

COASTGUARD NEEDED HELP TO ALLOW LIFEBOAT TO LAND



■ Deathtrap – protesters marching on the office of Michael Parker

Picture: SEANA HUGHES WRFCF

Protest sparked by quay rescue drama

SCORES of protesters surrounded a building belonging to the owners of a controversial quay.

The rally came after a fence at Mistley quay meant a massive rescue operation was hampered at the weekend.

Campaigners yesterday marched to the office of Michael Parker, boss of quay owners Trent Wharfage, and handed over a letter demanding the 2m high fence is pulled down. They claim the fence puts lives at risk.

It came after a family of four were dramatically rescued from the River Stour on Saturday.

Residents helped coastguards remove a part of the steel fence to allow the Harwich lifeboat to moor at the quay for a waiting ambulance.

Kate Worsley, spokesman for Free the Quay said: "This incident and the reactions to it will hopefully encourage Mr Parker to re-think his position, pull the fence down, and talk to us and the authorities about a safer solution that is accountable to everybody, and can't be a risk to life."

One of the sailors rescued in Saturday afternoon's drama was Richard Blay, of School Lane,

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Lawford, who was also at the quay yesterday.

The 49-year-old told how he decided to take three relatives out in his sailing boat when they encountered an accidental collision and it sank.

He said: "It happened with the weight on the wrong side of the boat. These people didn't move quickly enough and the boat tipped. It was like a bath tub, tipping over into the water."

"The boat was right in the middle of the river."

Passing yachts saw the three adults and teenage boy in difficulty and alerted Thames Coastguard.

Mr Blay, who was in the water for about 30 minutes, continued: "Three of the party were picked up by other yachts, I stayed in the water waiting by the boat until the lifeboat arrived and pulled me out and then sped to Mistley Quay."

"They had to get coastguards there to remove a piece of fence in order for the lifeboat to land."

One of the party was treated for hypothermia.

Derek Bell, one of those called to help the coastguard, said: "What worries me is the coastguards couldn't get that fence panel out without our help."

"What if no one had been around? Every minute can count in a situation like this."

"Ever since the fence went up a year ago we have said it was an accident waiting to happen. And now it has."



■ Drastic action – a section of the fence had to be removed

Villagers gathered at the scene yesterday before marching with placards to Trent Wharfage's offices just a few yards away.

They handed over the letter before continuing their chants outside the building.

Tending Council leader Neil Stock and the authority's planning portfolio holder, Sarah Candy, were also at the quay yesterday.

Mr Stock said he would be writing to the Health and Safety Executive and Trent Wharfage about the issue.

He said: "The RNLI have said it could have been a tragedy, so I want to know what the health

and safety have to say about that and if they ask for the fence to be removed and replaced with one with proper access."

The fence was erected by Trent Wharfage after the Health and Safety Executive said health and safety provisions are needed if the quay is operational.

A Trent Wharfage spokesman said: "We are liaising with all the appropriate agencies to establish the facts of the matter. Until we do that, we cannot really do any more."

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