

# Heritage site turned down

**GREAT HORKESLEY:** Councillors reject £25m plan

By Amie Keeley

**CONTROVERSIAL** plans for a £25million heritage site were last night rejected by Colchester Borough Council.

In all, 11 councillors voted against the proposed Horkesley Park development in the heart of the north Essex countryside, while only one voted in favour.

The proposed site, which sits on the boundary of the protected Dedham Vale area of outstanding natural beauty, would have included a country park of more than 100 acres, an art gallery and craft studios.

Bunting & Sons, the company behind the scheme,

argued the centre would attract 485,000 visitors a year creating hundreds of jobs.

But the development sparked fierce opposition from countryside campaigners and local residents.

Hundreds of people, both in support and against the plan, packed out Colchester Town Hall to see the final outcome.

The company suffered a major set-back in the lead up to the meeting when planning officers recommended the scheme be turned down.

In a document planners said that Horkesley Park was in conflict with a number of regional and national policies to "conserve and enhance the countryside".

In a last-ditch attempt to convince the council it

should go ahead, the company issued a 140-page report with responses to objections to the bid arguing that Horkesley Park would be an asset for the region and an important draw for tourism, providing education about the countryside.

At the meeting, Kate Bunting said: "The proposals would greatly benefit the local economy with all funding coming from private investment and not straining the public purse."

However, Will Pavry, chairman of Stour Valley Action Group, said: "Horkesley Park must be assessed as a retail development. It is a shopping centre masquerading as a heritage centre."

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