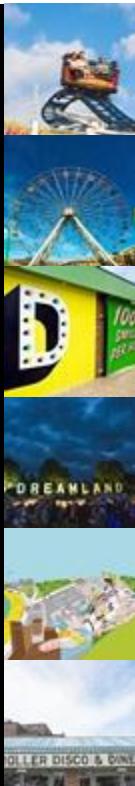


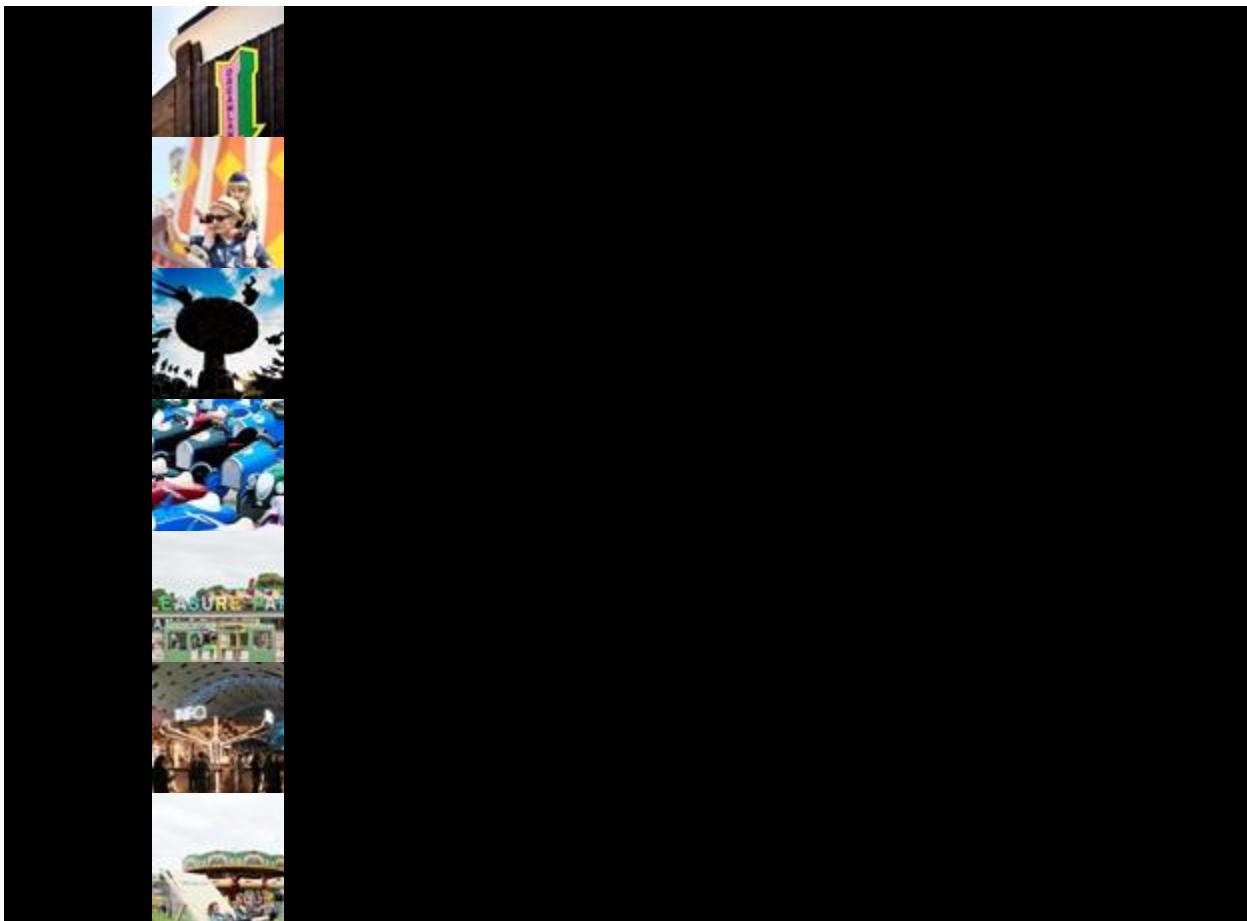
# Margate reinvigorated

10 July, 2015 | By Wayne Hemingway, Mark Humphreys



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**More than 10 years after its doors closed, Dreamland amusement park in Margate reopened last month following a £30 million restoration led by Hemingway Design**

The project, in collaboration with Guy Hollaway Architects and Ray Hole Architects, has restored the Grade II\*-listed scenic railway and refurbished key buildings such as the roller disco and the ballroom. The Centre for Social Justice's 2013 report *Turning the Tide* identified Margate as one of the most deprived coastal towns in the UK. Dreamland is part of its wider regeneration, which in 2011 saw the opening of the Turner Contemporary, welcoming more than 850,000 people in its first two years. Here, Wayne Hemingway and Guy Hollaway talk about their roles in the project.

