

SAVE DREAMLAND CAMPAIGN

The Shell Grotto, Grotto Hill, Margate, Kent CT9 2BU

Tel/Fax: 01843 220008 Email: campaign@savedreamland.co.uk

10 March 2003

Councillor Richard Nicholson
Thanet District Council
PO Box 9
Cecil Street
Margate
Kent
CT9 1XZ

Dear Cllr Nicholson,

Dreamland

Thank you for your letter dated 6 March 2003. We will, of course, be making our views known at any public consultation into proposals for the site, and during the statutory consultation period into the Second Deposit Draft Thanet Local Plan.

I am writing with a number of observations relating to points made in your letter, and to address some misconceptions that you appear to have regarding the site.

Firstly, it is very disappointing that the Council chose to ignore the results of the public consultation into the First Draft Thanet Local Plan, and to change the policy following representations recently made by the owner. This is especially disappointing when these representations were made after the closing of the statutory consultation period.

We are also concerned that there appears to be no evidence whatsoever that Dreamland would not be viable. In fact, we have presented evidence to Thanet District Council in our letter dated 12 February 2003 from the English Tourism Council that demonstrated that it would indeed be viable. The fact that the current owner has decided to retire and secure some redevelopment value from the site is, in our opinion, irrelevant in planning terms. Further to the information in that letter, I now attach information on two similar seaside amusement parks, showing significant increases in visitor numbers over the last few years, and the knock-on effects of increased visitors to the resorts as a whole. This information also further demonstrates how many visitors Dreamland could expect with a committed owner.

You refer in your letter on several occasions to the "*perceived lack of financial viability*" and to what you call "*commercial reality*". I should be grateful if you would provide us with the evidence on which these statements are based and which show that it is now necessary to look for a new use for the site to replace the amusement park. I have to say that this is not the view shared by the members of this organisation, and the interest shown by established operators in acquiring the site backs up our claims.

I also would like to correct you on a couple of misconceptions. Firstly, you refer in your letter to Thorpe Park and Blackpool Pleasure Beach. We have always been very careful not to refer to parks of this type as examples. These are international leaders in the amusement park industry, drawing visitors from huge catchment areas. And, contrary to what is stated in your letter, Dreamland is certainly not on the scale of these parks; Blackpool Pleasure Beach is approximately three times the size of Dreamland, and Thorpe Park covers an even larger area. We have always compared Dreamland with similar-sized parks, in similar towns, with similar catchments. The evidence is that these parks are viable, and that (when properly run)

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attract significantly more visitors (by orders of magnitude) than Dreamland has under its present ownership. In almost all cases, these parks are the biggest attraction in their respective towns (just as Dreamland is Margate's biggest tourist attraction). We therefore do not accept your comments on the park's viability; we consider that the Council's views are not based on fact, are short sighted and could therefore be very damaging to Margate's tourism economy.

There also appears to be some confusion between the terms 'tourism' and 'leisure'. In your letter you state, *"that is not to say, however, that the Council would not wish to see some leisure activities retained on the site..."* Tourist attractions, such as Dreamland, draw visitors into a town. Leisure and retail (as currently proposed) serve the local population. The Dreamland site is currently a tourist attraction, not a leisure use, and the Save Dreamland Campaign believes that most of the site should remain in that use for the benefit of Margate's tourism economy. Other options should only be considered as a last resort - if all else fails - because once the site is redeveloped and is changed from tourism to other uses, it is almost certainly lost forever. To use the expression in the previous local plan policy, it would mean the permanent loss of an "important asset".

As it currently stands, the Save Dreamland Campaign believes, for the reasons set out above, that Thanet District Council is misguided. At our meeting, you agreed to an organised visit to Southend, to see a similar-sized, well-run amusement park, and the regenerative effects it has had on the town over the past few years. We believe that, with a committed operator, the Dreamland site can be the focus of the town's regeneration, and can be just as successful as the Southend example, if not more so. On the basis of the information in your letter, we believe that this visit is now essential. I should be grateful if you would contact us with possible dates for this visit.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours Sincerely
for the Save Dreamland Campaign

Nick Laister BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI MIHT
Campaign Leader

Enc. Dreamland: Comparable sites

cc. Cllr Iris Johnston
Trevor Heron, Thanet District Council