

## The White House: Open Call for a Live-in Caretaker

*“Tenants shall be as free as possible to order their lives in their own way, so that they may pursue their originality...”*

London County Council Becontree Estate Tenants’ Handbook, 1921

### Background Information

#### The House

The White House is situated on the Becontree Estate in Dagenham, once the largest council estate in the world.

The White House is a former 18<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse on the Valence House estate near Chadwell Heath, which pre-dates the Becontree estate by over 100 years. Left abandoned for 9 years, Create undertook a capital refurbishment of the house in 2015-16. Now re-opened, The White House is in the process of being reimagined as a new public space for art and social activity inspired by the history of the borough.

In our first year we have made steps to establish a bold space to support all kinds of cultural and social activity including community meals, workshops and performances. Artists-in-residence are invited to live at The White House, to make new art and work with people living locally to build a vision for this new public building, and more ambitiously, for public life on the estate.

We are interested in creating an approach which might lead towards artists working in more connected ways with their neighbours in specific locations across London. The residencies explore the possibility of artists as active members in a community. Together we will test the ways that a space of this kind may be configured and function, and whether a space of this kind can exist and work for the many different kinds of people that use it.

#### White House Residencies to date

Since opening in August 2016 we have had four artists take up residence at the house:

**Chad McCail** created a pantomime with people from the area and students from the local college which was performed at the Civic Centre. Chad set up a new community group called *All Hands On Deck* who still meet and work at the house every week. The pantomime was a Dagenham re-imagination of Jack & the Beanstalk, exploring social issues and the history of Becontree.

**Patrick Goddard** made a film with a local resident, screened at Eastbury Manor House. His film *Tune Into Sanity FM!* looked at class antagonisms in the borough through the perspective of Patrick and his collaborator.

**Christina Ford** made a performance piece with lone parent families from the borough that was performed at the house, and set up a new community group called *Gingerbread Dagenham*. The work challenged stereotypes of single mothers and explored the real life challenges behind assumed images.

**Eve Chabanon** ran a Ken Loach retrospective and devised a performance in the form of a public debate at Barking Town Hall. The *Anti Social Social Club* critiqued crowd manipulation techniques, explored ongoing anxiety around gentrification and considered what constitutes our idea of ‘community’.

**Alice Theobald** started her residency in June 2017 and is currently based at the house.

### The Front Room Programme

Alongside the artists' residencies there are regular and one-off events and classes that form the *Front Room Programme*. These are supported by the Engagement Coordinator and usually fall on Wednesdays and Fridays, when the house is open to the public. Regular activity includes a poetry circle, crochet and needle-felt, oil painting and lino printing classes, a prop making group and a meet-up for lone parent families as well as social evenings run by the Friends of The White House.

### Beacon Garden

Starting in Summer 2017, we have commissioned artist collective They Are Here (Helen Walker & Harun Morrison) to undertake a two-year garden residency. Their project *When Species Meet* will transform the disused car park space currently behind the house into a functioning community garden, through workshops with the local community.

### V&A Residency

The V&A Research Institute and Create are currently requesting applications from social practice artists or designers working in any form or medium interested in exploring the creative interplay between town and countryside. The residency will be hosted at The White House later this year.

### The Caretaker

We have now reached the end of our pilot phase of the project. Upon reflection and responding to feedback over the year we have come to the conclusion that in order to run a space of this nature, that blurs the line between private and public, municipal space and arts space, that the house now needs a live-in caretaker.

We are now seeking an individual to live in the house for six months (with an initial 8-week trial period), to help look after the property and support the activity in the house. We are looking to work with someone who is interested and invested in the overall aims of the space, has experience living and working communally and wants to be a part of the growing community of The White House.

In exchange for looking after the house and performing specific tasks, the caretaker will receive:

- Six months subsidised accommodation to the value of approximately £800pcm\* including a double bedroom, a large studio, and shared use of the kitchen, dining room, living room and outdoor space in accordance with other activities there
- Utility bills, council tax and internet included
- A monthly stipend of £200

\*the equivalent cost of a bedroom and studio in a shared house locally

### Job Description

The caretaker will be expected to:

1. Be primarily based at the house at least 4 days per week in order to open the house for deliveries, for the cleaner and in the event of other staff needed cover.
2. Offer 15-20 hours per week to carry out tasks outlined below. Exact hours to be determined upon appointment.
3. Act as the primary point of contact to members of the public that may call in at the house outside of opening hours, directing them to the right

- person to contact or alerting them to the programme at the house and opportunities to participate, as well as answering the phone. The caretaker must act as an advocate for the project at all times and will be trained to ensure the safeguarding of anyone entering the house.
4. Manage the building: organise the repair of any damage, manage the cleaner, keep the house tidy, restock amenities, ensure safety, manage utility bills, manage first aid and assist with insurance and other administrative tasks. Maintain the daily security of the house; locking up the site each evening and after events to ensure that all doors, windows and gates are secure. Manage heating and ensure that recycling and bins are being used properly and collected. In the case of an emergency out of hours contact the Curator or Director of Create, and the emergency services if necessary.
  5. Work with the Engagement Coordinator and Curator to manage aspects of the house budget i.e. petty cash.
  6. Support artists in residence when they first move into the house to get to grips with the space and the local area i.e. introduction to safety, keys, local grocery stores, travel etc. act as their point of contact outside working hours.
  7. Assist artists and staff on any other reasonable task where necessary.

### Person Specification

We are looking for someone that has the following qualities and experience:

- Personable and friendly
- Can get on with and speak to a wide range of people
- Flexible and adaptable
- Supportive and open
- Interested in being an active member of a community
- Interested in community arts and social practice
- Experience of working intensively with groups and members of the public
- Willingness to work evenings, and weekends as required
- An understanding of and commitment to Health and Safety

Desirable:

- A connection to east London and/or Barking & Dagenham.
- Experience of maintenance and practical skills

We imagine that this unique opportunity would suit a freelance artist/creative practitioner who works from home, or someone with experience and interest in the arts that wants to work closely within and be part of a creative community. The arrangement will need good communication and mutual understanding from all parties as well as a sensitivity to working with a wide range of people.

### Application

Interested parties should submit a brief (max. one page) summary of their interest in being the White House Live-in Caretaker, relevant experience and connection to the area (if any). Please also include a brief CV – this will not be taken into as much consideration as the expression of interest, but will give us an idea of your wider experience and interests.

Please email to: [sophie@createlondon.org](mailto:sophie@createlondon.org)

Deadline: 12 noon, 7 August 2017

Start Date: September 2017

Please note: this opportunity will require a DBS check.

The successful applicant will be required to invoice for the monthly stipend with a UTR number and will be responsible for their own National Insurance and tax.