

> Right: Weighing the hops at East London Brewing Company, which is based at Fairways Business Park in Lammas Road.



Something brewing

With swathes of industrial space and an enterprising workforce, Waltham Forest holds the perfect recipe for entrepreneurial microbreweries, as **James Wood** reports

Beer drinkers in UK pubs could once be separated by their preference for either lager or ale. Few were concerned about where or how it was brewed. But these traditions are changing; and Waltham Forest is leading the way.

Research reveals the emergence of craft ale businesses is now considered a sure-fire indication that a neighbourhood is on the up.

Walthamstow topped a list compiled by online estate agency easyProperty as the place where average asking prices for homes have increased fastest. The company ranked all the places in London where boutique breweries have recently sprung up. Next on the list? Leyton.

“Beer brings people together and also creates a real sense of community and excitement in an area,” says Roger

Protz, editor of the Campaign for Real Ale's Good Beer Guide.

Waltham Forest has enough large industrial space to sustain several successful enterprises. The Ravenswood estate in Walthamstow has become popular, thanks in large part to the Wild Card Brewery. William Harris and Andrew Birkby established the business four years ago and now run a bar there at weekends.

Getting started was tough and they initially dabbled in 'cuckoo brewing' – paying another brewery to produce beer on their site – operating from the cellar of The Warrant Officer pub in Walthamstow.

In February 2014, Wild Card moved to its current site – discovered by head brewer, Jaega Wise. With ventures including gin liqueur and fruit juice producer Mother's Ruin also at Ravenswood, the estate has gradually become one of Walthamstow's thriving weekend hangout spots.

"People kept turning up at the weekend to buy beer to take away, but pretty soon it became clear they really wanted to stay. It began with people drinking bottles, then we had a few kegs, and it has grown from there. Without local people seeking us out, we wouldn't be where we are now."

Wild Card attracted world-famous

acts to play there; the likes of Sonic Youth singer Thurston Moore, free jazz improviser Evan Parker, dub producer Mad Professor and a DJ set by Felix Martin from Hot Chip.

Wild Card has also launched what they believe to be the first lager ever brewed in Walthamstow, shipping to one of Gordon Ramsay's restaurants, and exporting – a recent shipment request came in from China.

community is alive and well among brewers. "If one has the hops the other needs, each is willing to help out," says Bott.

Consistency helps drive both Signature and ELB. The latter is a family-run business, started by couple Stuart Lascelles and Claire Ashbridge-Thomlinson, who have three young children. In 2010, Lascelles made the decision to quit

+
If one has the hops the other needs,
each is willing to help out
+

Music is also an integral part of another nearby brewery business. Leyton's Signature Brew started with three friends pledging to do something about the insipid, overpriced beer they were forced to drink at gigs.

Cousins Tom Bott and Sam McGregor, who have run the brewery since 2011, moved to the Leyton Business Centre in 2013. Bott says: "The first dozen beers were collaborations. Bands and musicians would come and taste our range. We'd find out what their hop preferences were and spend the day brewing together."

Professor Green, Frank Turner and Enter Shikari all took part and Signature now turns bands away.

To keep up with demand, Signature Brew is due to take another unit nearby. The expansion will help Signature supply gig venues, festivals and bars in London, Manchester and Birmingham and to ship to America and Sweden.

But Signature is also invested in its locality. Its beers are not only available at Leyton Orient Football Club and the buzzing Leyton Food Market, on Saturdays, but Bott and McGregor cooperate closely with other breweries nearby, such as Wild Card and the East London Brewing (ELB) company. A strong sense of

his position as an industrial chemist. The jump was particularly scary, he explains, as Ashbridge-Thomlinson was expecting their second child.

Having found its premises on Lammas Road, Leyton, the couple decided their company needed to be operational within six months. Exactly half a year later ELB was up and running.

"I did everything to start with," says Lascelles, "from brewing to washing the casks. We are now bottling and employ five people and an apprentice and sell to wholesalers and shops. We're now in Marks & Spencer."

They are also exporting to Denmark, Sweden and Guernsey.

With such a number of success stories, how important is the supply of space in Waltham Forest?

Ashbridge-Thomlinson says: "Affordable, suitable space in London is like gold dust. We really want to stay here: the transport links are excellent, it offers easy access to London, as well as the space we need."

The success of Waltham Forest's microbreweries is down to attention to detail and a fizzing passion for the product. The borough's reputation for great brews shows no sign of going flat.

> Right: Tom Bott of Signature Brew checks the clarity of his ale.

