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News

DEVELOPMENT

Race is on to buy Dreamland before regeneration cash goes out of date



By Ed Hill

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THANET council has described the former amusement park Dreamland as a "hole" in the centre of Margate.

The park, which closed in 2005, has been at the heart of a struggle between its current owner the Margate Town Centre Regeneration Company, and the local authority.

Earlier this year the council served a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) on the site, which is now empty apart from its Grade-II listed Scenic Railway rollercoaster. It has set out its arguments for the CPO in a document in preparation for a public inquiry in January after the regeneration company objected to the forced sale.

Thanet council says there is a "compelling" case for its plans

to transform Dreamland into the world's first amusement park dedicated to historic rides, attractions, and sideshows.

Council leader Cllr Bob Bayford said: "With the opening of Turner Contemporary, Margate has already received a huge boost this year, and Dreamland represents another huge opportunity."

The project has already received £3.7 million from the Government's Sea Change programme and £493,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, with a possible £3m from the lottery in the pipeline.

The council and regeneration company, which wants to build 600 homes next to the park, had been in negotiations to work together until talks broke down earlier this year.

The company has objected to the forced sale because it says

the council's figures don't add up and the historic rides park could cost as much as £30m.

But Thanet council says it "became increasingly concerned that the owners... while continuing to apparently negotiate were taking no positive steps to maintain or secure investment in the site or to positively promote a new future".

The Dreamland Trust, set up to help run any new amusement park on the site, has also backed the CPO. It says government money will only be available for a set period and that the rollercoaster will soon be beyond repair.

After the public inquiry a planning inspector will prepare a report for the Secretary of State, who will make a final decision in May or June.

■ For more and sport see **www.yourthanet.co.uk**

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