



Dreamland, Margate: A Thrilling Theme Park from the Past

Summary Vision

The Save Dreamland Campaign launched its proposals for the Dreamland Heritage Amusement Park on 30 April 2007.

The Campaign launched its previous Vision for Dreamland - 'I Dream of Dreamland' - in March 2005, which showed a Concept Plan of how Dreamland could look if acquired by one of the theme park operators interested in taking on the site. This plan was backed by Southend's Adventure Island Theme Park, one of the operators vying to take over the park.

Following a series of meetings with Thanet District Council and the Margate Renewal Partnership (MRP) between January and April 2007, the Campaign developed the concept of a Heritage Amusement Park for Dreamland, based around the listed Scenic Railway.

Our vision for the world's first Heritage Amusement Park would be to include some of the remaining examples of Britain's amusement park heritage - many of the rides being rescued from parks that have recently closed down - in a high quality park-like environment around the Scenic Railway. The listed Cinema building would also be brought back into use with rides, shows, bars, restaurants and an amusement park/seaside heritage museum.

This will not be a collection of gentle old travelling fairground rides like the Fairground Heritage Centre in Devon, which is a fantastic tourist attraction in its own right. Dreamland Heritage Amusement Park will be a recreation of a large, thrilling permanent seaside amusement park - most of the rides will be permanent built structures and are generally much larger than travelling fairground rides. Seaside amusement parks of the past (Southend's Kursaal, Blackpool Pleasure Beach, Margate's Dreamland, Barry Island Pleasure Park, Belle Vue, etc), featured rides which were no smaller than the white knuckle rides of today. In fact, if anything, they were often bigger structures. Many were equally as thrilling. Most roller coaster experts consider the Bobs roller coaster at Manchester's Belle Vue (demolished in 1971) to have been the most 'white knuckle' ride ever constructed in this country. Through the last century wooden rides were eventually replaced by steel rides and seaside amusement parks were in some ways replaced by inland theme parks, with one or two notable exceptions. Dreamland Heritage Amusement Park will bring back the spectacular seaside amusement park of the Twentieth Century.

Dreamland Heritage Amusement Park's Unique Selling Point is effectively a "thrilling theme park from the past". An authentic traditional seaside amusement park experienced in its correct location.

The Campaign has carried out some initial feasibility work on the viability of the project and commissioned theme park designer Jean-Marc Toussaint to produce a new Concept Plan for the site showing how the park could look, based on an initial site area provided by Margate Renewal Partnership. The Plan shows a potential selection of vintage

amusement park rides of the type that could operate at the park, including those rides that have already been acquired for the project.

The Campaign sees funding from the developer of the remainder of the land within Dreamland (Section 106 funding as part of the planning permission for the redevelopment of the remainder of the site), along with other grant funding, as critical in delivering this attraction. The Save Dreamland Campaign has set up The Dreamland Trust, which will play a key role in delivering the Heritage Amusement Park project. We believe that this is the best option to secure the future of the Grade 2 listed Scenic Railway and for the distinguished history of the park to be recognised. It is also the best way to rescue the historic amusement rides that will be lost following the closure of a large number of Britain's seaside amusement parks over the past few years. It is an ideal way of safeguarding and preserving the UK's amusement park heritage at this critical time. The Trust has negotiated the 'rescue' of a small number of threatened vintage rides, most of which are now in storage in various locations. In some cases, these represent the last surviving examples of their type. The Dreamland project should capture the public's imagination and will also undoubtedly play a pivotal role in the regeneration of Margate, creating a contemporary and unique living museum.

Initial feasibility work undertaken by the Save Dreamland Campaign and by independent consultants suggests that the project will be viable. In terms of its likely draw, the park would certainly pick up the 'casual' family day tripper to Margate, who will use the park in the same way that they have done for the past 80 to 90 years. Note that, according to Visit Britain statistics, Dreamland attracted 680,000 visitors in the 2002 season, the last season for which figures are available (reference: Visits to Visitor Attractions 2002 - Visit Britain and Insight Division, June 2003). The people who are visiting Margate (as opposed to Dreamland) will be a fairly reliable baseline income for the operation because the rides presented there will be bigger and better than rides that have been seen on the park since the late 1990s. We do not see why fewer Margate visitors will visit Dreamland Heritage Amusement Park than they did when the park was operating in 2002. This, in our view, reduces some of the risk of the project. The 'heritage' marketing would then widen the catchment and visitor to the sort of people who perhaps would not have previously visited – nostalgia, enthusiasts, grandparents with grand children. These would be a bonus, and it is this area that is really untested, being the BCLM/Beamish market.

Further ongoing feasibility work on the project is ongoing as part of MRP's successful Sea Change bid.

We believe this proposal to be right for Dreamland and hugely beneficial to Margate as a tourism destination. We are confident that this is a realistic proposal, which should attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to Margate every year.

