



AMBITIOUS PLANS: Kate Bunting at the Great Horkesley site

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Photograph: SARAH LUCY BROWN

Bid for new heritage park is resurrected

SUFFOLK/ESSEX BORDER: Battle lines drawn again

By James Hore

AN AMBITIOUS scheme to open a £20million heritage and conservation centre on the border of Essex and Suffolk could be open by 2011, it was claimed last night.

The EADT can reveal today that a planning application for the high-profile Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre has been submitted to Colchester Borough Council.

The centre, known as "Horkesley Park", is designed to be a "celebration of the English countryside" with themes of agriculture, food, art and conservation and hopes to attract nearly 500,000 visitors every year.

Bunting and Sons, the company behind the 117-acre plan, has a 23,000-signature petition which it claims demonstrates "overwhelming" support.

However, there is opposition and last night the Stour Valley Action Group, set up to fight earlier attempts to create the park, said its concerns about the impact extra traffic on the surrounding roads in the surrounding area remained.

A garden centre, which angered opponents of the previous application, remains a part of the new scheme, although it is not as large.

More than £6million has been spent on the project already and the company claims there will be "no significant adverse effects".

Buntings have said the park will provide work for 226 members of staff, equivalent to 155 full-time posts, with 45 jobs created indirectly, in the local area.

Speaking in the 73-page submission,



PROPOSAL: The Chantry Fine Art Gallery reached on foot or by omnibus drawn by Suffolk Punches

seen by the EADT, Stephen Bunting, partner with Bunting and Sons, pledged Horkesley Park was a "unique opportunity" and would help the Colchester area to be a "premier venue" for cultural and sustainable tourism.

He said: "It promises to be a unique and vibrant place very much 'alive' and in touch with the modern world, but where our heritage can be seen, enjoyed and conserved for future generations."

The scheme's key aims include:

- Creating a sustainable tourist attraction dedicated to East Anglia's agricultural and cultural heritage.
- Relieving some of the "harmful" pressures on other tourist attractions at Dedham, East Bergholt and Flatford.
- Creating a deeper appreciation of the life and times of the famous painter John Constable.
- And safeguarding the future of the Suffolk Punch.

Horkesley Park would be built on the "Nursery Site", close to the A134 Sudbury to Colchester road, and is currently largely unused glasshouses.

Buntings have said they will improve the A134 and widen the London Road, which provides access to the site, and is

currently very narrow in places. Alongside the main building there will be a Suffolk Punch breeding centre and show gardens along with hundreds of car parking spaces.

Within the main building attractions include "the life and times of John Constable experience", "a farming yesterday exhibit" and a restoration and reconstruction workshop where barges, known as Stour Lighters, will be worked on along with other items of historical interest.

Last night, Andora Carver, of the Stour Valley Action Group, said members would be looking at the application in the coming days before making its views public. She said: "If it is the same or similar to before our concerns will relate to the volume of traffic, visitor numbers and any retail element on the site."

Fellow campaigner Georgina Harding said: "We really want to say that we have a team of local residents and experts committed to the issue and will get together as soon as possible to look at the plans in detail and give a considered view on them."

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