PECKHAM

Council's Peckham plans 'are pants'!

Protestors strip to undies over plan to move businesses

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COUNCIL WORKERS were rubbing their eyes in disbelief last week as three daring Peckham dwellers stripped off in the council's lobby to protest against its plans to uproot businesses surrounding Peckham Rye station.

Artists Sophie Lee, 24, Bayly Shelton, 25 and Umi Baden-Powell, 22, are part of a collective of local creatives opposed to the council's plans, dramatically to 'displace' sixty businesses along Rye Lane and at the station's rear to make way for a gleaming square and brand spanking new retail units.

Arriving at council headquarters shortly before members of residents' group Peckham Vision were due to speak at a Cabinet meeting about their concerns, the three removed all but their beige skin-coloured underwear and placards bearing the words 'Hands Off Peckham'.

They struck the classical pose of 'The Three Graces' - as depicted in the famous sixteenth century oil painting by Italian artist Raphael - with forty-odd supporters participating in an impromptu 'life drawing class' for ten minutes until the stunt was called to a halt by a council official.

"It was quite daunting because there was a relatively heavy security presence," said Bayly, "There were a good four or five security guards within ten metres of us.

"I thought they dealt with it very well because if they'd just tried to take us out straightaway it would have caused too much of a scene. They allowed us to make our point."

"It worked well in the space because the whole of the interior is glass so it meant that all the people who were working in Southwark Council offices came and saw the action happening," added Umi.

The three had been dismayed to learn about the council's plans to uproot local enterprises at an emergency meeting called by Peckham Vision the previous night, where attendees were asked to come up with an idea that would "illustrate a point without being too disruptive".

"What we really don't want and what we really feared was these businesses would go and they would replace it with a Starbucks or something that's really generic... there are about two or three art galleries or complexes that would've been removed," said Bayly.

"I feel like there's a sense of people making decisions who aren't living here or invested in the area," explained Sophie, a Peckham native who grew up on the border with Honor Oak. "A lot of artists are being pushed out to the edge of Peckham as it is," said Sophie. "We're trying to safeguard the spaces that exist already and have been invested in."

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Strike a pose: the artists make protesting at the council's Tooley Street HQ *(main and inset)*; the group outside Rye Lane station this week *(right)*; and how the *News* broke the story on the council's plans to move businesses last week *(inset)*

At the meeting:

MEANWHILE, INSIDE the cabinet meeting last week, fears were raised by Peckham Vision about the latest council report on the 'Gateway to Peckham' station regeneration project.

Concerns stemmed from a line in which the council said it was looking to acquire "vacant possession" of all businesses surrounding Peckham Rye station, which has since been amended. Meeting attendees were reassured that only the building units at the front of the station on Rye Lane would need to be knocked down and that negotiations would be "more fluid" with businesses at the rear of the station - including art groups and artists' studios - where a 'market courtyard' is to be created.

Cllr Fiona Colley, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, explained to the *News*: "The report that went out was very broad brushstroke about an issue that's very complicated. However, what the report hadn't expressed correctly was our aspirations for the rear of the station. What we want is to create a sort of market area and for the artists to still be there," she added.

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