



IF_DO

PRESS ENQUIRIES

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PRESS RELEASE

THE HITHE

ROTHERHITHE, LONDON, UK

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The Hithe is a new, low-cost, demountable business incubator space in Rotherhithe designed by IF_DO.

The name, from Old English, describes a landing place or small port for ships and boats, making reference to the nautical history of the area fronting onto the Thames, and the building's role in fostering nascent entrepreneurs.

Commissioned by Southwark Council, IF_DO has worked closely with the pioneering social enterprise Meanwhile Space CIC to bring a redundant site into productive use. The 200m² building provides 12 units of workspace; the largest is occupied by Meanwhile Space.

The Hithe is the practice's second project developed with Meanwhile Space, following the success of Granby Space, a 350m² short-term refurbishment on Lower Marsh, Waterloo, which has closed after five years. The Hithe represents a new departure for Meanwhile Space, as a new-build facility designed to be relocated. In this, its first iteration, it represents a new piece of social infrastructure for Rotherhithe: a community hub in a neighbourhood undergoing rapid change.

The relatively small site is located on Albion Street, within the wider Rotherhithe masterplan area, and was identified by Southwark Council for meanwhile use of up to 11 years while the council develops plans for the area.

Working within the constraints of a tight budget, the structure has been designed in collaboration with engineer Elliott Wood and fabricator Weber Industries to be fully demountable and relocatable, ensuring long-term use. It is constructed of an efficient lightweight steel and timber frame made with bespoke and prefabricated components and structural insulated panels (SIP), and built onto the site's existing foundations, largely eliminating the need for any new concrete on the project.

Inside, the timber structure and services have been left exposed. Ten micro-studios are arranged around a ground floor central gathering space with links to the kitchen and yard to the north of the site, which will be transformed into a planted outdoor social space. Two larger workspaces are located on the first floor. All units are accessed externally, reducing the requirement for built circulation space.

The building acts as a hinge between the existing community and the new developments around it, aiming to connect new and existing residents as the area goes through significant change. Double-height glazed lanterns on the north and south elevations create a landmark within the streetscape, with the aim of increasing footfall to other businesses along Albion Street.

The Hithe demonstrates how the construction industry can utilise circular economy thinking to reduce its carbon emissions and offer more sustainable solutions for urban regeneration. It is one of three circular economy demonstrator projects in London for CIRCulT (Circular Construction in Regenerative Cities). In the long term, when the site is ready for permanent redevelopment, the building will be broken down into its various components and re-erected on an alternative site. In the short term, by offering affordable workspace to local businesses, The Hithe promises to inject vibrancy into Rotherhithe, supporting the community as the area undergoes change.

Rents are offered at an affordable price to attract sole traders and start-ups (micro-units are charged at £270 per calendar month, including service charge). In addition to Meanwhile Space, tenants include a social enterprise focused on getting kids active, an apothecarist, an architect, a filmmaker, a beauty entrepreneur and a sewing club tutor.

Eddie Bridgeman, Executive Director, Meanwhile Space CIC, said:

"We needed a few things fulfilled in this brief. The building needed to be up and operating quickly, look good and fit locally, have a light footprint and importantly, have a second, third and maybe fourth life. Shipping containers have been the go-to option, but aesthetically the wrong choice; they also lose a lot of structural integrity once cut into for glazing and joining. To re-use the building again and again, maintain a quality structure and look that could be tweaked for different locations, we needed an alternative. IF_DO and Weber have really delivered us something that will recycle our investment and provide us with a product that we can use repeatedly on different meanwhile sites."

Thomas Bryans, Director, IF_DO, said:

"One of the key desires from the community was that the building shouldn't look temporary. They did not want it to feel like another construction site, so shipping containers and temporary site offices were ruled out at the outset. Designing a decade-long meanwhile building of a high architectural standard, to be delivered on a very tight budget, was always going to be challenging, but we added to that the ambition to make it demountable and reusable. We had been having conversations with Meanwhile Space for a while about the potential of relocatable micro-work units, and The Hithe was the perfect opportunity to start testing some of those ideas. The need for affordable workspace and the availability of vacant lots for temporary usage is a reality in many places, and especially so in London, so it's a model which we expect to be replicated quite widely."

