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PLANNING FOR LEISURE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

A PRIVATE ENTERPRISE CASE STUDY - THORPE PARK

BY

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PLANNING FOR LEISURE - A PRIVATE ENTERPRISE STUDY - THORPE PARK

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1. With the acquisition of Hall and Ham River in 1968, the Ready Mixed Concrete Group found itself the owner of very large tracts of land, mainly in southeast England, forming a series of exhausted sand and gravel pits. The majority of these sites were wetworkings, where the natural water table is exposed on excavation leaving behind large lake areas.
2. Up to the time of the acquisition these lakes had been put to limited use by clubs for fishing, sailing and water skiing. However, Ready Mixed Concrete was anxious to find ways of developing at least some of these sites on a more commercial basis and at the same time create areas for public enjoyment which would be helpful to the Company in demonstrating that worked out pits can be turned to advantage and provide much needed public amenity areas.
3. In 1969/70 an assessment was made of the leisure industry at home and abroad and this clearly indicated that with the

prospect of shorter working hours, leisure was a major growth area of the future. The assessment included many visits to major commercial leisure projects and the comparison of those in North America and Europe showed that the United Kingdom had lagged behind in terms of the standards and sophistication of its main commercial leisure centres. Many attractions in this country are run by showman families, as can be seen by some of the seaside resorts such as Blackpool, Margate, Southend and Clacton. By modern standards many of the holiday camps built during the boom period of the 50's and 60's are unsatisfactory. Owners are attempting to improve and introduce new facilities to change their image and wish to bury the name 'camp'. By contrast, some stately homeowners, forced by financial circumstances to increase revenues to meet escalating costs of maintaining their large homes, have diversified to widen the scope of their attractions. Longleat and Woburn developed safari parks and Beaulieu developed its motor museum and its nearby marine exhibits at Buckler's Hard.

4. Despite these changes the home market in 1970 still lacked the capital intensive leisure park of the kind found in parts of North America, such as the Disney, Six Flags and Marriott Parks, all involving huge investments.
5. At the same time as RMC was negotiating the planning permissions for its Thorpe Park development, John Broome

acquired Alton Towers, near Stoke-on-Trent, the former home of the Earls of Shrewsbury. He proceeded to upgrade the standards at Alton and introduced Britain's first corkscrew steel roller coaster in 1980 and this was an instant success. It was followed by the longest water flume ride in the world and numerous other major attractions. Although different in character, Thorpe Park and Alton Towers represent today the nearest equivalent in Britain to the North American theme park.

6. In 1970 what was to become RMC's Thorpe concept was new to Britain and because of this the Company was unable at the planning stage to call upon outside consultants who had the necessary background knowledge and experience to produce any worthwhile viability study. The final decision to proceed with the project was taken by the Company's executives based upon the research they had personally undertaken. It was their firm belief that the first park to go "up market" would be a great draw for the general public. This judgement shows every sign of being correct with Thorpe Park attendances rising each year, despite the recession. Attendances have been: 1979 - 300,000; 1980 - 450,000; 1981 - 600,000. To date the total investment, excluding land values, is some £10 million and it is now planned to increase this by a further £3 million with the addition of several major new attractions with a view to bringing the attendance up to some 1 to 1.2 million per annum.

7. Once the decision had been taken to move into leisure a study was made of the most promising sites owned by the Group. Site selection is the key factor of any leisure enterprise, indeed it is said in the leisure industry that there are three essentials for any successful leisure park, they are, "LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION".

8. Location requires the following:
 - a) The site must be near to centres of population;
 - b) It must be close to the motorway network as journey time determines the area from which the bulk of visitors will come;
 - c) Local roads must be capable of handling high volumes of additional traffic and provide satisfactory vehicular access to the site;
 - d) The park surroundings and approaches should enhance the development - visitors understandably wish to spend their leisure time in attractive rural surroundings as an escape from the concrete jungle;
 - e) If possible, the site should be within an established tourist area where the local authority is more likely to understand what is proposed and actively encourage the development;
 - f) Public transport to the site is a bonus although this is not essential as practically all visitors come by car or private coach.

