase. Currently, this arrangement has changed to a three-year licence for the rent. However, as one tenant observed, “there’s no guarantee that what’s going to happen to the rent after the three years,” as the amount of rent increase is determined by the Retail Price Index (RPI) and can be affected by the upcoming redevelopment of Elephant and Castle area.





Figure 22

The yards are publicly accessible when the gates are open, yet the workspaces remain invisible from the street. Apart from the event of Open Studios which takes place twice a year, most of the people in the neighbourhood are not aware of the activities in these workspaces.

Figure 23

Often tenants share their space to keep rents affordable, which has led to the internal subdivision of units. This has its benefits for artists wanting to keep rental costs low and tenancy contracts flexible, but has the downside of limiting the type and scale of work that can take place.

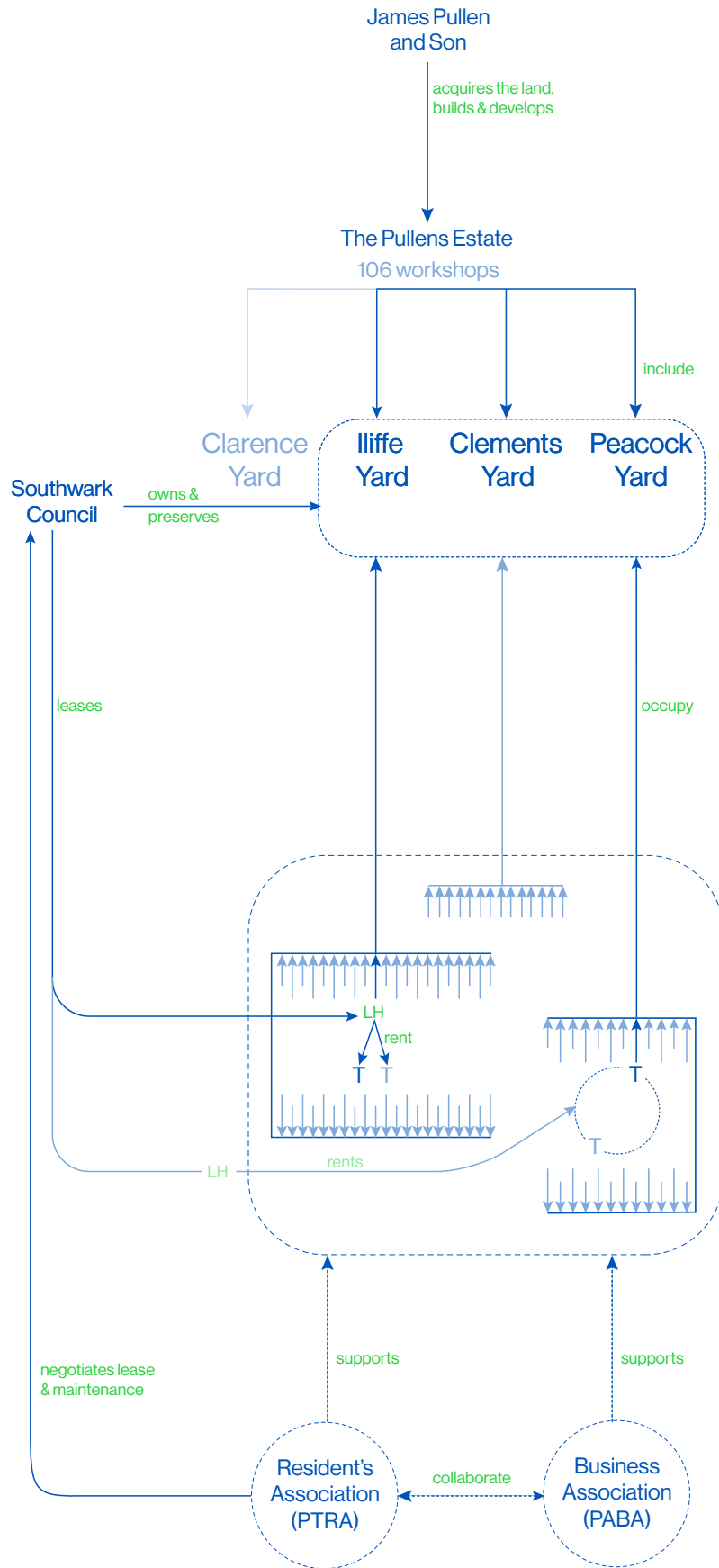




Figure 24

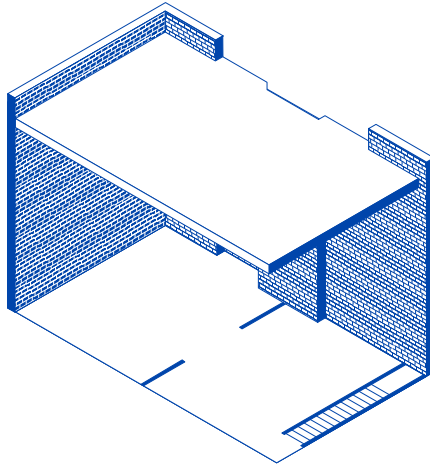
Some of the businesses such as this woodcarving workshop have expanded their workspace over several units. Adaptations to each individual unit have been done in an organic and unregulated fashion by the lead tenants, without monitoring from the council.

Networks

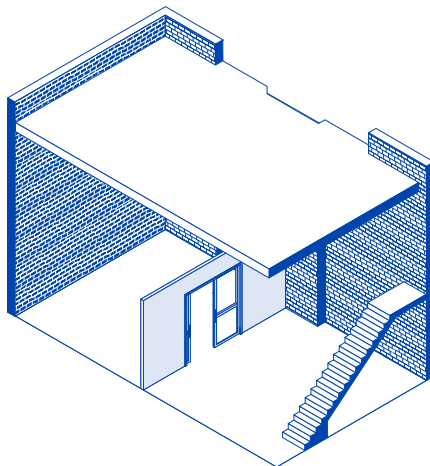


PABA: Pullens Arts and Businesses Association
 PTRA: Pullens Tenants and Residents Association
 LH: Leaseholder
 T: Tenant

