London's smallest microflat up for sale at £50,000 for 7 square metres

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. **According to a business magazine, these are the six most expensive cities in the world in which to rent a two-bedroom flat. Put them in order from 1 (the most expensive) to 6 (the least expensive).**

   a. London

   b. Hong Kong

   c. New York

   d. Paris

   e. San Francisco

   f. Zurich

2 Key words

a. **Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.**

auctioneer	**awash**	**crash pad**	**disposable**	**distil**
irk	**outlay**	**recoup**	**sought-after**	**toll**

1. If you _____ something, you produce a summary that contains only the most important pieces of information.

2. A / An _____ is the person who sells things at a public sale where things are sold to the people who offer the most money for them.

3. If something is _____, it is wanted by many people but not easy to get.

4. If you _____ money that you have invested, you get it back.

5. _____ is a formal word meaning *annoy or irritate someone*.

6. A / An _____ is the amount of money you must spend in order to buy something or start a new business or project.

7. A / An _____ is an informal term for a property you just use for sleeping.

8. If something takes a _____, it harms or damages someone or something especially in a gradual way.

9. A / An _____ item is one that is designed to be thrown away after you have used it once.

10. If a place is _____ with a particular type of business, there are too many of them.

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Property in a Victorian conversion in Lower Clapton has a bed, microwave, bathroom and incumbent tenant

Rachel Hall

17 February, 2022

1   Imagine distilling your life to fit in just 7 square metres. There would just about be space for a bed, a toilet and shower, a sink, a microwave and some storage. But no room for a kitchen to cook in, decorations, a place to store equipment for hobbies, or to have anyone round to visit.

2   This is life in London's smallest microflat. Located in a Victorian conversion in Lower Clapton, east London, it is thought by its sellers to be the smallest to have gone on the market in the capital. The minimum price set by auctioneers is £50,000, but it is expected to go for more as it was bought for £103,500 in May, 2017.

3   The flat is an example of what experts say is a growing phenomenon of tiny homes, driven by soaring rent and property prices. Microflats are becoming more sought-after and even smaller, they say.

4   The Clapton flat has recently been renovated and has a large window. To maximize space, it has a captain's bed above storage space and cupboards. The space between the bed and the wall is about wide enough to spread your arms in, and there's a foldout table for eating or working on. A toilet and shower are in a separate wet room.

5   The owner has already recouped their investment by getting £800 in rent each month. The current tenant lives elsewhere for most of the time and spends just a night or two each week in the flat as it is closer to work.

6   The auction minimum is well below the average deposit for first-time buyers in London, which Halifax calculated at £130,357 in 2020, but Neal Hudson, a housing analyst, warned that first-time buyers should be aware it is not sustainable to live in a tiny flat long term and that if they are unable to sell, they could find themselves stuck.

7   The price is a powerful symbol of how inaccessible housing has become. The TV presenter Kirstie Allsopp recently irked millennials by suggesting they could afford to buy their own homes if they spent less on the gym, easyJet flights, coffee and Netflix. Critics have pointed out that when she bought her first flat, the average home cost £50,000 and measured 73.4 sq m – ten times bigger than the Clapton flat.

8   Stuart Collar-Brown, the director of My Auction, which is selling the flat, said that although it was the cheapest flat with a long leasehold on the market within a ten-mile radius, he expected it would be bought by an investor rather than a first-time buyer, as banks will not lend on properties below 30 sq m.

9   With rental income estimated at about £10,000, investors were likely to be able to recoup the £50,000 outlay within five years, he said. Suitable tenants would not spend much time at home and would be those who were tired of house-sharing but unable to afford more space, or who lived elsewhere and needed a crash pad for work, he said. For instance, doctors or nurses working in nearby Homerton Hospital, or workers in the City, given the area's good transport links to Liverpool Street.

10 In 2019, a 9-sq m flat in another part of Hackney was on the market for £130,000. The estate agents Wild & Co said they received two offers, both below the asking price, and it took 28 viewings to find tenants, who paid £600 a month.

11 Microflats are becoming more popular and their size is shrinking, according to research by Philip Hubbard, a professor of urban studies at King's College London. One in 15 apartments in London fall below the national minimum standard of 37 sq m for a one-bedroom home, while the median size of UK properties below the space standard fell by one square metre to 29 sq m in 2022.

12 Hubbard recommended that buyers look for flats above 37 sq m since fewer windows and the inability to divide living, working and leisure space take a toll on sleep and mental health, and smaller properties are more expensive per square metre.

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13 Julia Rugg, a research fellow at York University's Centre for Housing Policy, said the Clapton sale reflected the "inflated nature of the housing market in London" and said it would be a "worrying development" if microflats were seen as a solution to housing affordability.

14 "This is accommodation that is barely suitable as a hotel room and does not constitute sustainable liveable space. The property lacks comfort or amenity and forces reliance on disposable items. The neighbourhood may well be awash with bars and cafés but relying on these for living space makes life very expensive," she said.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. How big is the microflat?

2. Why are there so many tiny homes in London?

3. How would a tenant manage to eat or work in the microflat?

4. Why does the current tenant live there?

5. How could millennials save money, according to the TV presenter?

6. Who will probably buy the flat, according to the auctioneer?

7. What is the minimum flat size if you want to obtain a bank loan?

8. How long will it take for an investor to recoup their outlay on the microflat?

9. What does the article suggest can take a toll on sleep and mental health?

10. What will any tenant of the property have to rely on?

4 Key language

a. Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

1.	growing	a.	buyer
2.	storage	b.	price
3.	first-time	c.	sharing
4.	rental	d.	items
5.	house-	e.	phenomenon
6.	asking	f.	links
7.	disposable	g.	income
8.	transport	h.	space

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "It is better to live in the country and commute to the city to work."

- "Everyone should have the right to buy their own house."

- "Renting is better than buying."

6 In your own words

a. Read the article titled *London's smallest microflat sells for 80% above asking price* written by Jem Bartholomew for The Guardian. Are you surprised by the outcome of the sale?

b. Summarize the main points of that article and report your findings to the class.