

## Naval Dockyards Society Statement to Voice4Deptford 1 September 2020

The Naval Dockyards Society welcomes Voice4Deptford (V4D)'s campaign to reverse three planning decisions passed by the London Borough of Lewisham (LBL) in June 2020, through an application for a Judicial Review. These decisions concern three Plots, 8, 15 and 22, which comprise a fraction of the total site called Convoy's Wharf, for which Hutchison Whampoa was granted outline planning permission on 10 March 2015. The three plots were approved by LBL planning committee on 9 and 22 June 2020.

Calling the site Convoy's Wharf, which imported paper products for News International until 1999, diminishes the significance of Deptford Royal Dockyard. For most of the last 500 years this 40-acre site comprised Royal Deptford Dockyard, Sayes Court, John Evelyn's seventeenth century manor house and garden, and part of Royal Victoria Victualling Yard.

The overall scheme, described in LBL planning application DC/13/83358, will provide a mixed-use development of up to 419,100m<sup>2</sup> comprising up to 3,500 residential units (including 'three tall buildings') and offices, restaurant/café/bar and hotel space. It will retain and refurbish the listed Olympia Building and demolish all the remaining non-listed structures. The phrase 'three tall buildings' omits the fact that they are intended to be 26, 32 and 40 storeys high. Only 15% of the homes across the development will be 'affordable': 5% at London Affordable Rent (60% of market rent) and 10% shared ownership. LBL target is 50%. This characterises the development as high-cost, offering little relief to LBL's housing shortage.

The NDS has critiqued regeneration designs for Deptford Royal Dockyard since 2004.<sup>1</sup> Since the first Richard Rogers Partnership design, we have criticised all the planning applications for not reflecting Deptford's maritime location and underground archaeology, but merely providing a generic high-rise development, with no specific connection to this site. They have all needed a richer conceptual vision to add authentic heritage, environmental and social value to the site.

Hutchison's latest design set out in the site-wide Convoys Wharf Heritage Design Proposal (Dec. 2019 rev.1, [https://planning.lewisham.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=\\_LEWIS\\_DCAPR\\_99825](https://planning.lewisham.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=_LEWIS_DCAPR_99825)), demonstrates almost no appreciation for the history of Deptford Royal Dockyard. On p. 5 it declares: 'Due to its condition (*sic*) (non-existent or fragile), location (underground), much of the site's history cannot be used in a meaningful manner. Therefore, it is important that this information is displayed through how a space is used and also through information points.'

This document then proceeds *not* to link spaces to underground remains, despite extensive archaeology conducted on the site since the 1990s. This declaration is preceded by Hutchison's true message: 'The need to include heritage principles should not be an excuse

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<sup>1</sup> NDS website campaign <https://navaldockyards.org/deptford/>; Ann Coats, 'Five Hundred Years of Deptford and Woolwich Royal Dockyards and counting...', Philip MacDougall, ed., *Transactions of the Naval Dockyards Society, Vol. 11, Five Hundred Years of Deptford and Woolwich* (Naval Dockyards Society, 2019), ISBN 978-0-9929292-8-2, £15.00 plus P&P from [avcoatsndschair@gmail.com](mailto:avcoatsndschair@gmail.com), or Kindle edition <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Hundred-Years-Deptford-Woolwich-Dockyards-ebook/dp/B084H15ZDN>.

to hold back on creating a modern and striking design. It is possible to use the past as a design cue to create new places with enhanced layers of meaning and interest.'

The Mast Ponds section (p.7), states 'This gives an amazing opportunity to create a water feature reminiscent of the layout and the journey of the water from the Thames.' Unfortunately, we do not know what they plan, as the concept images bear no relation to timber clad mast ponds. The Royal Dockyard section (p.10) suggests 'stone and brick can be used in the construction of buildings on this plot; this being the dominant building material revealed by the Tudor storehouse foundations.' Concept images are closer here, depicting strong rectilinear and arched brick structures but also weathered steel, which is striking, but not relevant to the underground archaeology. How the miniscule water feature called the Rill (p.14), overhung by monolithic office blocks, highlights 'how the site has transformed from an industrial site to one of leisure' is anyone's guess. The few imaginative images, such as the Sayes Court outdoor museum (p.23) are rare. Pepys and Evelyn would have turned in their graves at the misappropriation of their names!

What the NDS would like to see in a new plan is the explicit linking of the local, national and international significance of Deptford Royal Dockyard, recognised by the World Monuments Fund's inclusion in its 2014 Watchlist 'to raise awareness about this rich heritage and to advocate for sensitive integration of its historic vestiges into redevelopment plans'. Deptford is characterised as the:

1. Second oldest British royal dockyard, founded by Henry VIII by 1513 (500 years old)
2. Leading R&D dockyard on England's capital river until 1869; developed prototype ship designs; its master shipwright was the most senior and skilled of all master shipwrights; Samuel Bentham upgraded the master shipwright's house to house a projected Deptford resident commissioner in 1803/4
3. Dockyard node of collaboration with East India Company ships and shipwrights
4. Ceremonial destination of monarchs from Henry VIII to George III; Queen Elizabeth I knighted Francis Drake on board *Golden Hind* in Deptford in 1581
5. Shipbuilding exemplar for Czar Peter the Great of Russia, who studied shipbuilding at Deptford in 1698 before building Kronstadt/St Petersburg dockyard
6. Home of seventeenth-century diarist and horticulturalist John Evelyn who lived in Sayes Court, part of this development site
7. Administrative destination of seventeenth-century diarist and Navy Board official Samuel Pepys who described many official and unofficial visits in his *Diary*
8. Primary supplier of overseas colonies, naval bases and dockyards
9. Fitting out dockyard for major world explorations, circumnavigations and wars: Sir Francis Drake, Commodore George Anson, Captain James Cook and Joseph Banks, Commander William Bligh and Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson
10. Location of civil engineer John Rennie's remodelled basin mouth, caisson and riverside wall c.1814.

The archaeology of Deptford Royal Dockyard conveys its size: 'the largest archaeological excavation of a naval dockyard',<sup>2</sup> and multi-period aspects. Since its planning process began

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<sup>2</sup> MOLA, 'Discovering Deptford Royal Dockyard in Pictures' (13.12.2017)  
<https://www.mola.org.uk/blog/discovering-deptford-royal-dockyard-pictures>.

in the 1990s, Deptford Dockyard archaeology (pre-assessments, excavation and publication) has cost at least £3m. One outcome of this activity is that most of the site has been excavated to test for piling locations and underground car parks, therefore a detailed archaeological record is now available.<sup>3</sup> Archaeologists rarely find above-ground structures and usually have only robbed out foundation trenches and post-holes with which to work, but here there is a wealth of precise floor-plan information supplemented by historic plans and images.

The buried remains of the Tudor storehouse at Deptford are the earliest known remains of a naval storehouse in England; no other Tudor storehouse remains are known to survive. Its below ground remains, including the undercroft and buttresses, survive in very good condition and have been little altered by later activity. The original Tudor range apparently remained intact until 1952 when the above ground parts were demolished. Many of the bricks salvaged from the demolition were reused to repair Hampton Court Palace, and an ogee-arched niche containing an inscribed foundation stone was re-erected inside the Department of Computer Science at University College, London. By 1984 the rest of the storehouse complex had also been demolished.<sup>4</sup>

An imaginative realisation of the seventeenth century L-shaped Deptford Officers' terrace, the first palace front terrace in a royal naval dockyard and possibly the first in England, would restore original architectural ambience and scale. Other housing blocks might replicate the floor level plans of excavated buildings, just as refurbished officers' houses at Chatham and Sheerness dockyards have restored residential quarters to add character and value.

Preservation of the double dock's footprint is essential to understand its evolution. The inner end also needs investigation. The assumption that it is concrete has led to rejection of the need to preserve it. Docks were enlarged and rebuilt; that is their story. The Tudor dock is likely to have been subsumed in the enlargement: this is *its* story. Failing to find physical evidence does not negate the site's importance.

This archaeology can inform interpretation with overlaid maps, public archaeology involving schools and colleges, 3-D modelling of lost buildings, sensory displays, a replica ship (*Lenox*), storytelling and the arrival of successive Deptford communities. Based on ten-plus years of excavation, more of the archaeological footprint should not only be preserved, but integrated within the design, to reflect the significance of Deptford Royal Dockyard.

The former Master Shipwright's House (1708), outside the development site but next to the Double Dock, is a Queen Anne house remodelled internally c.1804, 'retaining significant fabric from both phases'. It is the 'only surviving example of a purpose-built Master Shipwright's residence in a naval dockyard nationally.' It extends into the former office of Samuel Bentham

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<sup>3</sup> Antony Francis, *The Deptford royal dockyard and manor of Sayes Court, London: excavations 2000–12* (MOLA Monograph 71, Museum of London Archaeology, 2017), ISBN 978-1-907586-36-1.

<sup>4</sup> Historic England, Scheduled Tudor naval storehouse at Convoys Wharf (2003), <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1021239>.

who was appointed Inspector General of Naval Works in 1796 to reform naval dockyards and forms a group with the storehouses.<sup>5</sup>

The foundations of the Tudor and early Georgian storehouses are a scheduled ancient monument, the surviving 1846 shipbuilding shed (Olympia) is Grade 2 listed, and extensive remains of the basin, docks and slipways survive below ground, signifying the continuity of building and repairing great ships at Deptford.

Ideally, Deptford Royal Dockyard will endure visually as an entity through a range of forms, using vistas, planting, paths and roads for demarcation, new buildings which respect the form and size of dockyard structures, and at least one replica terrace or storehouse to convey the grandeur of the officers' terrace and the utilitarian elegance of industrial buildings. Vistas through the yard towards the river, and particularly from Olympia and the basin to the river should be key features of any design.

Interpretation through the Sayes Court and *Lenox* projects will bring activity and community engagement. Below ground remains embody Deptford's tangible and intangible heritage and will give this project a unique character which should distinguish it from any other new developments, inform the overall design and improve its 'brand'.

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<sup>5</sup> Historic England, Grade II\* Former Office Building of Royal Dockyard, Deptford (1993), <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1288808>.