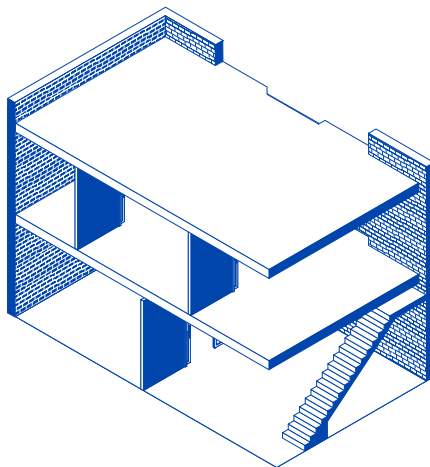
Adaptations



1. Lead tenant takes on the lease and divides space between sub tenants

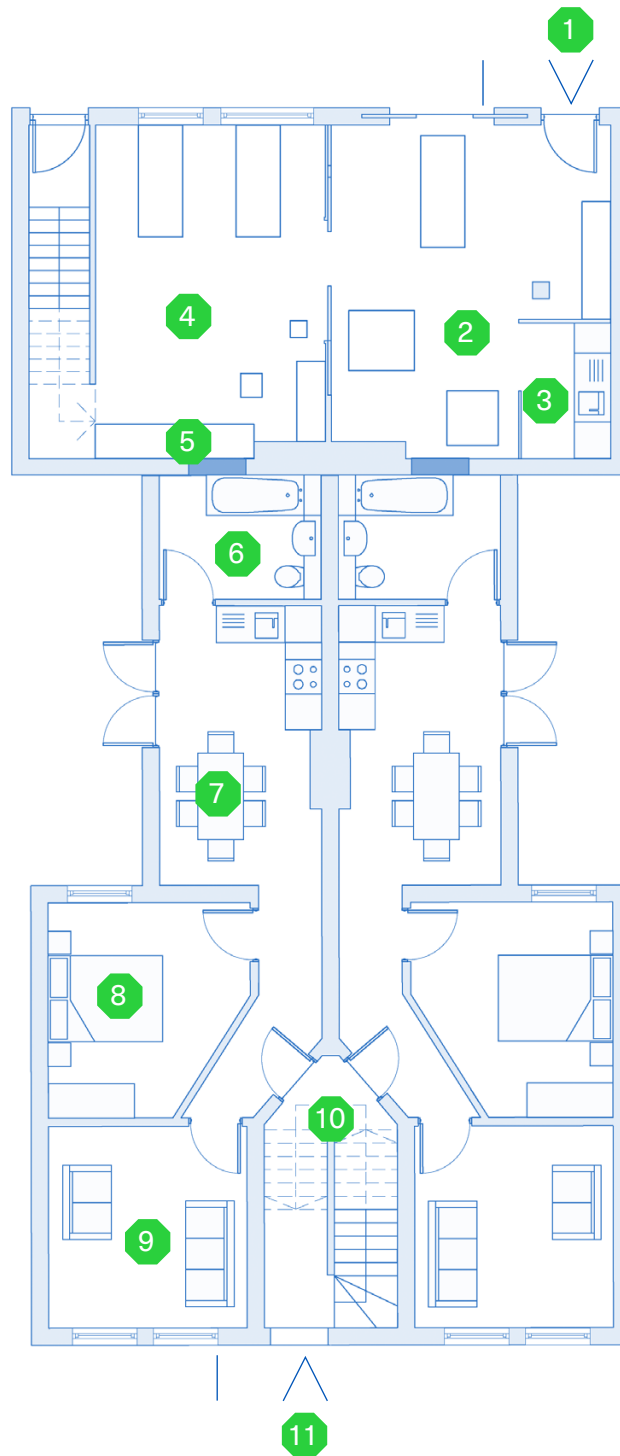


2. Internal subdivisions are built by the tenants to create individual workspaces



3. The space is divided in the same way on the second floor

Plans



- 1 Entrance to workshop from shared yard
- 2 Wood workshop
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Sculpting room
- 5 Bricked in doorway
- 6 Resident's bathroom
- 7 Resident's kitchen/dining
- 8 Resident's bedroom
- 9 Resident's living room
- 10 Shared foyer
- 11 Entrance to flats from the street



A maquette crafted by a woodcarver specialising in biodegradable headstones based at Pullens Yard. Maquettes such as this one, are used by the woodcarvers as prototypes to pitch for further work with woodland burial and green funerals sites.

4 The coda

What kinds of situations do the configurations of these infrastructural conditions create in terms of agency over the way spaces work, their interface with the public realm, their affordability, and their relationships to their ecological context?

Adaptations of spaces and practices

Adaptation brings and stems from different dynamics, and needs to be critically evaluated for its impact in different contexts. For example, the ability to subdivide a space can be positive for an artist, whose practice has decreased in spatial requirement but who wants to remain in the same location, or searches for a solution to the rising rents.

Firstly, adaptation can come from a lack of provision. This places a demand on the tenant to invest their own resources for making the space suitable for their work. It also fails to support shorter-term occupancies that act as springboards to larger spaces as micro-businesses expand. At the same time, a DIY fit-out reduces construction and maintenance costs and places agency in the hands of the user, having further impacts on the development of social networks within these spaces and the longevity of their use. In that sense, the provision of cultural infrastructure can be conceived of as the provision of infrastructural conditions for infrastructures to be built upon by their users, potentially reducing costs to those users and providing a catalyst for the development of organisational structures and social connections in the process.