The Concept Plan

The Concept Plan has been designed by Jean-Marc Toussaint, the man behind our original 'I Dream of Dreamland...' plan. It demonstrates that the Heritage Park can be accommodated within approximately 7 to 9 acres, the exact location to be determined at a later date.

The Campaign has consulted with its own members on the Heritage Park concept, and the response has been overwhelmingly favourable.

The Acquired Rides

Full details of each of the rides listed below is contained in the document: 'Report on Vintage Rides in Storage at Dreamland, Margate (August 2007)', produced by the Dreamland Trust for MTCRC last year, or on the web page: www.joylandbooks.com/scenicrailway/heritageamusementpark.htm.

Name	Source	Current Location
Caterpillar	Pleasureland, Southport	Dreamland
Chairlift (Cableway)	Pleasureland, Southport	Dreamland
Ghost Train/Journey into Space	Pleasureland, Southport	Dreamland
Flying Scooters (Mistral Flying Machine)	Pleasureland, Southport	Dreamland
Wild Mouse (King Solomon's Mines)	Pleasureland, Southport	Dreamland
Meteorite (Sandstorm)	Pleasureland, Southport	Dreamland
River Caves – boats and mechanical parts only	Pleasureland, Southport	Dreamland (water wheel mechanism still in situ at Pleasureland)
Fun House machines	Pleasureland, Southport	Dreamland (moving stairs still at Pleasureland)
Water Chute – trains and mechanical parts only	Ocean Beach, Rhyl	Ramsgate Port – TDC depot
Mirror Maze	Pleasureland, Southport	Pleasureland, Southport
Haunted Swing	Pleasureland, Southport	Pleasureland, Southport
The Whip	Blackpool Pleasure Beach	Dreamland

Content of the Park

In addition to rides, we would like the Heritage Amusement Park to include a National Amusement Park Museum, featuring the national and international history of amusement parks and seaside resorts. The idea being that visitors would learn about the history of amusement parks, in an interactive museum, then would step into Dreamland and experience living history.

The park would also include retailing, cafes, kiosks, sideshows, etc.

The rides will take up approximately a third of the Amusement Park area. The remaining land will either be walkways, queue lines or landscaping. Approximately one third of the Amusement Park should be 'green'. This can be seen on the June 2007 Concept Plan.

There will need to be food and drink kiosks, as well as a restaurant and small retail (souvenir) units. There will also need to be sufficient land for outdoor seating and picnic areas.

The lower ground floor of the Cinema could include (in addition to being the main entrance to the park) the National Amusement Park Museum, the Fun House (i.e. the location in which the original Southport Fun House machines would be operated – this could be a year-round covered play area, which could be hired for children's parties) and a café.

In terms of landscaping, we would support an approach similar to that shown on the June 2007 Concept Plan. However, it may be necessary to have more areas of hard standing and less landscaping to reduce maintenance costs. We envisage each ride being 'built in' to the landscape, with raised queue areas, walls, fences, etc.

Potentially there could be an area/areas within the Amusement Park where additional rides could be added, should they become available. Alternatively, every few years a ride could be replaced, but only where the ride has no direct historical link with Dreamland, and where a new location can be found.

The park should, in our opinion, be free entry. That way, footfall into the park can be maximised as can the use of retailing and food/drink. Rides could be either by purchase of tickets or by 'unlimited ride' wristband, depending on how long people want to stay. This method generally works best in seaside resorts, where people may only come into the park for a short period and would not wish to pay an entrance fee. This would not harm the park's educational role, with older people who just want to see the rides and have a cup of tea, being able to enter and use the park for free. Those wishing to spend a day would not be disadvantaged, as they could buy wristbands and enjoy the park as if it were a 'pay-one-price' theme park. With this arrangement, the park could operate a dual role – as a museum and a fun family day out.

There should also be a pay per ride option. However, payment would not be at the ride itself. To keep costs down (and for security reasons), payment should be via the purchase of tokens, which would be sold from a number of kiosks in the park.

The museum probably should include an admission charge, and would be separate to the Amusement Park.

Extra features should be provided at each ride such as an information board/zone to illustrate the heritage of the ride and its justification for inclusion. That is an important part of the experience, and the educational role of the park.

Other Issues for Consideration

Security is going to be an important factor. It will not be possible to leave the park open to the public when it is not operational. The site will therefore need to be fenced and secured out of hours. This will need to be carefully designed, although there are some good examples of urban amusement park security.

Maintenance is another issue. The park should be designed to have at least one workshop/maintenance area. The design should also allow maintenance vehicles (and emergency services) to access each ride and FaB unit. Also issues such as storage of waste.

We like the idea of the chairlift going out onto the promenade and across the road to advertise the existence of the park.

We also support the idea of a viewing area/amphitheatre in the 'Gap' on the frontage where people can look down over the park before going in.

Key Documents

- Ride Availability, Concept Plan and Business Plan (The Dreamland Trust, May 2007)
Concept Plan (The Dreamland Trust, June 2007)
- Report on Vintage Rides Currently in Storage at Dreamland (The Dreamland Trust, August 2007)