

DONINGTON PARK: DEAL SECURES FUTURE OF TRACK



PICTURE: ALISTAIR LANGHAM / 208630-02

AIM: Operations director Steve Watton and group MD David Broome, of Adroit, who have taken over Donington Park racetrack

Racing circuit saved as firm takes charge

by IAN GRIFFIN

BUSINESS EDITOR

DONINGTON PARK: The big Formula One plans that went wrong

Donington Park has been saved after a new company took over the running of the historic racing circuit.

Owner Kevin Wheatcroft's deal with Worcestershire construction firm Adroit Group has ended months of uncertainty about the future of the track.

Bosses at Adroit have vowed to bring back the glory days to the circuit by pumping millions of pounds into the derelict site.

The circuit was left unusable after an attempt to turn it into a Formula One Grand Prix venue ended disastrously last year.

David Broome, Adroit's managing director, said: "We intend to bring the site back up to a world class standard. The entire site needs attention while much of it will require a total overhaul."

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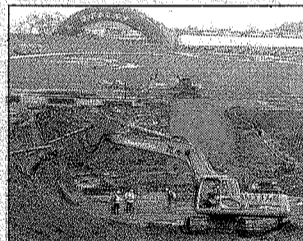
In February 2007 it was announced that Donington Ventures Leisure Limited, led by Simon Gillett from Birstall, had taken over the running of the track and had plans to invest in it.

In July 2008, the late Tom Wheatcroft, whose family owns the site, helped Mr Gillett strike a deal with Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone to bring the British Grand Prix to Donington from 2010.

A few months later, Donington Ventures unveiled at £100 million scheme to transform the track and facilities.

Mr Watton, a former racing car driver who has raced cars around the Castle Donington circuit, said: "It was a great opportunity for us to get involved with an iconic name. Opportunities like that don't come around very often."

He said the new management was planning to resurrect the iconic Dunlop bridge. However, health and safety laws means it will not be able to straddle the track. Instead it will stand at the side of the circuit.



SITE: An overhaul is needed

But with the credit crunch blooming into a full-scale recession, raising the cash proved a problem.

In February 2009, the national media reported that Donington Ventures was in financial trouble, with debts of £66 million.

Two months later, in April, the company was being sued

by the Wheatcroft family for failure to pay rent. The issue was resolved out of court.

Also last year there was also an ongoing planning battle with North West Leicestershire District Council over circuit changes.

Permission was eventually granted in late June, but the financial problems for Mr Gillett's company were far from over.

By August it had emerged that the £100 million plan was still short of investors to the tune of £80 million.

In late October, Donington Ventures finally admitted it was not going to get the cash.

Mr Gillett gave up the lease and the running of the track reverted to the Wheatcroft family.

The new operator is to host its first event on August 15, when vintage motorcycles will race at the track.

It will be followed by The Masters Series, featuring a range of historic racing cars on September 3 to 5, and the British Touring Car Championship on September 18 and 19.

The circuit lost a 17-year deal to host the Formula One British Grand Prix last year after failing to raise the £120 million needed to upgrade the racing track.

Donington Ventures Leisure, the track's former operator, went into administration with debts of £4.8 million in November.

Refurbishment work carried out by Donington Ventures was left unfinished, leading to speculation about the track's racing future.

Mr Wheatcroft, whose late father Tom bought the circuit in 1971, said: "We feel we have found the right people to move Donington forward into a new and exciting future."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Woman quizzed over bin blaze

A WOMAN was arrested after a wheelie bin was pushed up against a house and set alight.

The house in Groby Road, Leicester, was targeted at 5.15am on Thursday, May 20. The flames damaged the front door but no-one was injured.

Police said a 19-year-old woman was questioned and released on police bail.

Pc Janine Hardy said: "Although nobody was hurt it could have quite easily been far worse."

"I would urge anyone who was in the area last Thursday to contact me if they remember seeing someone acting suspiciously in Groby Road."

"Any calls received will be treated in confidence."

■ Contact Pc Hardy on 0116 222 2222.

Man facing jail

A 25-YEAR-OLD man accused of perverting the course of justice by giving false details about himself to the police has appeared in court.

Mahammed Darvesh, of Granby Avenue, Spinney Hill, Leicester, admitted the offence on August 9 last year.

He also pleaded guilty to driving otherwise in accordance with a licence and having no insurance.

The Leicester Crown Court case was adjourned until June 18, for a pre-sentence report to be prepared. Darvesh was released on bail.

Judge Simon Hammond said: "It is a very serious matter and the court will be considering a custodial sentence."

Pellet gun attack

POLICE are investigating a suspected pellet gun attack on a house.

The attack is thought to have taken place on a house in Allington Drive, Birstall, between 8pm on Wednesday, May 5, and 8am the next day.

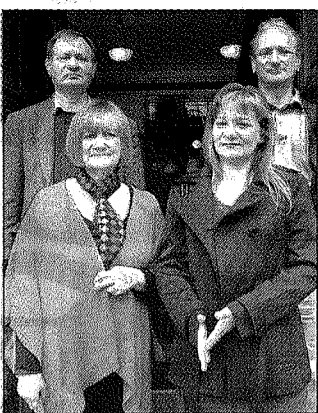
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■ Anyone with information about the incident should call Pc Brown on 0116 222 2222.

Noise is probed

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Three men have been arrested, two aged 18 and one aged 17, in connection with the incident. Investigations are ongoing and no further details have been released.



PICTURE: MIKE SEWELL

'LET DOWN': Sons and daughters, from left, Philip Mason, Elaine Smith, Jennifer Edwards and Christopher Mason after the inquest

Death of woman was 'preventable'

JOYCE FROM FRONT PAGE

diarrhoea and was found to have shallow breathing and discoloration of the feet.

At the inquest, Firland's care centre manager at the time, Rachel Court, confirmed the problems had been identified the previous day.

However the inquest heard there was no evidence she was monitored, checked or even seen between the hours of 1.20am and 7.05am on March 15. This was despite instructions she should be turned in her bed every two hours.

Doctors at the hospital told the inquest they believed Mrs Mason's condition had been declining for a while.

"Dr Malik gave clear evidence that, in his view, if Mrs Mason had been taken to hospital earlier, either when the family asked for a medical review, or when Mrs Mason became agitated, or even when the GP attended on March 9, on a balance of probabilities, Mrs Mason could have survived," the coroner said.

In conclusion, the coroner said the failings were: "a matter of misjudgement by the professionals rather than specific intention to leave a sick woman without assistance."

She delivered a narrative verdict that: "On the balance of probabilities, her death, at the time, was preventable if earlier hospital medical intervention and treatment had been sought and given."

After the inquest, Mrs Mason's son, Christopher, said: "We put our mother into care with people we thought we could trust. They let us down completely." He said the family were paying between "£2,000 and £3,000 a month" for her care. Daughter Elaine Smith said Mrs Mason, who was born and bred in Leicester and lived in Belgrave, was "very lively and enjoyed life" before she broke her hip and had to be admitted to Firlands.

Prime Life Limited, which runs Firlands, declined to comment.



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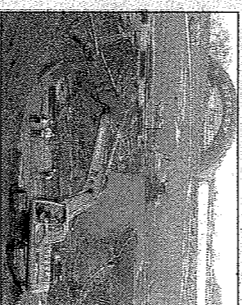
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