Film co-op plans new £750,000 HQ
Centre would have 120-seat cinema

LIGHTS, camera... action! The London Film-makers Co-operative, the pioneering avant-garde collective which this year celebrates its 27th birthday, is preparing to move to a new location.

Negotiations are under way for the co-operative, which was born in the West End and settled in Camden in 1976, to move to the Grand Union Building, in Kentish Town, near Camden Lock.

The Foundation for Sport and the Arts has provided a £200,000 grant towards the new media centre, which would cost at least £750,000, and would include a fully equipped studio, a 120-seat cinema, and workshops.

The proposed new site in Kentish Town would make more people aware of the co-operative; it also offers great advantages for people with disabilities and more comfortable surroundings.

The co-operative, which is funded by the British Film Institute with "some additional" funding from the Arts Council for specific projects, has been an important breeding ground for new talent in the world of experimental cinema.

Through it film-makers can exercise control over production, distribution and showing of their work.

Staff also work to make avant-garde films more accessible to the public, and are pleased to recall that in recent years there has been a surge in interest in the Scapa Cinema in Pentonville Road, Camden, and at the Tate Gallery.

Today the work of the co-operative is split into four main categories.

- It offers facilities for filming, editing and dubbing, with access to the largest film distribution library in the country.
- It runs an experimental work in its own 70-seat cinema and runs experimental courses, offering basic tuition right through to advanced techniques.

One of the better known names in the film world involved with the co-operative is Derek Jarman, whose films include Jubilee, The Tempest, Caravaggio and The Garden, and who early in his career showed work there.

Sandy Weiland, administrator of the co-operative, said: "Our current premises are run down and we are quite aware of that. The lease here expired four years ago and we are looking for somewhere to go.

"If the negotiations are successful then these new premises would be far more suitable. They provide a much higher profile as well as better disabled access.

"Basically anyone can come along and make a film pretty cheaply. We are the only people in Britain whose film festival is specifically for experimental work. Quite a few of our film-makers get BFI new director awards and the Oscar prize, they're all tremendous film-makers.

"David Curtis, Film and Video Officer at the Arts Council, said the co-operative was unrivalled in Europe.

"People from all over Europe come to make films and show them, there is a beacon from France and even Germany." he said.

Irene Whitehead, head of BFI planning, said of the proposed new media centre: "It is a unique venture and one of national importance. We are very grateful for the foundation for such a substantial sum of money."

Inger Lise Hansen, a film-maker using the co-operative's editing facilities.