



HORKESLEY PARK HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION CENTRE.

COL/09/090231

The Colne-Stour Countryside Association strongly objects to the planning application to create what amounts to a Theme Park and substantial Retail Centre in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This Association has over 600 members and 23 affiliated councils. Its remit includes safeguarding the countryside against inappropriate development in the upper Stour Valley, extending east as far as Little Horkesley.

In summary the proposal:

- Contravenes planning policy, including both Government Policy Statements and the Colchester Borough Council's Local Plan.
- Permanently damages the Dedham Vale AONB.
- Has a detrimental effect on local jobs and business.
- Causes serious and unwanted traffic congestion on the A134 and surrounding country lanes.

A key principle of National Planning Policy is to strictly control any new development in open countryside. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are to have **the highest status of protection** (PPS7 para 21). The proposed Theme Park and Retail Centre is clearly a major development for this particular area. It has to be subject to **the most rigorous examination**, (PPS7 para 22). Colchester Borough Council Planning policy is to **protect.... The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty** (Objective 5.4). The Council's duty is to protect the Dedham Vale as a "**peaceful area**" in which [the] **villages lie undisturbed by major development and heavily trafficked roads** (Para 5.7).

"C02. Development in.... the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be subject to special scrutiny. Where such development could have an adverse impact....on the area, it will be acceptable only where an overriding national need for development in that particular location can be demonstrated."

Chairman: Charles Aldous QC, Ravensfield Farm, Bures, Suffolk C08 5DP. Tel: 01787 227881

Hon. Treasurer: Michael Goodbody, The Old Rectory, Wickham St. Paul's, Halstead, Essex CO9 2PJ. Tel: 01787 269250

Patron: George Courtauld, D.L.



There is no such overriding need. The Dedham Vale Management Strategy specifies that the area is for **quiet informal recreation**, emphasising the need for only **quiet informal public access in keeping with maintaining the tranquillity of the valley**.

Planning Policy Statements make it clear that protection of AONBs must take precedence over recreation, with the views of the local community given great weight.

Proposals which contravene the principle of “**sustainable tourism**” must be rejected. This proposal does. If allowed, the AONB will be overwhelmed by tourism (18,000 per week in the summer months!). Local business within the AONB will be seriously affected, as the Retail Statement concedes.

Damage to the Dedham Vale AONB.

The whole site is within or should be considered as if it were within the AONB. Even that part just outside it will have a direct impact on the proposed major development within it; and should therefore under planning law be treated as a single proposal effectively within the AONB.

The Vale is unique, with its spectacular unspoilt farmed landscape, uncongested country lanes and small villages, with their local stores and public houses. As the Council for The Protection of Rural England have established, this area is now one of the very few tranquil areas left in South East England. The Planning Authorities have an obligation to protect it and ensure that it remains as it is, and is not suddenly “swamped” by a theme park, projected to be as large as Woburn Safari Park, with restaurants to seat 787 and a huge, unnecessary, Retail Centre.

Under the proposal the many public footpaths, which currently enable walkers wonderful unrestricted views across the vale, are to be “boxed” in to prevent access to the park without paying. This is not **protecting** or **preserving** the AONB!

There is no **overriding** need for this development. There are already numerous garden centres and farm shops in the vicinity, with regular Farmers Markets being held locally. The local public houses, which need supporting, provide all the meals required. A visit to, for example, Wyevale Garden Centre at Braintree will reveal how extensive this is.

This is in reality an application for a major 46,000 sq ft retail project, using the countryside park as the inducement, and should be treated as such. Seventy-five percent of the overall projected revenue is to come from merchandising, food and drink, with sixty seven percent coming from Merchandise Revenue alone. The Retail Centre is projected to earn £5.65million per year.

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The benefits offered to conservation are limited. For example, there are several others in East Anglia who are already involved in breeding and conserving the Suffolk Punch, and many local farm parks in the region supporting rare breeds.

Detrimental effect on local jobs and business.

The proposal is likely to have a marked adverse effect on local employment. Although the restaurants and retail centre will need staff, many will be part time and low paid, coming in from outside the immediate area. The proposal recognises that more jobs will be lost in the local communities than gained, implicitly because of its detrimental effect on local business within the AONB. Government policy makes it clear that the effect on employment and business within the AONB is a vital factor.

Traffic congestion.

With the projected visitor numbers of 485,000 in the first year, peaking at 77,000 per month in the summer (or 18,000 per week), there will be major traffic problems; not just along the A134, where vehicles will be backing up to turn into or exit the site. Many will use other routes. Those coming from the South West will come across country. There will be an inevitable unacceptable overload of cars and lorries using the quiet narrow country lanes, **which are required to be protected under the AONB designation**. At peak times traffic along the A 134 will be incessant, making it very difficult and dangerous for local drivers to access it from side roads.

The B1068 from Higham to Stoke-by-Nayland and the B1087 from Stoke-by-Nayland to Nayland, both highly scenic and extremely narrow roads, will be choked with traffic. This is likely to be an almost insoluble problem in Nayland where the B1087 slims into a narrow throat before meeting Nayland High St.

Why, one asks, should those living and carrying on business in the AONB and the surrounding area have to suffer this?

The views of those living in the area should be listened to. This is in substance an attempt to obtain planning permission for a merchandising, food and drink centre in an AONB under the umbrella of a heritage and conservation park.

Charles Aldous QC. (Chairman)

9th April 2009.

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