

Heritage centre plan under fire in protest

ROADSHOW: Action group shows its feelings about proposal

By James Hore

A CAMPAIGN group opposed to plans for a rural heritage centre on the Essex/Suffolk border yesterday carried out a protest at an event designed to promote the attraction.

Bunting and Sons want to open the Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre on the family's former tomato nurseries in Great Horkesley.

The proposed development includes a Suffolk Punch breeding centre, a large country park, art gallery, catering outlets and heritage exhibitions.

A roadshow designed to give people the opportunity to view and give feedback on the scheme, which would be set within 117 acres of farm and parkland, was held at Colchester's Town Hall yesterday.

But the Stour Valley Action Group, which claims the park is little more than a retail development, gathered outside the Town Hall with placards.

Fred Grosch, of the group, said: "Just last week they were saying 760,000 people a year would have to visit to make it viable, but that figure is now down to 440,000.

"The whole thing stinks. The problem with it is everything that they are proposing already exists in the area - amazing garden centres, marvellous old pubs and Suffolk Punches still being used at Stoke by Nayland.

"Five years ago the proposal was for a John Constable Centre, but that was dropped because of national outrage and he has looked around and thought it will be the Suffolk Punches this time."

But Kate Bunting said the figure for the projected number of visitors had been revised since the last application to reflect the changes that had been made to the plans, and denied the alteration was made recently.

She said the public exhibition had



been a very positive experience, and encouraged more people to attend it today at Great Horkesley village hall and when it returns to the Town Hall tomorrow.

She said: "Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre will be an asset for the community, an amenity for local people and a draw for visitors giving open access to the countryside and creating hundreds of jobs.

"We have to recognise that our beautiful countryside is shaped by agriculture and land use. But economic conditions change, and farming has changed too.

"We can now dispose of acres of ugly glasshouses, and through a sensitive modernisation that takes full account of our past, reinvigorate the farming of this part of the Stour valley in a uniquely creative way that

makes sense both economically and environmentally.

"Horkesley Park will preserve, conserve and celebrate our countryside heritage."

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MAKING A POINT: Stour Valley Action Group protesting against the proposed development of the Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre

Photo: ANDREW PARTRIDGE