

PRESS RELEASE: 6 APRIL 2004

New Masterplan would be Disastrous for Margate: Save Dreamland Campaign

Thanet District Council has recently launched a public consultation into the Margate Masterplan. The Masterplan, put together by consultants, considers options for the future of Central Margate, including the town's famous Dreamland Pleasure Park, home of the UK's oldest roller coaster: the Grade II listed Scenic Railway. The Council is now undertaking a public consultation on the Masterplan, which ends on 13 April 2004.

Campaign Leader, Nick Laister, says:

"The Save Dreamland Campaign has serious concerns about the Margate Masterplan. The consultants do not appear to have considered the importance of Dreamland Pleasure Park to Margate as a seaside resort. Even in its current run-down state it attracts almost 700,000 visitors every year. With a committed owner, the park would comfortably attract over 1 million visitors to the town – just look how successful other seaside parks are. Just because the current owner wants to secure some redevelopment value at the site is not a good reason to discard this option."

According to Laister, the consultants have not fully investigated all options:

"The consultants have not investigated whether there is interest from established operators in acquiring and operating the site. We know that there is, and we know that offers have been made. The consultants do not seem to be aware of this and therefore seem to just accept that closure and redevelopment is a forgone conclusion. That is wrong, and seriously undermines the validity of the Masterplan. If they had consulted the Save Dreamland Campaign as promised, they would have found out about this."

The consultants suggest a number of replacement uses for the site: commercial leisure uses (e.g. cinema, bowling, bingo, health & fitness, night clubs); a mix of pubs, bars and restaurants; a resort casino; hotel development; leisure retailing; public open space; and public sector sports facilities. These options concern the Campaign, explains Laister:

"None of the options they suggest for the site would act as a tourist attraction. The consultants believe the Dreamland site should become just 'another piece of the town', with streets and buildings and a public park. The amusement park (and probably the Scenic Railway) will be lost if the consultants' proposals are implemented. You will note that none of the proposals put forward (with the possible exception of the resort casino) are for a tourist attraction. None of the uses would attract people into Margate, certainly not in the numbers that an amusement park would. In other words, they want to replace an amusement park which could comfortably attract well over a million people to the town every year with a series of buildings that are nothing more than local leisure facilities. This will seriously undersell Margate."

The Campaign is also very concerned about the wording of the Questionnaire:

"Many of our members have contacted me stating that they believe the questionnaire to be badly worded. Instead of asking people whether the Scenic Railway should be retained as part of an amusement park, the question already assumes the park to be redeveloped. Our members do not think they are being properly consulted. We are very disappointed."

At the public meeting on 30 March 2004, a representative from Tibbalds Planning & Urban Design Ltd (the lead consultants) was asked if she was aware that more than one established theme park operator has confirmed an interest in acquiring the site, has pledged millions of pounds in new rides and park infrastructure, and has made offers for the acquisition of the site at full, independently-assessed, market value, but had been turned down. The Tibbalds representative said that she was not aware of this interest from theme park operators.

Laister believes these mistakes could have been avoided if the consultants had carried out proper research and consultation:

“If only they had properly consulted us (as we were promised), they would have known about this. This is, after all, the only serious proposal currently on the table, and would result in a completely new-look Dreamland, centred on the Scenic Railway, drawing hundreds of thousands – most likely millions - of people to the town! This could be the catalyst for Margate’s regeneration. As it stands, we believe the Masterplan is seriously flawed and the consultants need to go back to ‘square one’. They need to correct the numerous errors in the document, undertake the proper research, carry out the full stakeholder consultation we were promised, and present us with a masterplan worthy of Margate, one that harnesses the interest already shown in Dreamland by major theme park operators and one that recognises Margate’s potential as one of the south of England’s leading seaside resorts. A few subsidised local leisure facilities and an area of public open space are no replacement for a major tourist attraction, and the consultants should have recognised that. They are certainly not a good enough reason to lose the Scenic Railway.”

“In short, it is our view that the current draft Masterplan could be disastrous for Margate, and the Council needs to know that.”

For further information, or to organise interviews, please contact **Nick Laister (Campaign Leader)** on 01235 838214 (day), 07778 207036 (mobile) or 01235 762186 (evenings and weekends) or **Sarah Vickery (Local Campaign Coordinator)** on 01843 220008. Or email press@savedreamland.co.uk.

To find out more about the Save Dreamland Campaign visit the campaign’s website at <http://www.savedreamland.co.uk/>.

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Information for Editors

The Save Dreamland Campaign was launched in 2003 to save the Dreamland Pleasure Park, Margate, home of the UK’s oldest roller coaster, the 84-year-old listed Scenic Railway. Dreamland’s owner proposes to replace the park with a supermarket, shops and casino. The Campaign is led by planning expert Nick Laister, a leading amusement park historian, planning consultant and editor of www.joylandbooks.com, the specialist amusement park bookstore. The Campaign is now speaking on behalf of 13,000 people, including local residents, businesses and organisations such as the Margate Historical Society, Margate Civic Society, the Margate Hotel and Guest House Association, European Coaster Club, Roller Coaster Club of Great Britain and SAVE Britain’s Heritage.

The official campaign website is www.savedreamland.co.uk. The campaign can be emailed at campaign@savedreamland.co.uk. The address for all correspondence is Save Dreamland Campaign, The Shell Grotto, Grotto Hill, Margate, Kent CT9 2BU.

Over 120 wooden roller coasters, the centrepiece of most amusement parks in the 20th Century, were built between 1885 and 1960. Only nine now survive.

Only two ‘Scenic Railway’ roller coasters now survive, and the Scenic Railway at Dreamland is the only surviving ‘first generation’ scenic railway. The removal of this ride would almost completely wipe out this important part of British amusement park heritage.

The other surviving scenic railway is at the Pleasure Beach, Great Yarmouth, built in 1932, and is a more modern ride, with many of its original features lost.

The Scenic Railway at Dreamland is the oldest surviving roller coaster in the United Kingdom, the sixth oldest roller coaster in the world. Its age and rarity were major factors in support of its listing. It is the third oldest scenic railway in the world.

Nick Laister BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI MIHT MIPI is a leading amusement park historian and editor of the web site www.joylandbooks.com. He is a Chartered Town Planner and Technical Director with the RPS Group plc, the UK’s largest planning consultancy, and he specialises in planning for tourism and leisure. He has been involved in bringing forward numerous major developments across the UK, and has appeared as expert witness at several public inquiries and hearings. He has written articles for a

number of newspapers and journals and has been invited to speak at conferences on the subject of planning for tourism and leisure. nick@savedreamland.co.uk.

Sarah Vickery owns and runs the Grade 1 listed Shell Grotto in Margate, a popular tourist attraction with shop, museum and cafe attached. She is Chair of the Thanet Contemporary Arts Festival, a Board Member of the Margate-based group Limbo Arts Ltd and a member of the Isle of Thanet Tourism Association. She moved to Margate with her family in 2001 to take over the Grotto which she has known and loved since childhood. Before this Sarah was a journalist specialising in arts and travel, writing for a range of magazines and newspapers and editing books. sarah@savedreamland.co.uk

Dreamland Pleasure Park is located at Belgrave Road, Margate. The telephone number is 01843 227011.