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£8 Mn South Docks refurbishment branded “demolition” by Marina Bertholders Association

Connor Tao Fitzpatrick



(The Dockyard)

Boat and business owners living and working in docks in East London have hit out at the council's plan for an £8million refurbishment, labelling it a “demolition of our boatyard”.

Members of the South Docks Marina Berth Holder's Association (SDMBHA) have responded to Southwark council's recently approved plans for the dock, accusing the council of not cooperating with residents and potentially forcing them out.

Southwark council cited health and safety concerns as a key reason for the investment in a recent press release, despite residents' widespread concern of a potential four-fold increase in land price surrounding the docks with no compensation in place.

Residents fear South Dock's vibrant community of live-a-boards (people who live on their vessel), artists, artisans, and boat mechanics tailored to the needs of the local community are at risk of being priced out entirely.

Alex Steele, 51, who owns a boat workshop within the South Dock Marina, said: "The businesses are embedded with the boats, there's no response time because we're right here; we're local."



(Alex Steele, 51 year old workshop owner)

He's a paying member of the SDMBHA that aims to protect the local community by dealing with the council such as organizing resident campaigns.

Steele said he's rescued boats stuck in the Thames in the dead of night and he greets almost every worker with a broad smile as he passes through South Dock's fenced in cluster of "marine containers" and warehouses.

He said that other workshops had been unwilling to hire apprentices and struggling to pay bills due to increasing costs and now, they may lose their business amid the uncertainty of the council's approved planning.

Steele explains that every workshop is contained in "marine containers" - an industry standard that stops the spread of fires. While he understands the mix of pedestrian traffic and

machines in the docks is dangerous, places to walk and where not to stand are clearly marked, and supervisors always present.

Similarly, Simon Shillito, 43, an architect who's raised his family in South Docks Marina for over a decade, said he scrapped his own plans for a bespoke carpentry and CAD/CAM manufacturing business amid the planning approval.

Shillito said: "We need some certainty to set up a business, particularly the one we want to set up."

He's currently in the process of renovating his boat, and worries that the council's plans to remove live-a-boards during maintenance without compensation amounts to making them homeless.

Shillito said: "Our family will not have a home.

"We didn't move into boats because we're rich. We pay for it all, but are not recognized as residents.

"I honestly don't know how we would resolve it," he added.

Stele and Shillito stressed that there are currently no plans for compensation or relocation for residents and businesses, and they're frustrated with the lack of dialogue from the council.



(The much larger Surrey Quay)

Charlie Murphy, SMDDBHA chair, wrote: “It seemed well understood by all that the ‘special community ecosystem’ that is evidently important would be irrevocably damaged by the proposal as it stands.

“It was recognised that South Docks Marina Management (SDMM) should work towards ‘co-design’ with the community as agreed by previous council schemes.”

These issues were put to Southwark Council press office, who responded with quotes from Councillor Portia Mwangangye, cabinet member for leisure, parks & young people.

Mwangangye said: “We are pleased to now be able to address urgent health and safety concerns to our unique marina.

“While this project will cause some disruption, we are dedicated to supporting berth holders through this transition period.”



(Boats in the dock)