9. Thorpe Park was chosen because its location is outstanding. The Park is situated 21 miles southwest of London and 20 minutes drive from London Airport. It adjoins the M3 and M25 motorways, local roads are good, and the new roundabout on to the A320, built at the Company's expense, has overcome any access problems.

10. Despite its proximity to London, the site's surroundings are heavily treed, including the fine wooded slopes of St. Anne's Hill which provide a perfect backdrop to the Park. The bus company runs a service into the Park which connects with Staines Station, some 4 miles distant, which is one of the stops on the route.

11. The site must also fulfil a number of essential requirements:
 - a) Size is the critical factor which determines what can be achieved on a site. Thorpe Park covers some 450 acres of which 250 acres consists of a series of interconnected lakes. In addition RMC owns a further 200 acres of adjoining land which could be included if required in the future. Whilst Disney World is quite exceptional even by American standards, it is worth noting that Walt Disney purchased 26,000 acres for his mammoth development in Florida.

Car parking alone is very demanding on space and is a critical factor in determining park attendances. The

parking area must be of sufficient size to accommodate the attendance on a peak Bank Holiday. The usual standard adopted for parking is 180 cars to the acre. At Thorpe the main car park has a capacity of 3,500 cars with a grassland overflow car park area providing additional spaces for 6,000 cars. Assuming an occupancy of three persons per car, this gives a theoretical maximum attendance of about 30,000.

Size also permits flexibility in the layout of the Park, high intensity areas can be separated from more passive uses, themed areas created and buildings sited away from adjoining properties;

- b) Without doubt water is a great attraction to people and provides the perfect setting for any leisure development. If anything, Thorpe Park is blessed with too much water, leaving insufficient areas available for the siting of leisure facilities. To some extent this limitation can be overcome by the judicious filling-in of certain lake areas and no doubt this will be necessary in the future.

Landscape quality is a prime consideration. If the environment is found lacking the Park is doomed to

failure through lack of return visits. All too often ill-conceived schemes seek to utilise areas of dereliction which are incapable of transformation. Sites should be selected on their scenic merits rather than resorting to leisure as the answer to a problem area for which no other solution can be found;

- c) At an early stage in the planning of any project the availability of services close to the site must be investigated and the ability of these to accept the sudden surges brought about by influxes of large numbers of people.

12. Site selection must also pay regard to the vital question, "Will planning permission be granted for the development?" This must be in the forefront of one's mind when considering a location, for without planning permission the site is worthless and much time and money will be wasted. Wishful thinking is dangerous and costly and yet time and again would-be developers have been carried away by their own enthusiasm only to find frustration and rejection by the local planning authority. Designing a leisure facility is so stimulating and exciting that it is all too easy to fall into this trap.

13. In 1970 the Thorpe Park site was an active gravel pit covered by a number of planning permissions which broadly required the site to be refilled and returned to agricultural use. These consents covered a time span of some 30 years dating back to the opening of the pit in 1940.

14. At an early stage informal discussions took place with the County Planning Officers with a view to removal of the filling conditions and the substitution of a consent for the retention of the lake areas and development of the site for leisure. The Company's proposals were well received, although it was pointed out by the officers that our applications would only be granted if there were no serious objections at local level.

15. Following this advice local meetings were organised, and an open day held at which details were given of the Company's proposals. It was also pointed out to the residents that if the Park was developed they would be spared the disturbance of tipping operations over a 20-25 year period and the probability thereafter of housing development on much of the land, thus destroying the character of Thorpe Village.

16. In parallel with the discussions with local residents, consultations took place with the Highways and Drainage Authorities, Electricity and Gas Boards and the County Landscape Architect.

