Public Art Commission for Edward Edward's House, Almshouse, Southwark

220 Blackfriars Road

Expression of Interest — Public Realm Artistic Activation



CGI render of the proposed public realm at 220 Blackfriars Road

1. Introduction

Southwark Charities invites expressions of interest from artists, designers, makers and interdisciplinary teams to create an artistic activation in the public realm at our new almshouse development at 220 Blackfriars Road, Southwark.

The commission marks a significant moment — the opening of a new almshouse for a new era, rooted in a charitable tradition that has served the people of Southwark since 1717. 220 Blackfriars Road is not simply a new development: it is a pioneering and visionary model for what an almshouse can be in the twenty-first century — entirely affordable, built to the highest standards, and designed to provide dignity, community and security for those who need it most. It sets a new standard for this kind of housing, in the heart of one of London's most vibrant and well-connected neighbourhoods.

We are looking for bold, thoughtful work that speaks to the public realm, reflects the heritage and values of the charity, and creates a lasting contribution to this corner of Southwark. We welcome proposals from practitioners working across all disciplines and at all career stages.

2. The Opportunity

The commission focuses on the southeast corner of the ground floor public realm due for completion in early 2029 — a landscaped garden and publicly accessible space that forms the public face of the new almshouse development. This is the primary site for artistic activation. Our preference is for a UK based practitioner. We particularly welcome applications from artists and practitioners with connections to Southwark and from those whose practices reflect the diversity of London's communities.

We are looking for bold artistic ideas and considered treatments for this space — proposals that respond to the site, integrate with the approved landscape design, and create something genuinely compelling in the public realm. The physical elements of the space include pavements, paving surfaces, street furniture, landscaping and planting — all of which are available as part of the canvas. Proposals may work across any or all of these elements, and may include:

- Stone, brick, metal or terrazzo interventions
- Sculptural paving or embedded materials
- Lighting, projection or digital interaction
- Text, typography or narrative inscriptions
- Ceramic, glass or mosaic work
- Integrated seating, thresholds or landscape features
- Mixed-media or interdisciplinary approaches

This commission seeks an exceptional public artwork that will become the defining feature of the corner of the new public space. The ambition is to create a work that establishes a strong civic identity, marks the arrival at the new almshouse, and contributes to Southwark's rich tradition of public art. The artwork may act as a landmark, a point of orientation, a subtle wayfinding device, a sculptural intervention, or an immersive public experience. Rather than prescribing a particular form, the brief invites artists to respond imaginatively to the site, creating a work that is both rooted in the history of the place and forward-looking in its expression. The successful proposal should animate the public realm, encourage people to pause, gather or reflect, and become a memorable part of London's evolving cultural landscape. The commission is intentionally open in its approach, inviting proposals in any suitable medium that create a memorable destination, encourage interaction and reveal the rich histories of Bankside, Blackfriars Road and Southwark through a contemporary artistic vision.

Artists should consider durability, accessibility, maintenance requirements, public safety and environmental sustainability within their proposal.

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3. Who This Is For

This is a commission for the public. The artistic activation should speak first and foremost to the people who pass through, work nearby, and live in the neighbourhood — local residents, office workers, visitors to the area, and those using the community hub, workspace and charity offices within the development.

Almshouse residents are part of this picture too, and depending on the nature of the commission, there may be opportunity to integrate and extend into the dedicated outdoor spaces elsewhere in the building. But the primary focus of this commission is the charity's presence in and contribution to the wider public realm — a statement of who Southwark Charities are, what they stand for, and their commitment to this neighbourhood.

4. What We Are Trying to Achieve

We aim to create a publicly accessible, artistically activated space that is engaging, functional and enduring. **The principles below should guide proposals. The final work need not address every principle, but should complement the space, its users and the landscaping.**

Subtle heritage

The history of the charity and the site is long and layered — stretching back over three centuries to Edward Edwards, a stone mason who founded a charitable tradition that endures today. We want that heritage present in the space, but worn lightly. We are not looking for literal commemoration. We are looking for work that reflects the longevity, stewardship and values of the charity in a way that feels contemporary and understated.

A space for reflection and dwelling

The space should invite people to pause, linger and reflect — not simply pass through. We are looking for an activation that creates a sense of place and belonging, somewhere that people choose to spend time in and return to.

