

# **Letter to Mayor on Castle Square evictions**

## **Key information**

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### **Eviction of four traders in Castle Square, Southwark**

Dear Sadiq,

I am writing to follow up on part of our conversation at MQT today.

Five traders have been evicted from their business premises in Castle Square, Elephant and Castle, Southwark. These traders were some of the lucky few who were relocated to Castle Square as a temporary measure while awaiting the redevelopment now-demolished shopping centre, from which hundreds of traders evicted in 2020.

The evicted businesses are owned by people with Guyanese, Jamaican, Nigerian and Ecuadorian heritage. They are incredibly popular locally and across London, and a precious surviving part of the community that have so far somehow survived the £4bn regeneration project that has displaced a once-thriving indoor market and eroded the vibrant, diverse cultural heritage of the area. They have invested time and money in growing their businesses.

I hear from traders that the grounds for eviction are nebulous and the developer and landlord, Get Living, and managing agent, Savills, have handled the situation incredibly poorly. Traders have reported that:

- Managing agent Savills unfairly back-billed traders after 3.5 years of occupancy (many energy suppliers won't charge microbusinesses for energy used more than 1 year ago. And the traders are not protected by Ofgem back billing legislation around micro businesses as they do not receive energy directly from the supplier, but via managing agent Savills);
- Savills never provided traders with supplier bills to verify the totals, with one exception;
- Savills verbally agreed to repayment terms with traders that they then revoked;
- For the one trader that did see their supplier bill, an independent electrician confirmed they were being charged more than the Landlord for certain periods, with tariff variances up to 46% – and no explanation from Savills when requested.

On Wednesday, 1 October, the traders arrived at work to find themselves locked out of their shops. Lawyers representing the traders are reportedly still being refused further information from the developer or managing

agent. It is my understanding that Southwark Council, who have an obligation to protect and support businesses in the regeneration area, have done nothing to intervene.

For many of the evicted businesses in the lost Elephant shopping centre, it may be too late. But there is still a glimmer of hope for these traders. They have until next Wednesday, 15 October, to appeal the decision.

**I implore you to take urgent action on their behalf to enable these businesses to continue operating on the site:**

- Demand Get Living and Savills provide detailed supplier bills and clarify why electricity recharge rates for certain billed periods exceed industry standard.
- Demand Southwark Council fulfil their obligation to support long-standing traders amid the regeneration of the area.
- Work with the landlord and Southwark Council to ensure all evicted traders can reopen their businesses and in Castle Square and, subsequently, in affordable units in the new development.

As Mayor, you have a duty to stand up for the markets and small businesses that are instrumental to our diverse city. Please act with urgency to support these businesses.

Kind regards,

**Zoë Garbett**

Green Party Member of the London Assembly