

Traffic fears over heritage park plan

by ALI OXBORROW

"A JUDGMENT of Solomon" is how a council described its decision not to support a controversial application for a countryside heritage park.

Great Horkelesley Parish Council said it had wrestled with the need to support innovation and progress against the very real fears of the village residents.

After several weeks of consultation in debate the parish council has submitted its formal response to the Bunting and Sons application for a £20 million, 117-acre Heritage and Conservation Centre.

The four-page document said that traffic is by far the greatest issue of concern to Horkelesley residents and the council is not prepared to accept the assertions of the traffic assessment presented by the applicants.

Parish council opposes park plan

It reads: "Everyone knows that by reason of rat running from the A134 to the A12, rat running to Holmwood House School and rat running to Littlegarth School the London Road/A134 junction is a nightmare four times a day with continuous traffic passing down what is in effect a single track roadway for much of its length."

It points out that the Boxted Road junction is already under pressure from commercial activities, Ivy Lodge Road already carries heavy goods traffic and there could be major junction alterations if any proposals for development at Tile House Farm are

approved.

The parish council also urges the borough council to ignore the "jealousy and sour grapes" of those who have criticised the Bunting's business activities.

Proposals for the Heritage Park include a garden centre, art gallery, breeding centre for Suffolk Punch horses, wildlife areas and a restaurant.

It is estimated it could attract an average of 1,925 visitors per day.

The parish council's report concludes that while the parish council has a policy committed to progress, employment and regeneration, it believes the application to be "doomed to failure."

Village clerk Sean Groom writes: "Great Horkelesley Parish Council has, with no great spirit of enthusiasm, resolved to accept that it cannot support the application."

Resolving instead to support North Essex MP Bernard Jenkin's calls for a public inquiry.



Save us from 'theme park'

FARMERS are calling for the Essex countryside to be saved from the threat of a "theme park".

A letter signed by 15 farms surrounding the area where Bunting and Sons has applied to build a £20 million heritage centre has been sent to Colchester Council.

The farmers are concerned the rural landscape will be spoiled by the development and that the traffic generated will cause gridlock on the roads, causing problems during time critical planting and harvesting months.

Peter Rix, of Lodge Farm in Boxted, said of the application: "The word unhappy is an understatement. We have no antipathy towards the Bunting family, but the principle is wrong."

He said that while many of the

roads surrounding the area are double track most of the way there are single track points.

"The roads capacity to move traffic is only as good as the poorest link," he said. "The traffic is bad now, with that development it would be chaos."

According to estimates submitted with the plans, if the park were given the go-ahead, there would be an average of 1,925 visitors every day.

Traffic assessments handed to the council by Bunting and Sons claims the development would have an "insignificant" effect on surrounding roads.

Stephen Bunting, a partner in the firm, said: "I think that people do not understand the extent of the environmental impact assessment that has been undertaken by national specialists to look at these matters."

He said the development would be a boost to the rural economy, preventing stagnation and helping local villages thrive.

But the farmers say the reverse is true and the development would in fact harm several successful small businesses in the area.

Mr Rix added: "The countryside is known for being beautiful, it's already a tourist attraction. We can't see the need for it to be replaced and packaged like this."

The letter was signed by JE Copsey and Son, Tom Dobell, Hugh Thorogood, George Storey, Humphrey and Hannah Taylor, Tim Knighton, D Bradshaw, GF Bates, Richard Sills, Gill and Hugh Gray, David and Georgina Lewis, Chris Chamley, Michael Bates and Sara and Robert Erith.