17. Traffic generation is always a problem; indeed it is difficult in these days to find a road within 21 miles of London which is not already overloaded. Leisure developments have the advantage that peak attendances are at weekends and on public holidays, when there is no commuter and commercial traffic. However, standards applied today seldom permit additional volumes on the scale of one million visitors in a six month Park season. It is not difficult to anticipate the reaction of a local authority traffic engineer to many existing facilities were they to be proposed today. Wembley, Twickenham, Wimbledon, Tower of London, Windsor Castle, Earls Court and Olympia are just a few examples.

18. As I have said earlier, Thorpe Park was fortunate in that the construction of a new roundabout, at a cost of over £200,000 (1978 value) to the Company, satisfied highway requirements. In addition the Company decided that car parking would be free thus avoiding any danger of traffic build-up whilst cars waited to pass through a pay point.

19. A further factor in the Company's favour was that with advance signage it was possible to route traffic round the Village of Thorpe.

20. A Thorpe Park-type development has the advantage of drawing people over a large part of the day, thus spreading the

traffic load, this is in contrast to an event which starts at a given time where everybody arrives and departs within a short space of time.

21. Although the initial outline permission took over two years to negotiate, the real problems arose at the detailed application stage.

22. The situation was made worse by the re-organisation of local government in 1974 when planning powers were transferred from County to District level where local vested interests carry undue sway. Local inhabitants are opposed to people coming into the area and therefore fear attractions which will draw people - yet it is these elements which are essential to a viable enterprise. The conflict is such that I believe controversial matters of regional significance should be dealt with at County rather than District level as is the case with mineral applications.

23. Layouts submitted were agreed in part only, certain important aspects were rejected which upset the balance of the layout resulting in a redesign of the whole area. An ice rink, amphitheatre, water flume ride and certain children's rides were rejected and the applications withdrawn. With the passage of time fire regulations were changed with the result that the tented structure for the main entrance concourse had to be abandoned and replaced by a permanent structure.

24. In all a further four years elapsed before the Company felt that the Park had permissions for sufficient attractions to make it a viable proposition. The cost of these delays was considerable and the viability even at this stage open to question.

6 years!

25. The delays caused other problems. The Company had agreed in 1971 to sponsor and hold the World Water Ski Championships at Thorpe in 1975. The aim was to conclude the opening season with a world sporting occasion. The Company was landed with holding the event without a Park to support it and with no public facilities on site. In a desperate attempt to make the event a success and to increase its appeal to the public, a boat and angling show was included together with demonstrations by the S.A.S., Navy Divers and a funfair. This event was attended by the then Minister of Sport, Mr. Dennis Howell, who stated:

"These championships have been staged here at Thorpe in a manner which reflects the greatest credit on this country. I have talked to many of the competitors and they are unanimous that Leisure Sport has created the world's number one water ski arena."; and went on to say, "I want to congratulate the Company on their great achievement in providing such unrivalled leisure facilities for the country as a whole, and for London in particular. Leisure Sport has created a very early fulfilment - a very major one - of Government Policy."

26. The Minister was so concerned to learn that the Company was having such difficulty in negotiating planning permissions that he asked the Company to invite the Planning Committee

to finals day and a reception afterwards so that he could stress to them the importance of Thorpe Park and the role the private sector must play in leisure provision.

27. The result of the holding of the championships was that the planning authority served an Article 4 direction on the Company and this remains in force to this day.

Why not challenged?

28. There is no doubt that much of the planning delay could have been avoided if the Company had submitted a detailed application at the outset, then deemed a planning refusal and taken the matter to appeal and public enquiry. Local people would have been given the opportunity of having their say and the Company would have stood every chance of obtaining a permission for the development in its original form.

29. The Company believed so much in the Park development and in the planning gain to the planning authority of preserving the site from use as a rubbish tip, that it decided to attempt a negotiated permission rather than have recourse to the appeal procedure. The Company fell into the trap which I described earlier - wishful thinking!

30. Up to the present time the Park has involved the submission of no less than 130 separate applications and as change is vital to its continued success many more will follow in the years ahead.