### **'We want to get the art crowd in as well as the bucket-and-spade brigade'**

Three things drew us to this project. One was the community spirit behind it. It is a project that never would have happened without people power. The Dreamland site was going to be given over to housing, and the public didn't like that. Secondly, there was the history of the place. It's arguably Britain's oldest amusement park, and to lose it to housing seemed daft. Thirdly there was the town itself. When we visited Margate, we were lifted by a seaside town that was using good design and intelligence to reverse its decline. We've created more than 200 jobs, of which something like 80 per cent went to locals, making Dreamland one of the town's largest employers.

It was clear that this was the 'other end of the promenade' – Dreamland and the Turner Contemporary are Margate's two bookends. We needed to make sure that visitors to the Turner Contemporary would walk the half-mile of prom, and that Dreamland would appeal to them as well. The aim was to appeal to every age – we couldn't make an amusement park just about art and design. There have to be thrills, there has to be kitsch. We want to get the art crowd in as well as the bucket-and-spade brigade – it's a delicate balancing act.



As designers we have to ensure everyone understands the emphasis on quality. We need to make sure Dreamland doesn't rest on its laurels. The standards need to be higher than at any other seaside park. We know that if we go somewhere that is beautifully designed but the food is shit and the events aren't good, that's what people will remember. As designers of the brand, the narrative and the spatial aspects, we are guardians of these standards. The client often thinks the design is done once a project opens, but design should be involved in every bit of thinking.

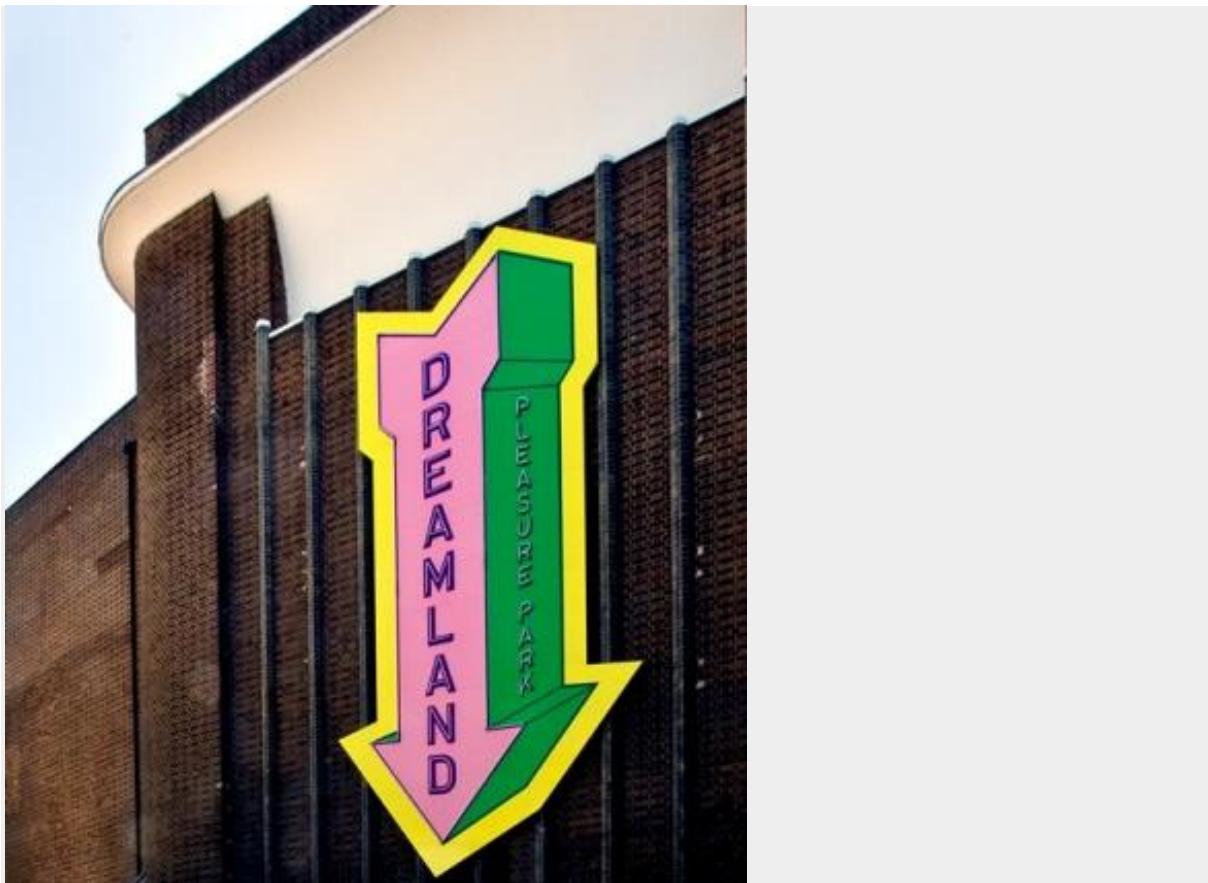
Dreamland will not survive on nostalgia alone. The first thing our team developed was the brand. We spent a long time creating something that addressed the history, but something you couldn't quite place. It feels seaside, it feels pleasure park, but it is screamingly of the now. It's not been the easiest of openings; a lot of the rides weren't complete, which was a bit disappointing – we were amazed at how little flack we got. You have to remember that Margate has arguably the nicest close sandy beach to east London. Brighton has always been an escape from London, and Margate can be a much smaller version of Brighton for east London.