Materiality and craft

The physical treatments of the space — its surfaces, materials, textures and details — should be considered and intentional. We are looking for proposals where the quality of making is evident, and where material choices feel rooted in the character of the site and its histories. A dialogue with landscape architects is possible at the development stage for the shortlisted artists.

Integrated wayfinding

The commission could incorporate public wayfinding and signposting, woven cleverly and discreetly into the overall design rather than treated as a separate or secondary element.

Supporting the community hub

The space sits directly alongside the charity's community hub. Any proposal must support the operational and events needs of that hub — enabling the space to be used flexibly for public programming and community activity.

A connection to what's above

There is potential to create a relationship between the public realm space and the rooftop, a space the charity controls. This is not a requirement, but proposals that consider this vertical dimension are welcome.

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5. Thematic Directions

These themes are offered as starting points for creative exploration, not as prescriptive directions. Artists are encouraged to interpret, combine or depart from them in ways that feel authentic to their practice.

The Almshouse Legacy

The almshouse is one of the most enduring and humane concepts in British social history — a commitment to providing shelter, dignity and community for those who need it most. Southwark Charities has embodied that commitment since 1717, and 220 Blackfriars Road is one of the most ambitious and contemporary expressions of the almshouse concept anywhere. Artists may wish to explore:

- Traditions of care, shelter and mutual support
- The role of philanthropy and charitable giving across generations
- Ideas of belonging, dignity and community
- Permanence, memory and the long arc of stewardship
- The almshouse as a model for affordable, purposeful living

Making and Craft

The charity was founded by Edward Edwards, a stone mason — someone who worked with his hands and built things to last. This is a neighbourhood with a deep tradition of physical making: of skilled craft, material transformation and things built to endure. The former dye works and tenter-ground that once operated nearby brought colour, process and industry to these streets — part of a long history of making in this corner of London. Artists may wish to explore:

- Historic and contemporary craft and masonry traditions
- Carving, mark-making, pattern and texture
- Tools, materials and the processes of making
- The former dye works and their vivid colour histories
- Craft guilds, apprenticeships and skilled labour
- The relationship between making, permanence and place

Place and People

Bankside and Blackfriars Road have always been places of exchange, gathering and reinvention. Communities have settled, industries have risen and fallen, and this corner of London has constantly transformed itself while retaining a distinctive civic character. Artists may wish to explore:

- Urban transformation and the changing landscape of Southwark
- Diverse communities, migration histories and civic identity
- Hidden stories, archives and oral histories
- Public gathering, exchange and everyday life
- The layered relationship between past and present in this neighbourhood
- Contemporary life and community around Bankside and Blackfriars Road

6. Budget

We recognise that an ambitious commission of this nature requires appropriate investment. As a charity, however, we also have a responsibility to be careful and transparent stewards of the funds entrusted to us. We anticipate an overall budget in the region of **£200,000–£300,000**, appropriate to the scale and ambition of the opportunity.

This budget is intended to cover all costs associated with the development and delivery of the commission**,** including the artist's fee and professional costs, design development, materials, fabrication, transportation, installation and any other costs necessary to realise and complete the work.

We are particularly interested in proposals that demonstrate excellent value alongside artistic ambition. We are seeking to make a meaningful, long-term investment in a work of exceptional quality, integrity and longevity. The budget will be discussed openly with shortlisted artists at the appropriate stage.

We will also consider carefully the relationship between an artist's experience, the proposed approach and the scale of fee and associated costs. The budget is intended to support an ambitious and properly resourced commission, rather than to imply that the maximum available budget should necessarily be spent.

7. Indicative Timeline

The timeline below is indicative and subject to programme development. The public opening of the almshouse is planned for Q1 2029.

Stage	Indicative Date
Open call for commission launched	Autumn 2026
Expression of interest assessed and up to 5 artists shortlisted	Jan 2027
Shortlisted artists submit concepts	March 2027
Artist appointment	Late Spring 2027
Design development and coordination	Autumn 2027
Fabrication and production	Early 2028
Installation and completion	Autumn/Winter 2028
Public launch	Q1 2029 — opening of the almshouses

8. How to Apply & Shortlisting Criteria

This is an expression of interest, not a request for a fully developed proposal. Please submit the following to info@southwarkcharities.org.uk by Friday 4th January 2027

- A brief statement of interest outlining who you are and why this commission interests you
- Initial ideas or references that give a sense of how you might approach the commission
- An indicative sense of the investment your approach would require
- Examples of previous relevant work (maximum 10 images or equivalent media links)
- Artist CV(s) for all team members
- Details of any collaborators or specialist consultants
- The application must not exceed 10 pages

Applications are welcomed from:

- Individual artists
- Artist collectives
- Architects and designers
- Makers and craftspeople
- Interdisciplinary teams
- Emerging and established practitioners
- Preference will be given to those based in the UK

Collaborative and cross-disciplinary proposals are strongly encouraged.