31. Since the detailed consent was granted three appeals have been decided in the Company's favour on written representations:

- (1) The first concerned a single strand of barbed wire along the top of an approved 6 ft. high chain link fence on either side of a public footpath which divides the property.
- (2) The second was in respect of the removal of a filling condition imposed under a gravel winning consent for some 30 acres of water at the end of one of the main lakes in the Park. This area had been excluded from the original Park application as it was the subject of a controversial gravel winning application at that time. The gravel consent was issued prior to the decision on the adjoining areas comprising the Park. Accordingly, the gravel permission contained a filling condition with a note to the effect that if the Park was subsequently permitted favourable consideration would be given to the removal of this condition. When application was made the Company was informed that the County Council had made a policy decision that all gravel pits must be filled regardless of the circumstances!
- (3) The third, the extension of the Park to include the derelict farm buildings on a corner of the site as an educational farm exhibit. Over a long period of time

housing development and gravel extraction had reduced the farm holding from over 1,000 acres to an uneconomical unit of 100 acres. Inclusion in the Park was the only way capital expenditure on the restoration of the buildings could be justified. The buildings have now been saved and fulfil a useful dual purpose for agriculture and education.

Yet another planning problem has been the service of a Compulsory Purchase Order on the Company for an area of land severed from the Park by the M3 motorway, required by the County Council as a permanent site for 15 gypsy families. This was vigorously opposed at a public enquiry last May and we now wait for the decision. The Company is obviously most concerned on visual and security grounds and also has plans to develop the land in connection with Thorpe Park. This area has many disadvantages as a permanent gypsy site, such as noise and lead pollution from the motorway, lack of services and partial flooding risk. The estimated cost for site works and services alone for the 15 families is £195,000.

32. The latest development is the refusal of three major Park attractions involving a further investment of £3 million. The Company will try to negotiate a compromise in an attempt to avoid an all out confrontation with the planning authority - we must wait and see what transpires.

33. In all of these disputes I have no criticism to make of the planning officers. The problem is with the Committee members at District level and the determined efforts of the vociferous minority. Had Thorpe Park been situated in an established tourist area it would have been welcomed as a means of bringing added trade to the district - as it is, its drawing power works to its disadvantage.
34. Infrastructure costs for this type of development are very high, have to be paid for at the outset and are not directly revenue producing. I have already referred to the entrance roundabout cost of over £200,000, to which was added expenditure on car parking areas, four miles of internal roadways, a new one mile main sewage pipeline together with pumps, over three miles of perimeter fencing, five bridges and the provision of electricity, water, gas and telephone lines.
35. Landscaping costs amounted to some £500,000, the main items being landshaping involving the grading of all banks to natural contours, the creation of mound features to break up the flat landscape, deepening of the 1,500 metre rowing course and the grading of the banks in the water ski arena to a gradient of 1 in 8 at and below water level to reduce backwash from ski boats. Terraced viewing and acoustic soil banks were also provided round three sides of the ski arena. Part of the central area was also raised some two feet to bring it above the level of the 1947 flood.

36. The Company was fortunate in having the top soil and overburden already stored on site as a result of the earlier gravel excavations. Costs were therefore limited to the movement of this material over comparatively short distances. Without the availability of this material much of the landscaping could not have been contemplated.

37. Some 24,000 trees and shrubs have been planted to augment the existing waterside vegetation which had occurred through natural regeneration over the years and ornamental waterfowl have been introduced.

38. As a result of these efforts the lakes have acquired a natural appearance and a landscape quality which is much appreciated by visitors.

39. Within this setting Thorpe Park aims to provide a unique mixture of excitement, adventure and fun for everyone. Its central theme features the origins, history and achievements of the British people as a maritime nation. It is British through and through and not a carbon copy of an American "theme" park. The aim has been to blend together Britain's fascinating past with the latest in entertainment to fire and stimulate the imagination and to provide a day of pure fun for all ages.