*Wayne Hemingway, Hemingway Design*

#### **'We liaised with English Heritage to restore the railway to its former glory'**

Guy Hollaway Architects began its involvement in the reinvention of Dreamland six years ago after Thanet District Council appointed us following an invitation to tender for the architect role. We were commissioned for the duration of project, tasked with designing a new layout for the lower ground floor of the cinema building, assisting in the park's landscape and ride layout, designing various buildings within the Grade II\*-listed scenic railway, and managing the relationship between the project team and English Heritage throughout the reconstruction of the ride.

At the early stages the team worked closely alongside the Dreamland Trust to produce an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and determine an outline brief, masterplan, and strategy for the park. The successful bid allowed the project to progress to RIBA Stage C, at which point an urgent works contract was implemented to stabilise the structure of the main cinema building.



Following a successful compulsory purchase order, the design evolved, responding to a new brief derived through a rigorous understanding of the building's history. Initial proposals focused on celebrating the 1920s Grade II\*-listed cinema building, by removing the seemingly less influential buildings attached to the structure. Consultation with Thanet's heritage adviser, Nick Dermott, gave us an insight into the significance of various elements of the building, further informing the project brief in regard to which buildings should be retained.

The eastern blue sheds were formerly a First World War hangar, relocated to Margate following the war; and the vast steel structure of the former ballroom pre-dates the cinema building itself, once forming part of Margate's original train station. Stripping back layers of the building fabric revealed the extent of the changes the building has endured, allowing the brief to carefully protect significant heritage.

The importance of circulation was pivotal to the success of such a large entertainment complex, with a narrow existing concourse needing to accommodate large crowds, while offering a link with the beach. The concourse acts as the spine of the proposal, from which a number of facilities branch, integrating retail outlets, events spaces, food and drink facilities, and even a collection of rare vintage pinball arcade games, accompanied by a retro roller disco.



These spaces occupy a deep plan, set within a semi-basement, with little natural light. This led to our introducing a rooflight at the mid-point of the concourse, reinstating high-level glazed block windows to the ballroom function space, and adding full-height glazed doors to the southern elevation. We also encouraged permeability between internal and external provisions.

Guy Hollaway Architects worked alongside local and specialist contractors and their design teams, procured via various Design and Build contracts, to ensure the project was delivered to the level of quality desired, and that informed design changes were incorporated into the approved listed building consents.

Within the structure of the scenic railway lie three ancillary buildings: the workshop, powerhouse, and station building. An arson attack in 2007 left these buildings either destroyed or heavily damaged, and we were tasked with redesigning and replicating their historic predecessors. This required careful study of historic photographs to recreate these key functional buildings. Liaison with English Heritage was required throughout construction, in order to restore the historic ride to its former glory; retaining original features such as the in-situ brake man, while simultaneously ensuring that modern safety and operational requirements were incorporated.

Having built a strong connection to the project over the years, we are proud to realise a concept originated so many years ago, and to have worked closely with Hemingway Design to create a much-needed addition to what Margate has to offer. We look forward to maintaining our involvement in future phases of Dreamland's growth.

*Mark Humphreys, Guy Hollaway Architects*