

# Heritage centre plan objections submitted

**£20MILLION PROPOSAL:** Opposition group details its reasons

By James Hore

A CAMPAIGN group fighting to stop a £20million heritage park on the border of Essex and Suffolk going ahead has submitted its formal objection to the scheme.

The Stour Valley Action Group, known as SVAG, was set up to fight the proposed Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre.

Local family company Bunting and Sons want to transform disused green houses at Great Horkesley, near Nayland, into a tourist attraction, including a John Constable experience, and have hailed the project as a "celebration of the English countryside".

Nearly 500,000 people are predicted to visit every year, helping to create 270 jobs.

The company has urged people to look at the plans and make their own mind up, accusing demonstrators of twisting the facts.

Colchester Borough Council will vote on the plans later this year and SVAG has now formally submitted

its objections to Horkesley Park. The protest group employed its own independent consultants to help prepare their submission document.

SVAG has said the application should be rejected, claiming:

■ More than 75% of revenues predicted would come from retail activities, so the application is therefore a retail development and should be treated as such in the assessment of conformance with planning law.

■ Bunting and Sons has failed to demonstrate any overriding need for the development, with all the heritage and conservation elements "readily available" elsewhere within the region.

■ The application is a "thinly disguised" attempt to get planning permission for the buildings and infrastructure for a shopping village using the disguise of a visitor attraction.

■ The local road infrastructure is not sufficient to cope with the predicted influx of visitors.

A spokeswoman said: "In forming our opinions we have taken note of a number of other weighty

objections to the proposal made by the following bodies and individuals, all of whom have particular knowledge of the areas of heritage and conservation in which Buntings claim Horkesley Park would be involved: The National Trust, the Joint Advisory Committee to the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley AONB, The Colne-



We have refined and improved the proposals

Stephen Bunting

Stour Society, The Dedham Vale Society, Gainsborough's House, and Dr Ronald Blythe.

"These informed opinions support our belief that the development would irreparably damage the landscape and the tourist destinations of Constable Country, and that the Buntings proposal shows neither intention nor capability of mounting exhibits of genuine cultural value.

"Our conclusion is that the application is defective on so many grounds that it should be withdrawn and abandoned by Bunting and Sons before any more public resources are wasted on its evaluation."

But Stephen Bunting, partner with the company, told the EADT this month: "SVAG has misrepresented the Horkesley Park scheme and they have caused scaremongering.

"Horkesley Park will be an asset to the community - it will be an amenity for local people and a draw for tourists and provide 270 jobs net.

"We have refined and improved the proposals and that has been carefully done over a long period of time and we have listened to people and adjusted things.

"It has been professionally assessed and these assessments are not something that we have dreamt up - they are the ones that Colchester Borough Council wanted."

james.hore@eadt.co.uk