

Concerns over tourist scheme

ATTRACTION: Retail elements under attack

By Annie Davidson

AN ACTION group has voiced concerns over plans for a countryside tourist attraction close to a designated conservation area.

The proposals for the Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre will be submitted to Colchester Borough Council in the summer after a public consultation has been held.

The application is for land which used to be a tomato nursery and is close to the Stour Valley – a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Now the Stour Valley Action Group has voiced concern about the plans and claimed retail elements would be a “primary rather than ancillary” part of the development.

The scheme also 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 be restoration workshops, education centres, catering and parking facilities as well as a 66-acre country

park including woodlands and lakes.

Action group chairman Will Pavry said yesterday that until the detailed plans were submitted to the council it was difficult to comment fully on the scheme.

But he said: “The plans talk about an ancillary garden centre and restaurant facilities, but we actually believe the retail elements will be primary to the whole viability of the project.

“There should not be a retail development adjacent to an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. That is our real concern and that is why we are protesting.

“We don’t believe this application will be significantly different to prior submissions which we were also against.”

Previous plans submitted by Bunting and Sons for the Great Horkesley site caused controversy in the local community and provoked a raft of objections and technical queries from residents and organisations.

The concerns led to the proposals being withdrawn last year to allow experts to address the matters raised and alter the scheme accordingly.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

mally lodged with Colchester Borough Council in the summer. Before that, landowner Stephen Bunting is to launch a consultation exercise to give people the opportunity to make their opinions known and identify any further issues that might need to be considered.

Technical consultants and specialists will be available to answer questions in Colchester Town Hall on May 10 and 12, and in Great Horkesley Village Hall on May 11. Between May 14 and 19 there will also be an exhibition on the site of the proposed development – including a tour of the land – and in coming months an “exhibition roadshow” will tour Colchester.

Mr Bunting said last night: “It is important to stress that the plans have not been released yet and we are inviting the general public to come to the public consultation which lasts three days.

“We will have technical people in attendance to provide information and advice. People can tell us what they think so we can refine and modify the plans which we have already done before in little ways and in bigger ways. Then all the feedback can be considered before we produce the final plans.”

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