

PLEXAL: THE QUIRKY INNOVATION CENTRE WITH A 'HIGH STREET' THAT'S BEING SET UP IN LONDON'S £150 MILLION TECH HUB

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Plexal at the Here East innovation centre. Here East A huge new innovation centre in London's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park has been named Plexal.

The £15 million space, which sits within the larger Here East complex and is being hailed as one of Europe's largest innovation centre, held a "soft launch" on Thursday.

However, the doors won't officially open until May 2017 – at least five months later than was initially planned.

Plexal has been developed by technology consultancy firm Entiq and British property developer Delancey, who bought the Olympic Village with the Qatari ruling family in 2011.

The startup hub has been designed to resemble a "mini city" and comes with a "high street," as well as "civic spaces" and "private spaces."

Those behind it say that it will go beyond what other startup hubs like WeWork and TechHub offer by providing access to lawyers, PR specialists, accountants, and recruiters. It will also offer equipment such as 3D printers and laser cutters.

Claire Cockerton, the CEO of Entiq, gave Business Insider a tour of Plexal ahead of the launch.

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Plexal sits within the larger Here East complex, which is a £150 million development being built on the western fringe of the Olympic Park.



Here East (originally called iCity) is a short walk from several train stations including Hackney Wick, Stratford International, and Stratford Underground.



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The Here East project, which was announced in 2013, involves turning the former Olympic press and broadcast centres into new spaces for technology companies, universities, startups, and creatives.



Plexal, which was named by an East London branding agency, will sit within the former press centre, which spans four floors and overlooks the River Lea Navigation Canal.



"Plexal is a neural network," said Cockerton. "It's a word for a collection of nodes and synapses and collections of networks. So it's very much trying to embody the concept of connectivity and also humanity."

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"The whole focus of our space is on connected devices and we're focusing on sport, health, fashion and IoT technologies," said Cockerton.



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Here East and Plexal are a short walk from the Olympic Stadium, which is now used by West Ham Football Club.

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Startups at Plexal will be treated to views over vast swathes of the Olympic Park.



Here East

Plexal will initially be on the first floor of the Press Centre but Cockerton said she has ambitions to take over other floors.



Here East

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Plexal membership prices will start from £200 for a basic coworking space and rise to over £400 for a premium private office. Cockerton claims that the entry price is lower than what's on offer from startup space providers in Central London.



Here East

This is what Plexal currently looks like. Over the next few months, Entiq and Delancey will kit the place out with furniture and offices.



Business Insider UK/Sam Shead

These architectural plans give you an idea of what Plexal will be like when it's finished. "We're designing Plexal as a mini-city," said Cockerton. "The space lends itself well to having a high street through the middle section. For us this was integral; we know that this is where innovation really happens. In market places, in souks, on these high streets. Replicating this within the centre was at the forefront of our minds."

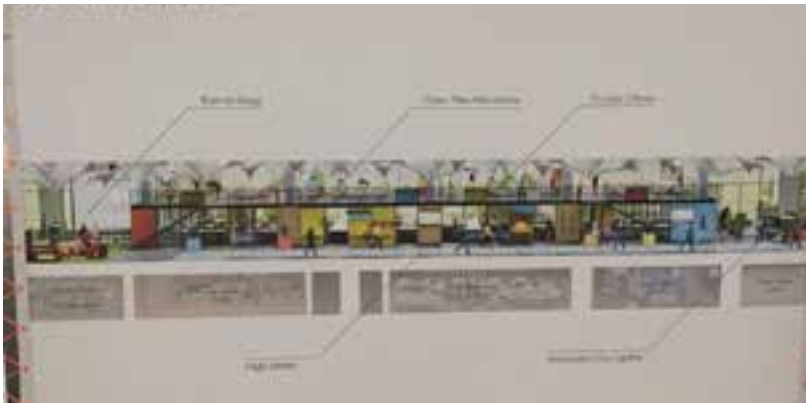
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A mezzanine is being built on top of the private offices as a way of utilising all of the space available. "A company can choose to take either their own private roof terrace or they can just have the bottom unit," said Cockerton, adding that units can accommodate between four and 30 people.



Business Insider UK/Sam Shead

There will be 300-350 coworking seats at Plexal and capacity for up to 800 members, according to Cockerton. "It will include a mix of open communal space where people would gather. Park lands, events places, an industrial quarter, a maker's lab, and different kinds of civic facilities. And then the private office space, which will exist on either side of the high street."

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This is one of several other vast floors that Plexal could expand onto. The building is as long as the highest skyscraper in Canary Wharf, which happens to be where Cockerton used to work.



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A large events space separates the press centre from the broadcast centre.

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The courtyard features a number of green spaces and seating options.



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The broadcast centre will feature dozens of units for Hackney's artists and creatives. Approximately half of the building will be taken up by a huge data centre belonging to data centre provider Infinity.

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Here East

Some organisations have already moved into the broadcast building including BT Sport and Loughborough University, which has accepted 850 postgraduates since it opened in September.



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University College London is planning to take possession of 3,000 square metres of 10 metres high studio space at Here East (in the former broadcast centre) in order to undertake research in areas including architecture, infrastructure, transport, robotics, healthcare, manufacturing, and environmental measurement.

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Here East

Cockerton compared the Here East "Gantry" to Box Park in Shoreditch, which is a retail complex made up of several shipping containers.



Here East

Those behind Plexal and Here East are hoping that the startups they nurture will one day go on to be as successful as the Team GB athletes that competed across the Olympic Park where their buildings now sit.

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Great Britain's Mo Farah celebrates after winning the Men's 3000m at the Sainsbury's Anniversary Games in London, July 2015 Reuters/Matthew Childs