40. An important part of the original concept was to include exhibits with an educational content which would attract school parties and at the same time be of interest and appeal to the average visitor and overseas tourist.

41. This has been achieved in several ways. One section of the Park is devoted to historic scenes ranging from a reconstruction of a Stone Age cave to a Celtic farmhouse, a Roman port scene complete with fullscale Roman fighting galley, signal tower, bath, temple and forum, a reed thatched Saxon Hall, a Viking ship, Norman Mott & Bailey and the Runnymede tented pavilion with King John and his barons seated at a banqueting table at the time of Magna Carta.

42. The maritime theme is maintained with the royal Naval Air Service and the recreation of a typical World War I airfield in France. Canvas hangars house a unique collection of aircraft of the period representing both friend and foe, including such famous names as the Sopwith Camel and Triplane, the SE5A, DeHavilland DH2, Manfred Von Richthofen's Fokker DR1 Triplane, Fokker D VII, Albatros DV and Spad XIII. World War I float planes can also be seen on the lakes, the Sopwith Baby and Hansa Brandenburg W29. More float planes form the Schneider Trophy exhibit and comprise past winners of this coveted trophy, the Deperdussin 1913, Curtiss R3C2 1925, Macchi M39 1926, and the famous forerunners of the Spitfire, the Supermarine S5 1927 and S6B 1931.

43. Some of the aircraft are flying replicas and whilst they cannot be flown at Thorpe for display purposes, they have appeared at many air shows, including Farnborough, Greenham Common and the Silver Jubilee display.

44. Man's achievements are featured in the Model World section where 1/36th scale models are displayed in a garden setting. Nelson's Column is dwarfed by the Sears Building and the CN Tower and the Pyramid of Cheops stands massive and awe inspiring beside the numerous other models.

45. The latest of the educational exhibits is the working farm exhibit of the interwar period. British farm animals in a traditional farm setting is proving to be an irresistible attraction for young and old alike, most of whom are modern day urban dwellers divorced from the countryside. Demonstrations of farming activities such as sheep shearing and country crafts add variety and further interest.

46. The success of the Park's educational programme can be judged by the 107,000 school children who visited the Park in 1981 during a six week period in June and July. In that year 10,800 schools were circulated. In 1982 the number of schools has been increased to 31,000 covering an area from the north of Birmingham to Somerset, including the whole of Wales. This year the number of school children who visited the Park increased to 150,000.

47. Educational visits fill the Park during normally slack mid-week periods and also generate a high percentage of return visits during the holidays with the whole family involved. Teachers are supplied with notes on all the exhibits which can be used in class both before and after visiting the Park. The children have question and answer papers to complete.

48. The Park has also proved beneficial to the handicapped, accounting for about 1% of the total attendance. Many are mentally handicapped, living in institutions, and there is no doubt that the Park helps to stimulate and relieve the boredom of their restricted lives.

49. A successful commercial Park cannot exist alone with the educational and more passive forms of exhibits I have described, it must contain elements of lighthearted fun. Thorpe provides two children's play areas with mini roundabouts, inflatable bouncing castle, slides and swings, go-karts, video games, crazy golf course, pedal and bumper boats, and all of these are well patronised and profitable.

50. In addition, four waterbuses ranging in size from 60 to 120 seats take visitors for trips round the lakes. In 1981 the Park opened a 180° large screen cinema recently developed in the United States. The audience of 300 standing in the theatre are subjected to a 12 minute film of thrill experiences ranging from riding some of America's most

vicious roller coasters to panoramic helicopter views of mountain ranges. The sensations created by this film are so powerful that I have seen many people fall over!

51. 1981 also featured the introduction of an international size roller skating rink. With the development and perfection of new forms of synthetic wheels, roller skating is a very graceful and enjoyable sport for both the participant and the spectator. The Thorpe rink has been so successful that this year a permanent cover has been built over the centre of the rink with a removable outer cover for winter use. This rink has also created a useful added attraction for evening entertainment.