Expressions of interest will be assessed on the criteria above.

In particular, we are interested in the ideas expressed about the approach to the commission.

Shortlisted artists will receive an honorarium of £5,000 to develop concepts for final selection

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9. Selection Criteria For Final Work

Submissions will be assessed against:

- Artistic quality and originality
- Relevance to the brief and site context
- Value for money and understanding of the charitable context of the commission
- Understanding of public space and how people use and move through it
- Feasibility and technical understanding
- Experience delivering public-facing work
- Understanding of materials, durability and long-term maintenance
- Potential for public and community engagement
- Commitment to inclusion and accessibility
- Potential for an ongoing creative relationship with the space and the charity

10. How We Will Work Together

The selected artist or team will work in close collaboration with the Southwark Charities team, architects and landscape architects throughout the design and development process. Integration with the approved landscape design is central to the commission — this is not an artwork placed into a finished space, but a creative intervention developed in dialogue with it.

We see this as a genuine partnership — one where the artist's vision leads, but where the practical, operational and community dimensions of the space are understood and respected.

Proposals should demonstrate:

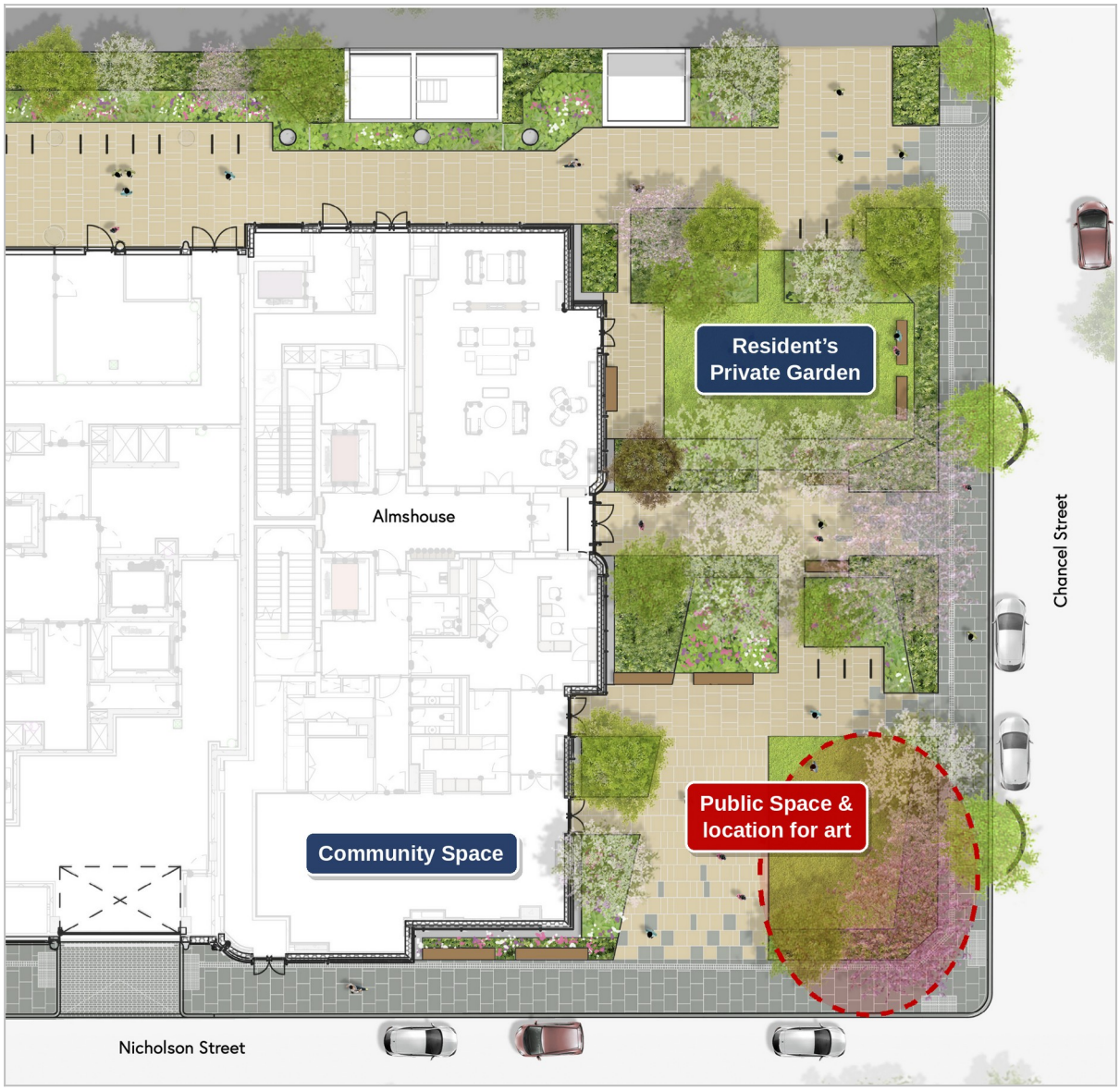
- A strong and original artistic vision
- Understanding of public space and how people use it
- Sensitivity to heritage and context
- High-quality material thinking and technical feasibility
- A rigorous approach to sustainability, durability and long-term maintenance
- Inclusive and accessible design principles

