



The owner of Oxfordshire's Fairytale Farm, the UK's first turn-up-and-play farm park designed for children of all abilities, has reached a major milestone with the reopening of the Britain's oldest amusement park, a project he has led on a voluntary basis since 2003.

The famous Dreamland Amusement Park in Margate, which closed in 2006, will reopen on 19th June 2015 following a 12-year campaign to save the attraction. Dreamland is the oldest surviving amusement park in the UK and is home to the country's oldest roller coaster, the Grade II* listed Scenic Railway. Nick, who has masterminded the £18m (\$27m, €24m) project since 2003, has led the Campaign throughout this period and has also chaired the Dreamland Trust (now a charity) since 2007.

Nick says: "It is now 12 years since I first set up the Save Dreamland Campaign. The reopening of the park on 19th June will be an incredible day for me and the hundreds of campaigners who have worked tirelessly to make this happen."

Nick, who is also a planning consultant at Oxfordshire-based RPS, first got involved with Dreamland in 2001 when he asked the UK Government to consider giving listed building status to the Scenic Railway roller coaster:

"The Scenic Railway is the oldest surviving roller coaster in the country, and in 2002 it became the first ever listed amusement ride. I thought that would be the end of my involvement with Dreamland."

When it was announced in January 2003 that Dreamland was to close, Nick set up the Save Dreamland Campaign having received lots of emails asking for help:

"I set up what I thought was going to be a small internet campaign, and I believed I could help them with my professional knowledge as a planning and development adviser to a large number of the UK's theme parks. I thought it was a cause worth giving up some time for. I was taken by surprise when within days I had hundreds of people signing up. Within the matter of a few weeks I was speaking on behalf of several thousand people who believed that Dreamland should be saved. Everyone agreed that Dreamland was the beating heart of Margate and the town's economy would struggle without it."

After Nick appeared at the public inquiry into Dreamland in 2004, a Government inspector decided that Dreamland and its Scenic Railway should be saved. This gave Nick the certainty he needed to take the project to the next stage.

"The idea for rebuilding Dreamland as an attraction that celebrates amusement park and seaside history and culture was something that I came up with in 2007. It seemed so right to rescue rides that were being destroyed in amusement park redevelopments, at the height of

the property bubble and rebuild them alongside the Scenic Railway in a vibrant new visitor attraction at Dreamland. "

Nick and his fellow volunteers decided that to make this happen they needed a vehicle:

"We decided that campaigning alone wasn't enough. There needed to be an organisation that could actually involve itself in driving forward plans to reopen Dreamland, by going out there and securing funding for the project."

The Dreamland Trust was born towards the end of 2007, and Nick was appointed Chairman:

"I can remember so many meetings around the country trying to persuade organisations, such as English Heritage and the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), that Dreamland was a cause worth supporting. So many of these organisations got on board, and I am so grateful for that. And with these organisations behind us, we were able to apply for money from Heritage Lottery Fund and the Government. We successfully secured several million pounds from Heritage Lottery Fund. Other funders then came forward and we eventually managed to get the project budget up to £18m. A huge thank you goes out to all the funders, but particularly to the Heritage Lottery Fund, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Thanet District Council, as without these organisations this project could not and would not have happened."

With the money in place, Nick and his fellow volunteer directors at The Dreamland Trust began to develop the layout, look and feel of the park. But there were major setbacks.

"The Scenic Railway fire of 2008 was a major blow to the project. Not only was 25% of the structure of the listed roller coaster destroyed, the station and workshops were also lost, including all the original wooden trains with their distinctive carved dragon's heads. But in an unexpected way, it gave the project traction as everybody realised that if things did not happen quickly Dreamland would be lost forever. The project really took off."

From that day the project gained momentum, and with millions of pounds of funding in place a team of designers, engineers and amusement ride specialists came on board and, under the Dreamland Trust's leadership, the project that we see today started to take shape.

"We appointed a team of top consultants, architects and designers. For example, we appointed Wayne Hemingway as a consultant to create the Dreamland branding, and Guy Hollaway Architects to design the buildings and layout. We told the team that we did not want a heritage amusement park - the term was actually banned! We wanted a mix of rides from all eras, events, festivals, food and numerous supporting attractions, all presented in a non-ironic way. The team brilliantly embraced our vision."

The Dreamland Trust and its partner Thanet District Council have now appointed a local Kent company, Sands Heritage Ltd, who will be responsible for operating Dreamland when it reopens next month.

Nick says: "Dreamland will bring hundreds of thousands of tourists to Margate, will create hundreds of jobs and opportunities for local companies. In a town that has already seen positive change following the very successful opening of the nationally-famous Turner

Contemporary art gallery, Dreamland will be another major leap forward. Margate is a resort that is finding its way back into the hearts of people up and down the country; it is an exciting place to be. The town is definitely worth a visit from Oxfordshire; there is a genuine buzz in the town and so much to see, so please go and give it a try."

The opening of the park will be a significant personal moment for Nick:

"The opening of Fairytale Farm in Oxfordshire was a big personal moment for me back in 2013, when the Prime Minister cut the ribbon, as it was something I felt passionately about and still do. And to see Dreamland also now reopening and people enjoying themselves on the rides and attractions will be quite an emotional experience for me. Now that both Fairytale Farm and Dreamland are open, I need to sit down and have a rest!"

ENDS

Information for Editors

Nick Laister is available for interview.

Email nick@fairytalefarm.co.uk or telephone 07778 207036 to organise an interview with Nick.

The Save Dreamland Campaign was set up in January 2003 and speaks on behalf of several thousand people. www.savedreamland.co.uk.

The Dreamland Trust was set up to deliver a revived Dreamland and ensure that the park's contribution to the regeneration of Margate can be realised. www.dreamlandtrust.org.uk

Details of the new Dreamland Margate can be found at the park's new website: www.dreamland.co.uk

The Dreamland Trust, working in partnership with Thanet District Council, has secured a funding package of £18 million, which includes external funding from The Heritage Lottery Fund and the Sea Change grant, and match funding from the Council itself, to deliver the first phase of the project.

The Dreamland site is owned by Thanet District Council following successful compulsory purchase.

Fairytale Farm is located on the A44 just outside Chipping Norton and is open every day until 1 November 2015. www.fairytalefarm.co.uk