Cllr Helen Dennis, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development, said:

"We are delighted this striking new community landmark will give local entrepreneurs and small businesses access to affordable space to grow and share skills. Our vision for a fully de-mountable building that acts as a beacon for Albion Street has come to life, set to draw in new visitors and the local community alike. This sustainable hub can be redeployed to sites across the borough, meaning in time other areas can reap similar economic and social rewards."

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FACTS AND CREDITS

Location:	71-75 Albion Street, London SE16 7JA
Site area:	283m ²
Gross internal floor area:	200m ²
Construction value:	£400,000
Schedule:	Sept 2017 – Dec 2021
Client:	Meanwhile Space/London Borough of Southwark
Architect:	IF_DO
Structural engineer:	Elliott Wood
Quantity surveyor:	Measur
Fabricator/contractor:	Weber Industries
Materials:	Lightweight steel and timber frame, SIP panels
Photos:	© Mike Massaro

IF_DO

Established in 2014 by Al Scott, Sarah Castle and Thomas Bryans, IF_DO is a young architecture practice dedicated to creating projects with a positive impact on users, the environment and the surrounding community.

IF_DO works on projects of all scales, from interiors and one-off houses to strategic planning and masterplans. Built works include: Granby Space creative work hub in Waterloo for Meanwhile Space CIC (2016); 'After Image', the multi award-winning London Festival of Architecture Dulwich Pavilion, a temporary events pavilion in the grounds of the Dulwich Picture Gallery (2017); St Teresa's School Sixth Form Centre, Effingham, Surrey (2018); and the practice's first new-build house, Thorpeness Beach House in Suffolk (2021).

Current projects include: The Hithe, business incubator workspace in Rotherhithe; the retrofit of The Observer Building, a former printworks in Hastings, into a new mixed-use community facility; The Yard, a new community enterprise hub with a café, community event space, and low cost workspace in Bruce Grove, Tottenham; and The Space, a new-build community centre in Enfield commissioned by the Methodist Church.

Informed by research, the practice was founded on the principles that we should ask questions and take action, always seeking to deliver broader social and environmental benefits through design and working closely with clients to make their projects do more.

The three founders met while studying architecture at the University of Edinburgh. They are committed to campaigning for greater diversity in the profession through their work with Urbanistas, Part W, Architecture LGBT+, and the Social Mobility Foundation.

www.ifdo.co



Meanwhile Space

As the market leader since 2009, Meanwhile Space is the pioneering social enterprise creating better places to live and work, by taking on challenging redundant spaces, and working with local communities to bring them into affordable use.

Through development and management of spaces, and other consultancy and capacity building work, our understanding is enriched by the experience of being rooted stakeholders in local neighbourhood community clusters in London and the South East. We build local capacity for enterprise by bringing vibrant activity to underused spaces for the benefit of local individuals starting or growing their own creative or social enterprise, passion or skills. Building community hubs that reflect what local people want and need, each project is carefully designed to achieve maximum employment and placemaking benefits.

Meanwhile Space is currently landlord and steward of 110,000 ft², with 160 tenants, in 24 properties. Over 85% of the tenants in our projects live in the local area, and we have worked with 14 London Boroughs, primarily in outer London.

From makerspaces in vacant railway arches, to former council buildings re-imagined as creative hubs, to new build retail incubation on the high street - each of our spaces is a place responsive architectural and operational identity serving a range of tenant uses from product designers, to a bakery, to social and community enterprises, fashion designers and tech startups. Our portfolio of award-winning projects include Ebury Edge in Pimlico, Blue House Yard in Wood Green, Queens Parade in Willesden Green, Tripod in Brixton, Rock House in Hastings, Central Parade in Walthamstow and Place/Ladywell in Lewisham.

www.meanwhilespace.com



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