We actively welcome proposals that incorporate resident engagement, community workshops and participatory elements as part of the process, and we are particularly interested in artists who see potential for an ongoing creative relationship with the space and the charity beyond the initial commission.

11. Further Information

Further site information, architectural drawings and technical details will be provided to the final shortlisted applicants. The following pages include 3 images that provide the approximate location on the site to where we envisage the artwork to sit. This will need final planning approval.

The landscaped area is approx. 12 by 12 meters. The almshouse sits on the west of the site and is 14 storeys.



Ground floor plan - The southeast corner, at the junction of Nicholson Street and Chancel Street, is the primary focus of the commission. The work will sit on the corner of the flexible event space that has direct access from the almshouse community space.



Current street view – corner of Nicholson St and Chancel St



CGI image used for planning process. Nicholson St. The cherry tree was the architect's impression only. There are currently no trees on the site. This is the approximate proposed location for the artwork.

Appendix 1

Public Art Commission – Selection Process

Stage	Process	What happens
1. Expression of Interest (EOI)	**Open submission**	Artists submit a concise EOI setting out their practice, relevant experience, initial response to the brief and an outline of how they might approach the commission.
2. Shortlisting	**Selection panel**	A shortlist of **up to 5 artists** is selected against the published criteria. Shortlisted artists are invited to develop their ideas further.
3. Development Stage	**Paid development opportunity by invitation**	Each shortlisted artist receives **development funding** to develop a fuller project proposal, including the artistic concept, approach, materials, relationship to the building and residents, indicative costs, timescale and delivery requirements.
4. Presentation	**Trustees & Residents**	Shortlisted artists present their developed proposals to Trustees and residents. There is an opportunity for questions, discussion and resident feedback.
5. Artist Selection	**Final decision - Panel**	Following presentations and consideration of the proposals and feedback, **one artist/artist team is selected** for the commission.
6. Due Diligence & Contracting	**Appointment**	References, safeguarding and other appropriate due diligence are completed. The final scope, budget, programme and responsibilities are agreed and a formal contract is put in place.
7. Commission & Delivery	**Project delivery**	The selected artist develops and delivers the artwork in collaboration with Southwark Charities, and the project team.

Flow chart

1. EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
Artists submit a concise response to the brief

2. SHORTLIST
Up to 5 artists selected

3. DEVELOPMENT FUNDING
Up to 5 shortlisted artists receive funding to develop a full proposal. This is a separate budget to the main commission. All short-listed artists will be eligible.

4. PRESENTATIONS
Artists present proposals to Trustees and residents

5. SELECTION
Artist/artist team appointed

6. DUE DILIGENCE & CONTRACTING
Checks completed and commission agreed

7. COMMISSION & DELIVERY
Artwork developed and delivered with residents and the project team

The development funding is paid to each shortlisted artist and is separate from the final commission fee.