52. Water sport facilities are provided on the lakes for the use of the public, the training of top athletes and the holding of events. The lakes at the Park are interconnected and consist of five main water areas, each of which is allocated a particular sporting activity or public boating facility.

53. Water skiing is restricted to those lakes which are furthest removed from adjoining properties thus eliminating any possible noise objection. Unfortunately, for safety reasons, traditional water skiing behind a boat is very demanding on water area and because of this only one boat is available for the public ski school and as a result it is impossible to meet the demand. However, an ingenious German invention now permits continuous operation of an electrically

driven cable supported on four pylons at the corners of a rectangular course, which carries up to 10 skiers at any one time. The speed can be varied to suit the capability of the skiers and permits international slalom, tricks and jumping competitions. It is planned to install this equipment at the Park for 1983.

54. The advanced ski school training facility utilises the Britannia Water Ski Arena used for the 1975 and 1981 World Water Ski Championships. The last day of the 1981 event attracted a crowd of nearly 20,000. Many international skiing events are staged in the Park, including the KP Masters for the past three years, and in 1982 The World Cup. The arena is also used to stage the Thorpe Park Water Ski Show on peak Sundays, Bank Holidays and at major events.
55. Rowing and canoeing regattas are held each year on the 1,500 metre course which provides four rowing and six canoeing lanes. This water is also used by the British Rowing and Canoeing squads for training purposes during off-peak periods; no charge is made for this use.
56. Boardsailing is a popular sport at the Park. The school is R.Y.A. approved and provides daily courses at both beginner and advanced levels. Boardsailing events are also held during the season.

57. On land, the showground area is utilised for a variety of events including jousting and show jumping.
58. Park catering is provided in four restaurants, supplemented by kiosks at strategic points and mobiles. There is also an Edwardian style ice cream parlour and the Crown & Anchor Pub. The main catering areas are sited within the Mountbatten Pavilion, named after the late Earl Louis Mountbatten of Burma, who officially opened the Park in 1979. This building also contains the main shops, pub, amusement arcade, roller skating and water sport changing rooms, bank, information desk, first aid and security office.
59. The top level of the Pavilion has a stage and is used for evening entertainment, private parties and functions up to a maximum of 700 people.
60. The day time admission charge is £2.50 for adults and £1.50 for children and Old Age Pensioners, with reductions for parties, the handicapped and schools. There is no charge for parking and the admission charge is inclusive of all events, landtrain rides, Farm ferry and all the exhibits. In the longer term it is planned to make one inclusive charge for all of the attractions and rides which is the system often adopted in America. On certain evenings, from 7.30 to 11.00, a restricted area of the Park is open to the public at a reduced charge of £1.80 for adults and £1.20 for children.

61. No concessions are granted so that the Company can maintain complete management control over all activities and staff within the Park. This is very important if standards are to be maintained and reasonable pricing policies adopted. Cleanliness and staff behaviour are of the utmost importance and have considerable bearing on the conduct of the visitor. People are far less inclined to leave litter if the place is kept spotless. Our success in this is evident from the letters we receive and the fact that we have not had one case of graffiti anywhere in the Park.

62. Staff must have smart uniforms, be alert and helpful and instantly recognisable to the public - a uniformed security man has twice the authority of someone in civilian dress.

63. The permanent Park staff is about one hundred with a seasonal staff, of mainly students and some part-time labour, amounting to about three hundred. It provides an interesting job opportunity for students and we have been fortunate in finding no difficulty in recruiting the right people.

64. The Park is promoted by way of leaflets distributed through the 200 Tourist Information Centres, coach operators, company social clubs, schools, etc; advertising on local radio, through the press, by the televising of events and programmes featuring the Park, Radio 1 Fun Day broadcast live from Thorpe Park, and editorial comment. Most effective of all is personal recommendation which accounts for about 50% of our visitors.