Finally, though, adaptations can come as a new form of operation, production, or work. That is the case of freelance laptop-based co-working, which provides a way to squeeze greater value out of a small space, threatening more space-consuming activities. Whilst this has been part of an on-going planning focus on providing flexible spaces for the so-called 'creative class',⁵² it misses to protect spaces for the messier and bigger processes, that may or may not be cultural in the narrower of the sense. Yet, there is possibly a stronger alliance between car mechanics and audio-visual suppliers to cultural events, than there is between these events and graphic or architectural designers, in terms of the kinds of rents and size of workspace that makes their work possible.

Interfaces of spatial and social structures

Within both the spatial and organisational configuration of these infrastructures, attention

should be paid to the way that their interface with the public realm impacts the ways they are used. Both Spare Street and Pullens Yards have overarching public-facing organisations that communicate these spaces-'brands' to a wider public, but with very different aims. In Spare Street, the non-profit company of Hotel Elephant exists partially to manage the studios, but is also angled towards the creation of a public programme of events and the management of a public café. Their remit goes beyond the simple maintenance of the infrastructure, and into making that infrastructure a destination. This is reflected in the significant investment in the design of the public realm and facade in order to create an image rather than just an amenity at Spare Street; an image that helps increasing the reputation of Elephant and Castle as a 'creative' zone, following the desires of the local authority instead of the users of the spaces. It is also represented by the 'virtual' visibility of Hotel Elephant, which has its own Instagram account advertising yoga workshops, gigs, tours, and promoting the use of the public spaces. The tenants of the studios themselves have little control over how and when their presence is put to work as part of that reputational value-creation.

