

New plans for major heritage attraction

FOURTH TRY: Consultation process

By Roddy Ashworth

A £15,000 3D model is to form part of an exhibition ahead of new plans being submitted for a controversial countryside tourist attraction.

The 1.4metre-square topographical model represents the current proposals for the Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre which, if approved, would be built on former tomato nurseries owned by north-east Essex firm Bunting and Sons.

It depicts land about 1.1 miles in area around the proposed development and has been made to a scale of approximately 1:1250.

Previous plans submitted by the company for the Great Horkesley site caused deep splits in the local community and provoked a raft of objections and technical queries from both residents and organisations.

Many were worried about the visual impact the centre would have on the surrounding countryside, especially the nearby Stour Valley, which is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

These concerns led to the last proposals being withdrawn last year to allow experts to address the matters raised and alter the scheme accordingly.

It is now anticipated that a revised planning application will be formally lodged with Colchester Borough Council in the summer.

Before doing so, however, landowner Stephen Bunting is to launch a wide public consultation exercise to give people the opportunity to make their opinions known

and identify any further issues that might need to be considered.

The scheme includes plans for a fine art gallery, a Suffolk Punch horse breeding centre, a farm barn, restored Georgian gardens incorporating a Chinese garden, a specialist garden centre, design and craft studios and a rustic adventure playground.

There would also be restoration workshops, education centres, catering and parking facilities as well as a 66-acre country park including woodlands and lakes.

Mr Bunting said yesterday that technical consultants and specialists involved with the scheme will be available to answer questions from the public in Colchester Town Hall on May 10 and 12, and in Great Horkesley Village Hall on May 11.

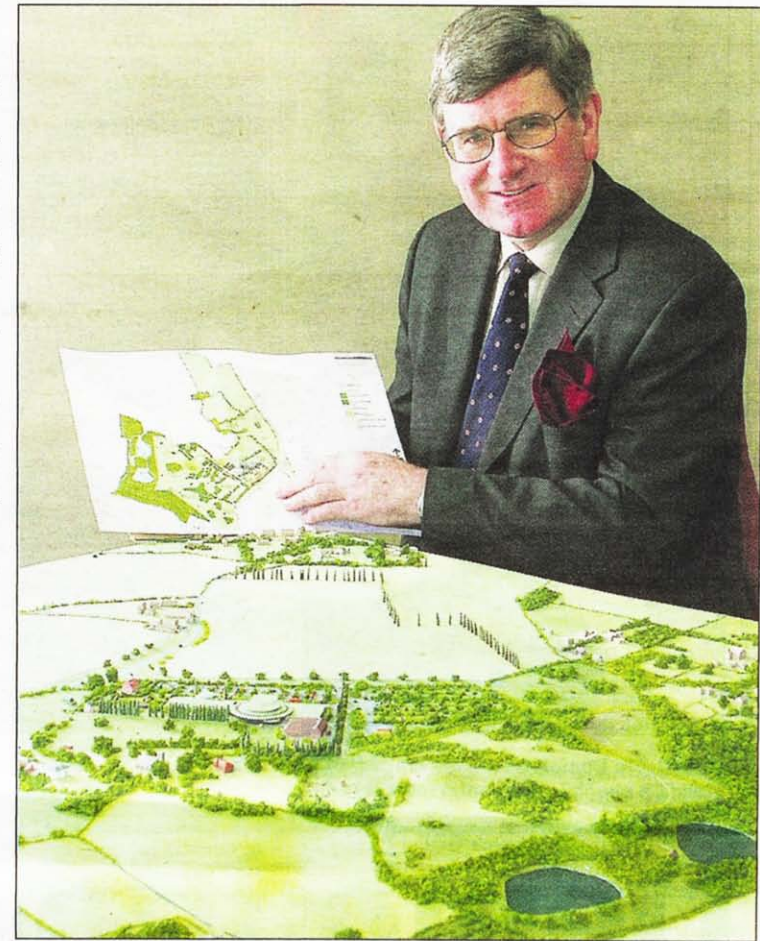
Various information boards about the plans will be available for perusal as well as the new model, he added.

Between May 14 and May 19 there will also be an exhibition on the site of the proposed development – including a tour of the land it would be created in – and in coming months an “exhibition roadshow” will also tour various wards of the Colchester borough so people from further afield can look at details of the scheme.

“Depending on how much needs to be done after the consultation and how complex it is, we would like to get the application in as soon as we can in the summer,” Mr Bunting said.

“If planning permission is given in 2007, we would plan to open in the spring of 2010,” he added.

However, Will Pavry, of the Stour Valley Action Group, said he believed plans for the centre still relied more heavily on the retail



REVAMP: Stephen Bunting with the model of the proposed Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre

Photograph: CONTRIBUTED

elements of the scheme than they did the heritage proposals.

“We can’t comment in detail on the application until it is in, because, as always with these things, the devil is in the detail,” he said.

“But from our point of view it will still have the same adverse

impacts in terms of volume of traffic and the AONB as it did before.

“This is the fourth application in six years, and we suspect that in terms of noise, traffic and light pollution this will be just as unpalatable as it was before.”

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