65. In the immediate future it is apparent that at least three major new and exciting attractions must be provided if the required target of over one million visitors is to be achieved. Each ride or attraction must be capable of handling large numbers of people to avoid long queues - a sure way to build up customer dissatisfaction! They must combine to provide new experiences for people, thrills and a challenge and yet not upset the balance of the Park, be too noisy or too dominant in the landscape. One possible solution is to site them within buildings clad with facades, possibly examples of different periods of English architecture, to retain the character of the Park and to add the element of surprise to the attractions they contain. Utilising the inside of buildings in this way, and by making full use of modern technology in electronics, lighting and simulation, it is possible to create magic. Disney has done this to magnificent effect with such rides as the "Pirates of the Caribbean" and "It's a Small World". The Company must follow his lead even if the cost is high.
66. Return visits are essential to any successful leisure development. Disney estimates that of its 25 million visitors to Disneyland in California over the past 25 years, 90% have been on more than one occasion. It follows that new attractions must be added and existing facilities updated at frequent intervals to stimulate repeat visits. This need for constant change and updating of facilities is difficult

to convey to planners and the Company has been accused of changing the original concept. This was inevitable as the original concept is now twelve years old and at that time could not be based on any previous operational experience or known public acceptance.

67. Four seasons of Park operation has taught the Company a great deal about public taste. The original concept has been an undoubted success, however, as I have said earlier too much emphasis should not be placed on passive activities. The proposed new attractions will correct this imbalance, but will the District planning authority seek to refuse permission because they are not in keeping with their understanding of the original concept of a water park? Visually the buildings containing the new attractions and rides can be themed to retain the character of the Park and effectively eliminate any outside noise - two factors of particular importance to us as well as to the District planning authority. The Chairman of the planning committee is on record as having said to his committee when considering an earlier application, "We are in danger of trying to run this Park for them." This is a state of affairs which should not and cannot be allowed to happen.

68. Protracted negotiations and delay in resolving planning disputes is a serious and costly handicap to any developer, particularly so in the ever changing leisure and tourist industry. Circular No.22/80 dated 28th November, 1980,

issued by the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office states under the heading "Efficiency and speed in decisions", paragraph 3 and 5:

"3. The planning system should play a helpful part in rebuilding the economy. Development control must avoid placing unjustified obstacles in the way of any development especially if it is for industry, commerce, housing or any other purpose relevant to the economic regeneration of the country."

"5. Promptness, relevance and efficiency are characteristics of good planning. The benefits to the economy and to the individual from the business-like handling of planning applications are very substantial. The vitality of the economy depends on new development. The magnitude of the investment at risk from delay is very large: the annual value of development passing through the planning system is of the order of £8 billion in England and Wales. Unnecessary delays in the development control system can result in wasted capital, delayed production, postponed employment, income, rates and taxes, and lower profitability. They can create a poor climate for future investment."

I would like to think Circular 22/80 was pinned to the wall of every planning office as a constant reminder because it goes to the root of so many planning difficulties. It is a pity that the problems peculiar to leisure provision are not specifically mentioned. The leisure industry and tourism with which it is closely associated are important to this country and I hope that some future circular will remedy this omission.

69. Back in 1965 "The Challenge for Leisure", a Civic Trust survey on planning for increased leisure facilities, stated:

"Three great waves have broken across the face of Britain since 1800. First, the sudden growth of dark industrial towns. Second, the thrusting

movement along far-flung railways. Third, the sprawl of car-based suburbs. Now we see, under the guise of a modest word, the surge of a fourth wave which could be more powerful than all the others. The modest word is leisure."

With the passage of 17 years the "fourth wave" is gathering momentum and can be clearly seen. How long will it be before it breaks and releases its full force? Companies in the private sector should be encouraged to provide the much needed facilities and resources to help absorb its impact. Sadly the Thorpe Park experience has been the opposite, it is one of delay and a continuous running battle with the District planning authority.

70. The Thorpe Park experience is hardly likely to encourage others to follow.