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**NEWS**

# 'Fantastic' Dismaland to inspire 'eclectic' Tropicana revival project

by **Simon Angear**

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A routinely-evolving events space housing art exhibitions, music festivals, theatre productions or even a 'pop-up' summer lido... could this bold vision finally revive the Tropicana after 15 years of 'pie-in-the-sky' ideas?

Leading urban designer Wayne Hemingway has been recruited by North Somerset Council in the hope he – and his connections within the worlds of art, entertainment and culture – can reinvigorate the Weston landmark.

The seafront pool closed in 1999, and flummoxed planners for 15 years as a series of grand private sector regeneration efforts floundered.

Bulldozers were even readied in 2012 as the site looked finished – but the subsequent interventions of two contrasting figures ensured the Tropicana remained standing.

First, Government Minister Eric Pickles blocked demolition proposals, and then guerrilla artist Banksy catapulted the building towards international fame by choosing it to host his acclaimed Dismaland exhibition.

Now, buoyed by the success of that subversive theme park parody – an event which boosted Weston's economy by £20million – renewed efforts are being made to find a long-term Tropicana future.

Hemingway Design has already injected fresh impetus by hosting two meetings at the seafront yesterday (Wednesday) where a raft of creative thinkers were invited to put forward their own innovative ideas.

It remains to be seen exactly what those ideas entail, but no suggestion was off-limits – and, in all likelihood, the eventual solution will be a mixture of many of them.

Mr Hemingway told the Mercury: "At the moment we are getting ideas – there is no agenda about what it can or should be and I think that's important.

"There's not going to be one solution – if there was just one solution it would have come forward by now. But it is not obvious, and that's why it has been empty so long."

## How did Hemingway Design become involved?

Wayne Hemingway was one of the near-200,000 people who visited Dismaland when it ran at the Tropicana last year.

He describes the show as 'the world's biggest art event of 2015' but says it also opened his eyes to Weston's possibilities.

It was his first visit to the Tropicana, and indeed the first time he had heard of it, but he went on to blog about the building and later met senior council figures at a conference.

He is now signed up to help generate and focus regeneration ideas, both for the site's reinvention, and for potential funding sources.

The final decision on what happens remains with the council, but Hemingway Design has not ruled out being involved on a longer-term basis, too.

However, it is clear the council has



delivered a coup in securing his involvement.

North Somerset leader Nigel Ashton said: "We are pleased to be working with Hemingway Design, who have an excellent pedigree of involvement in regeneration projects.

"They also bring with them a wealth of quality contacts in arts and culture, and it is these people who are now willing to share their ideas and enthusiasm to help us move forward with a proposal for the future of the building."

## What has Hemingway Design achieved in the past?

The firm's mission statement says it 'breathes new life into old concepts, cutting through the ordinary and expected with powerful, visionary design'.

Dreamland in Margate is one of its highest profile successes, a £10million retro-style theme park boasting rides, restaurants and events spaces.

The restored Boscombe Overstand in Bournemouth is another of its key seaside achievements, while the firm has had a lasting effect in Morecambe, where it created and runs the Vintage By The Sea festival – an annual event which draws in 48,000 people.

## What is the ambition?

"My gut tells me it needs to be eclectic and with an element of surprise," says Mr Hemingway, while stressing the need for proposals to be both realistic and affordable.

"Some of the ideas put forward for the Tropicana in the past are totally pie-in-the-sky and are undeliverable.

"We have got to be pragmatic. Our job is to take a common sense approach to what the Tropicana can house over the next few years.

"We have got experience at bringing

things back to life in a thrifty way and that's what we pride ourselves on; we have a pretty good understanding of which ideas are daft or too expensive or not realistic in this economic climate."

Whatever does come next, the leftfield arrival – and immense success – of Dismaland has already laid the foundations for public approval of a wider range of options.

Cllr Ashton said: "Hosting Dismaland last summer, followed by the popular programme of theatre over the festive season, clearly demonstrated that the building has the potential for uses beyond a pool.

"We're keeping an open mind at this stage, and are keen to hear what the industry thinks about a future for the building.

"What we are clear on though, is that it must fit with our clear vision for Weston as a place which combines the best of living, learning and lifestyle."

Mr Hemingway believes public affection for the Tropicana – stemming from its origins as a nationally-renowned lido, but renewed by the Dismaland success – is a major advantage.

He said: "There's obviously a lot of love there for the Tropicana which is a fantastic start. People just want it to succeed. Obviously Dismaland played a massive part in that.

"As an event space, we know it works. Dismaland was fantastic – it has a scale which works for that kind of event. Art will work there, but art, music and shopping events will all work there.

"There will be people who remember it as a lido and nothing should be dismissed, except it's unlikely that a commercial operation will come along in this day and age and say we will make money out of it.

"But there could be some solution. Somebody somewhere might know a way of doing a pop-up, cost-effective lido which could be there for part of the year.

"My gut feeling is we will have a suite

of ideas and a set of operators or group of friends who want to deliver a festival there or a classic car show, hopefully another great art show, and hopefully there will be people who want to host a cinema and pop-up theatre events there.

"Hopefully people will think 'I am going to Weston because there will be something good at the Tropicana' – that's the dream."

## What comes next?

Hemingway Design has prom-

ised to keep Mercury readers updated on progress, and says there is an important role for the public to play, too.

Mr Hemingway said: "I think people need to wait a few weeks for the ideas to be published and then get stuck in.

"There will be ideas they don't like and that's great – there should be, there's no 'one size fits all' solution. We want constructive criticism and everyone will have a valid comment to make."

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