Pullens Yards, on the other hand, is represented publicly by an organisation generated and manned by its own users, placing control in the hands of its tenants over how and when they 'perform' or get 'put on stage'. This is demonstrated in the Open Studios events which focus more on creating opportunities for the artists and makers to sell their cultural products, than on putting the yards themselves on the map of cultural tourism in the area. Indeed, most of the time the yards are closed and gated, resisting immediate visibility to passers-by. Their virtual 'facade'—the website and Instagram account—exist to advertise the Open Studio, which takes place only around twice a year.

On the opposite side, neither Robert Dashwood Way nor Maldonado Walk have overarching organisations that run them. In both those cases, each arch is rented directly from the landlord, though within Maldonado Walk informal social structures have emerged within the arches. For Robert Dashwood Way, this is a benefit. The rudimentary, non-designed, and inactive frontages inhibit any interaction with the street and ensure the businesses remain less known. This keeps their equipment secure and prevents their rents

from rising as the spaces become viable for retail and other public-facing activities, like Spare Street showed. For Maldonado Walk, on the other hand, this lack of overarching organisation is a problem to overcome. Activating the arches' frontages would actually help the businesses behind to promote themselves to customers, strengthening their collective position vis-à-vis the kinds of evictions their neighbours at Elephant and Castle shopping centre have seen. But designing and sustaining these spatial and social structures takes resources, and part of the reason this is possible for Spare Street is the public investment they have received in both the construction and programme.

The study of these four backstage spaces showed there is an interrelationship between the ways the material design produces visibility of activities within these infrastructures, the kinds of organisations that run them, the ways they are communicated to the public 'virtually', and the means by which they have come about. The question is then, are cultural producers conscious of these aspects and their interrelationship? Do they want to be made visible in this way and how? None of the tenants in Spare Street complained about the glass facades that put them on show, but most pointed out that it was not necessary for what they do. Pullens Yards' spatial configuration is inherited from a time at which productive activities were perceived as dirty and messy and were to be hidden behind houses, off of public thoroughfares, or under train tracks that the city turned its back to. The artists there benefit from this configuration to keep control over their visual exposure to the public. But the wider shift from heavier industrial to knowledge- and screen-based forms of production in the city has meant sites of that production become destinations in themselves, leading to the transformation of spaces like Spare Street that were once industrial sites with restricted access. The businesses of Maldonado Walk need more visibility, but do not have access to resources that can help them to achieve it. Yet, they are aware that their operation relies heavily on the informal support they receive from the Latin community in the wider Elephant and Castle area.

Summary

Through the four case studies unfolded in this report, we have tried to expand our understanding of cultural infrastructure by examining the underlying conditions that have enabled different practices to operate and thrive within these backstage sites in London.

Through an ethnographic study of surveying spaces and interviewing their users, we have expanded the definition of cultural producers to include all those unincorporated individuals and collectives, artists, makers, micro-firms, and artisans, who access, appropriate, and operate within these infrastructures according to different spatial, functional, and legal conditions. The work presented in this report reveals the complex relationships between the physical space, the socio-economic status, and the social and organizational structures that enable or constrain the types of production that can or can't happen there.

By revealing these interweaving infrastructures, we hope to build a multi-voiced account of what constitutes cultural production in the city, placing practices including cooking, writing, rehearsing, supplying, and making, alongside more traditionally recognised forms of artisanship. Our study pointedly focuses on the first-hand accounts from the users of these spaces, seeking to understand how they build and maintain their own social, economic and operational infrastructures amid the larger planning and regeneration frameworks they exist within. We hope to expand this understanding, comparing and contrasting our findings in London with case studies from Paris, Marseille and Glasgow.

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Colophon

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For more information on Theatrum Mundi's Urban Backstages project visit: <http://theatrum-mundi.org/project/urbanbackstages/>

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