# Banksy mural's removal leaves Lowestoft couple burdened by fame and cost



In a twist of fate that epitomises the complex relationship between art and its environment, Gert and Gerry Coutts, homeowners in Enfield, north London, have found themselves grappling with the unexpected repercussions of owning a Banksy masterpiece. Initially optimistic about their newly acquired property in Suffolk, the couple's experience quickly soured when, in August 2021, a 14-foot seagull mural appeared on the house, seemingly overnight, after scaffolding had been erected. Verified as a Banksy creation, the mural featured a whimsical depiction of a seagull feasting on polystyrene chips, cleverly placed beside a refuse skip designed to mimic a traditional chip container.

What began as an exciting opportunity quickly devolved into a financial and emotional burden for the Coutts family. Their property, once a source of rental income, became a magnet for tourists and curious onlookers, drawing hundreds each day. However, this surge in interest brought significant challenges. Mr Coutts described the situation as distressing, stating, “I’m completely depressed and sick about it.” He lamented the impact on their lives, saying, “I’ve done everything I can, tried to do the right things, and me and my wife have just had the p\*\*s taken out of us.”

The initial allure of potential riches—estimates of the mural’s worth hovered between £1 million and £3 million—quickly dissipated when they learned that East Suffolk Council was considering a preservation order on the piece. Such a move would have significantly altered their responsibilities, imposing an annual maintenance cost of about £40,000. “So, there you go Banksy. Does he realise what the consequences are of his artwork—or does he care?” Ms Coutts asked in despair. The couple’s frustration grew as they faced increased vandalism, including an incident where someone attempted to sell stolen scaffolding from their property.

In May 2023, the couples’ ordeal culminated in the removal of the mural, a process that cost nearly £250,000. This controversial decision sparked backlash within the community, where many viewed the owners as removing cultural heritage for personal gain. Local residents expressed disappointment over the loss of the artwork's original context and meaning, voicing concerns about the consequences of the mural’s removal on both the local culture and the broader narrative surrounding Banksy’s work. Many have said they felt the Coutts were effectively “stealing” a piece of art from public appreciation.

Compounding their hardship, the mural's removal was conducted under tight security, reflecting the tension surrounding its fate. As footage circulated showing the wall—once a canvas for Banksy’s genius—being loaded away, public sentiment remained divided. While some sympathised with the owners, others felt disillusioned about losing a landmark that had garnered global attention.

Amidst the turmoil, the immediate environment of the mural also changed significantly. East Suffolk Council had previously highlighted the positive cultural and economic impact generated by the artwork, which drew visitors not just for the art itself but also for the local shops and amenities that benefited from the increased foot traffic. The irony, however, is palpable: what could have been a celebration of art turned into a source of profound distress for the Coutts, leaving them questioning whether they would have preferred to live without the burden of fame—a sentiment strongly echoed by Mr Coutts when he candidly stated, “If we could turn back the clock, we would.”

With the seagull mural now a memory and its future uncertain, the Coutts family is left to ponder the unintended consequences of a piece that was meant to provoke thought and discussion but instead forced them into a public and personal crisis. The legacy of Banksy in Lowestoft serves as a poignant reminder of the fine line between artistic expression and the realities of homeownership, raising questions about the responsibilities of artists towards their audience and the communities they impact.

### Reference Map

1. All content derived from lead article.
2. (2), (3), (4), (5) - Context on the mural’s removal and local sentiments.
3. (3), (4), (7) - Details on council involvement and community reactions.
4. General details about the mural’s impact and the owners’ perspectives were informed by multiple sources.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14722601/Banksy-house-millionaires-wish-never-bothered.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd1n0xzen5go> - In February 2023, the Banksy seagull mural in Lowestoft, Suffolk, was covered up during renovation works. The mural, painted in August 2021, depicted a seagull on a house wall. The skip component, which had been removed earlier to deter fly-tipping, was also absent. East Suffolk Council stated that the building was privately owned and that scaffolding and sheeting were in place due to ongoing renovations. The council had previously noted the positive cultural and economic impact of the artwork on the area.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-suffolk-65186563> - In May 2023, the Banksy seagull mural in Lowestoft was removed from the side of a house, sparking concerns about its fate. The mural, part of Banksy's 'Great British Spraycation' series from August 2021, was originally painted next to a skip containing insulation strips representing chips. The skip had been removed earlier to prevent fly-tipping. The removal was carried out by a crane, with police present, and the artwork's future remained uncertain. The building was privately owned, and the council had no jurisdiction over its fate.
4. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/british-homeowners-spend-250000-remove-banksy-mural-2309530> - In May 2023, Garry and Gokean Coutts, owners of a property in Lowestoft, revealed they spent nearly $250,000 to remove a Banksy mural from their building. The seagull artwork, painted in August 2021, initially seemed like a windfall. However, the presence of the mural led to increased vandalism, including theft attempts and damage. The local council considered placing a preservation order on the artwork, which would have required the owners to maintain it at an annual cost of £40,000. The couple found the situation extremely stressful and chose to remove the mural.
5. <https://www.suffolklive.com/news/suffolk-news/gallery/sorry-state-lowestofts-banksy-murals-8501327> - As of May 2023, the state of Banksy's murals in Lowestoft, including the seagull piece, had deteriorated. The seagull mural, originally featuring a skip filled with insulation strips to represent chips, had the skip removed to deter fly-tipping. The artwork was covered with protective screens, but concerns about its preservation and the impact of its removal persisted. The local community expressed disappointment over the loss of the mural's original context and meaning.
6. <https://www.suffolklive.com/news/suffolk-news/suffolk-councils-explanation-after-part-8001113> - In January 2023, East Suffolk Council explained the removal of the skip component from the Banksy seagull mural in Lowestoft. The skip, which was part of the artwork, had been used for fly-tipping, leading the council to request its removal to maintain cleanliness. The large seagull mural remained in place on the building. The council acknowledged the building's private ownership and the owner's decision to remove the skip to prevent discarded rubbish collection.
7. <https://www.lowestoftjournal.co.uk/news/23243524.lowestoft-skip-removed-prominent-banksy-artwork/> - In December 2022, part of the Banksy seagull mural in Lowestoft was removed to deter fly-tipping. The mural, painted in August 2021, depicted a seagull on a house wall, with a skip containing insulation strips representing chips. The skip had been used for fly-tipping, prompting East Suffolk Council to request its removal. The building's owner complied, storing the skip and cleaning the area. Local residents expressed disappointment over the loss of the mural's original context and meaning.