



“Seaside towns have an important role - they are part of our national culture. Seeing them succeed - their regeneration - is important.”

Conservative Party leader **David Cameron** comments as he launched the Tory's local election manifesto in Hastings

Grand Pier reopens

Weston-super-Mare's Grand Pier has been officially reopened after undergoing an extensive redevelopment. Improvements to the attraction, sold earlier this year to brother and sister Michelle and Kerry Michael, include new rides, restaurants and retail outlets.

Mediterranean makeover

The Welsh seaside resort of Barmouth has given itself a Mediterranean makeover by importing 60 palm trees from Italy. Businesses in the town have sponsored 13ft (4m) trees, which have been planted along its promenade over the summer months, at £500 each.

Amusements

Better days ahead for Dreamland despite fire setback

The arsonists responsible for the conflagration at Margate's Dreamland have unwittingly sparked a new wave of support for the ailing amusement attraction.

CAMPAIGN CONTINUES

DREAMLAND BLAZE

Police are convinced that the fire which destroyed a major part of the scenic railway at Margate's Dreamland was started on purpose. About 25 per cent of the footprint of the Grade II listed roller coaster - the oldest in the UK - was destroyed by the blaze. Police have announced that the fire was started deliberately and investigations are continuing.

Representatives from English Heritage have visited the Dreamland site to assess the damage to the facility. "Based on our visit, the damage is not as significant as was first presented to us," said Peter Kendall, English Heritage team leader for Kent and East Sussex. "We are categorically of the view that the ride is repairable. We will work with everyone else to achieve that end."

The encouraging line was echoed by Nick Laister, leader of the Save Dreamland Campaign. He noted: "We have a much better picture of the extent of the damage and the prospects for repair. I have spent the last couple of days contacting as many people in the amusement park industry as possible to satisfy myself that the skills and expertise are available to repair the Scenic Railway."

"Several people who know the Scenic Railway well, and who have maintained the ride over the years, have told me that repairing the structure will not be a major task. They are also willing and able to get involved with the restoration. In addition, companies which are specialists at reconstructing and replicating wooden roller coasters in the UK and overseas



have confirmed that, given the extent of damage, plans can be drawn up and the ride rebuilt.

"I have forwarded these details to Dreamland's owners. With all this local knowledge, the expertise of wooden coaster specialists and the hundreds of photographs of the ride, I am now convinced that a rebuild is possible and achievable."

The fire may be a physical setback for Laister's campaign, but it has stirred up new support from hundreds of people. "I can't remember any time since we started the campaign in January 2003 when there has been such an influx of new members," he said. "Our online forum is busier than it has ever been. I am genuinely heartened by the huge response from the people of Margate - and from around the country - who have all expressed their outrage that this much-loved listed building could have been damaged in this way."

"I am pleased that Dreamland's owners, the Margate Town Centre

Regeneration Company Ltd, have acted swiftly in getting people on to the site to assess the damage, and I have personally told the company chairman, Toby Hunter, that we will do everything we can to help him with the task of restoring the ride."

Laister added: "For the time being the most important thing is to stop this from becoming another Brighton West Pier, with a series of further arson attacks. Security at the site must be stepped up immediately to protect this now extremely vulnerable listed building."

Thanet District Council has already called for security at Dreamland to be stepped up following the arson attack. Council Leader, Sandy Ezekiel, who called the ride "the single most important piece of the town's cultural heritage", has said that the Council expects the owners to rebuild the structure as soon as possible.

The blaze, which took 80 fire-fighters to bring under control, has also attracted the attention of Roger Gale,

Conservative MP for Thanet North. He told press: "Those who love Margate have loved the scenic railway. It has been a beautiful example of seaside architecture and engineering, and over the generations it has given pleasure to hundreds of thousands of visitors. We must not, though, let the loss of this structure - if indeed it is a total loss - distract us from the development of the Dreamland site."

"We envisage plans for a working seaside funfair museum, bringing together the best of the remaining machines, rides, dodgems and seaside artefacts, and this event makes it more important than ever to ensure that Margate, the home of the bathing machine, becomes an international centre for the traditional funfair. We need to look forward. Yesterday's seaside holidays will not return, but the creation of the Turner Centre and the whole Margate waterfront development can create a new beginning for a town whose best years are, I believe, still to come."

Pledge made over Bognor Pier restoration

RESTORATION PROCLAMATION

BOGNOR REGIS PIER

A regional councillor has pledged to explore the possibility of using government funding to help restore Bognor Regis Pier. The leader of Arun District Council, Cllr Gill Brown, said she would investigate if the pier was eligible for a share of the £45m Sea Change regeneration fund earmarked by culture secretary Andy Burnham to help buildings of cultural and heritage importance to seaside towns.

The pier's owner since 1996, John Ayers, has already spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on repairs, but the effect of recent storms and inclement weather proved too much for exposed areas of the pier, away from the landward end that houses a large amusement arcade and a nightclub. Last month 80ft of the structure's seaward end had to be pulled down due to safety concerns, leading to the cancellation of one of the town's main tourist events, the Bognor Birdman competition.

Cllr Brown commented: "I am happy to find out about this new government funding. I would also need the complete agreement of the pier owner that he was happy to play his part in the restoration of the pier away from its commercial side."

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