

SAVE DREAMLAND CAMPAIGN

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3 March 2003

Councillor Richard Nicholson
Thanet District Council
PO Box 9
Cecil Street
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Dear Cllr Nicholson,

Thanet Local Plan

I write on behalf of the Save Dreamland Campaign. We speak on behalf of almost 13,000 people who are concerned about the impact that the redevelopment of Dreamland will have on Margate's future prosperity and its heritage. Our members include local residents and businesses, visitors to Margate, and a number of organisations, including the Margate Civic Society, the Margate Hotel and Guest House Association, the Margate Historical Society and SAVE Britain's Heritage.

At our meeting at the Council Offices on 28th February, you gave us copies of the proposed revisions to the Local Plan regarding the Dreamland site. We have been following progress with the Local Plan closely over the past few years, and we therefore find the revisions very concerning as they appear to ignore the work that has been undertaken on the Plan over recent months, including the statutory public consultation. These changes represent nothing short of a 'u-turn', which have no basis in the work undertaken over the past few months and can therefore only have been precipitated by the council's recent meetings with the owner of Dreamland and the developers.

As I am sure you will appreciate, our members feel betrayed by the council, particularly because the policy as it had emerged in recent months was put in place because the Council had seen little evidence of investment at the site, and therefore predicted a pressure for the site's redevelopment. But it seems to our members that as soon as the site's owner announced its closure to allow for redevelopment – the very thing the policy predicted – the council has thrown away all of this work and inserted a completely new policy that allows for the site's complete redevelopment.

We should therefore be grateful if you would answer the following questions.

1. The Status of the Policy

Firstly, I should be grateful if you would clarify the status of the policy. I assume that it was discussed at the Cabinet meeting on 16th January 2003, but as the report relating to the Dreamland site was excluded from the Council's website, we were not able to see that the previous policy had actually been deleted to be replaced by a new policy. Please explain why this report was excluded from the Council's website, as it meant that the Save Dreamland Campaign – and others – were not aware that the Council proposed to completely replace the Dreamland policy with a new, less restrictive, policy for the site. It also meant that we lost the opportunity to lobby members to express our complete rejection of this replacement policy,

which seems to have only been put in place to allow for the closure of Margate's biggest tourist attraction, contrary to the wording of the original policy.

As we lost that opportunity to make our views known, we are setting out our views in this letter, and request a response.

2. The removal of paragraph 8.50

Paragraph 8.50 acknowledged that part of the site might have to be redeveloped for related uses that are compatible to the continued use of the amusement park. It stated:

"However, it is important that revenue from such development is reinvested into the provision and improvement of facilities so that the attractiveness and viability of the park is maintained. To develop part of the site and not reinvest in the park is not acceptable. This would make the amusement park even less viable and would ultimately lead to the loss of the whole attraction and therefore this important asset. The Council will, therefore, require a legal agreement that will tie the development of part of the site with improvements to the amusement park."

The replacement paragraph makes no reference to the viability of the amusement park, or the fact that it is an important asset. There is no longer any mention of the requirement for a legal agreement to tie any developments of part of the site with improvements to the amusement park. Why has this important requirement been removed?

3. Resisting development that would lead to a reduction in the attractiveness or tourism potential of the site

Policy T11 in the DDTLP stated:

"Proposals that seek to extend, upgrade or improve the attractiveness of Dreamland Amusement Park will be permitted. Development that would lead to a reduction in the attractiveness or tourism potential will normally be resisted."

A cross party Working Party of Councillors considered all of the objections and has proposed changes to the Draft Plan. Policy T11 received an objection, which is set out in the Council's summary schedule. This objection stated that the use of the word "**normally**", as an attempt to provide a degree of flexibility, might result in ambiguity about when the policy will apply. The Working Party agreed with the objection and removed the word "normally" from the first part of Policy T11, which now reads:

"Proposals that seek to extend, upgrade or improve the attractiveness of Dreamland Amusement Park will be permitted. Development that would lead to a reduction in the attractiveness or tourism potential will be resisted."

The second sentence of this policy was very important, as it allows the council to refuse planning applications that would reduce the attractiveness or tourism potential of the site. The result of the statutory consultation was to strengthen this part of the policy. Why has this part of the policy now been deleted? Representations were made during the statutory consultation period requesting that this policy be tightened. Can you confirm whether any representations were made to the plan requesting that this clause be deleted? If not, what is the council's justification for doing this?

4. Redevelopment of part of the site

The policy was also very clear about how much of the site could be redeveloped, and if it were, how that redevelopment would need to improve the amusement park. The policy read:

"Exceptionally, development of a limited part of the site may be accepted as part of a comprehensive scheme for the upgrading and improvement of the theme park. The scheme will be required to demonstrate that the future viability of the amusement park can be assured"

and the Council will require a legal agreement to ensure that the proposed development and the agreed investment in the amusement park are carried out in parallel.”

The Cabinet considered the Working Party recommendations at a meeting on 3rd December 2002. The minutes of that meeting state that members expressed concern at the use of the word **“limited”** in Policy T11 and did not feel this was sufficiently restrictive. Officers were asked to consider alternatives and report back.

This entire section of the policy has now been deleted and replaced by a policy which allows the redevelopment of the entire site, instead of restricting development to a “limited” part, and which has no requirement for any legal agreement to protect the amusement park. Please explain how this policy can be considered to be more restrictive than the previous policy? Why is there no longer a requirement for a legal agreement to protect the amusement park? Why has the policy changed so substantially at this very late stage in the review process of the First Deposit Plan? Is it a response to the Council’s meetings with the owners of Dreamland? If so, why weren’t this organisation and other organisations in the town consulted before these changes were made?

5. Public consultation

The new policy bears no relation to the one that has been prepared and consulted on over recent months. I should be grateful if you would explain how this policy relates in any way to either the policy in the First Deposit Draft Plan or the results of the public consultation on that Plan.

It would appear to only relate to the wishes of the site’s owner, who to the best of our knowledge made no representations to the Plan, not to the wishes of the local residents, businesses and organisations that have taken an interest in this plan and in the future of Margate.

Conclusions

We fully understand that this is first draft plan, and that the council is entitled to modify the policy at this stage. That is not our concern. **Our concern is the way this policy, which has been consulted on and carefully redrafted in response to the consultation, has now been completely replaced with no consultation with ourselves or other organisations, seemingly to open the way for the site’s redevelopment. All this following a meeting between the Council and the site’s developers.** The policy now allows for the complete redevelopment of the site without requiring anything to secure the future viability of the amusement park. This represents a u-turn by the Council that cannot be explained on planning grounds. As there was no consultation with this organisation, and as the report on the policy was excluded from the Council’s website, I am sure that you can appreciate how this appears to the members of this campaign. The replacement policy no longer protects the amusement park, which our members have always considered to be a vital part of the emerging local plan, and now just opens the gates for a total redevelopment of the site.

Our members are now requesting to be consulted on this policy before it is finalised in the Second Deposit Draft Thanet Local Plan, and request that it is taken back to Cabinet following a consultation with ourselves and other organisations in the town. The correct place to make such a substantial change, if required, would have been following the next statutory consultation period. We don’t feel that such a substantial change to the plan should have been ‘rushed through’ like this without consultation with the people whose livelihoods depend on Dreamland, and the many thousands of other people who know that the Dreamland Amusement Park is vital to the future prosperity of the town. Our members feel completely betrayed by the Council, and we request that this matter is dealt with urgently.

Yours Sincerely
for the Save Dreamland Campaign

Nick Laister BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI MIHT
Campaign Leader

cc. Cllr Iris Johnston
Trevor Heron, Thanet District Council