

# Battle lines drawn

**TOURIST ATTRACTION:** Opponents aim to 'save valley'

By James Hore

PROTESTERS opposed to a major tourist attraction on the Essex/Suffolk border have revealed their final campaign will be fought with the message "Saving the Stour Valley".

More than 100 people attended a meeting at Little Horkesley Village Hall to prepare a new protest operation ahead of a decision on the Horkesley Park planning application.

Bunting and Sons want to transform disused greenhouses at Great Horkesley into a tourist attraction, including a John Constable experience. Nearly 500,000 people are predicted to visit every year – helping to create 270 jobs – but the proposals have divided opinion.

Supporters say the extra jobs and the knock-on effect would boost other businesses in the area. But opponents say the scheme would ruin the countryside and create traffic chaos.

Colchester Borough Council's planning officers are studying the proposals but no date has yet been set for the meeting at which a vote on planning permission will be taken.



The Little Horkesley meeting heard from Stour Valley Action Group chairman Will Pavry who spoke about recent developments. Calls were made for "as many people as possible to turn up" and be a visible presence at the borough council meeting.

Stephen Bunting, of Bunting and Sons, has accused the group of misrepresenting the scheme and "scare-mongering."

He said: "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."

A council spokeswoman said: "The planning application is still being considered and no date has been set for the planning committee."

Because of the size of the application, it was unclear at this stage how long it would before it would reach committee stage for the vote.

**BATTLE PLAN:** Will Pavry and Alison Shaw, opponents of the Horkesley Park tourist attraction proposals. The Stour Valley Action Group has unveiled its battle cry for the fight against the scheme

Photo: ALEX FAIRFULL

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