

**HORKESLEY PARK**

# Buntings: 'New will be an asset

New plans reduce heritage centre by a third and retail space

Ryan Jennings

FRESH plans have been unveiled for the creation of a countryside centre at Horkesley Park.

Last year, a proposal by landowners Bunting and Sons to create a heritage centre and visitor attraction at its 100-acre site led to a storm of protest.

The plans were eventually turned down by Colchester Council.

Now Bunting and Sons has revealed its new proposals for the site.

The new plans do not include any new buildings in the area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB), and former proposals for an underground building, a specialist garden centre, a lecture theatre and a farm barn have all been removed.

Instead of having one large building, the fresh plans allow for a complex of buildings outside the AONB.

The new additions include a nursery and gardens, an indoor display ring with additional animal areas and a Field to Fork scheme, which will allow guests to sample food, which has been grown on the land.

There are also plans to build a dairy on site.

The fresh plans have also dramatically reduced the size of the buildings - by about 30 per cent - in comparison with the original proposals, while the scheme's retail space has been cut by 80 per cent.

Bunting and Sons' original plans had allowed for 485,000 tourists, but the revised forecast still plans for



**Planner's view:** An artist's impression of the view from entrance to the park towards Horkesley Square.

316,000 a year. The firm also hopes to create about 150 jobs initially.

Kate Bunting, partner at Bunting and Sons, said: "Many of the concerns relating to the Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre focused around perceptions of scale and mass, quantity of retail and buildings in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

"We have been very mindful of those matters and, in consideration

of them, have revised our proposals. "We believe that the changes address the concerns."

Hector Bunting, a partner of the firm, added: "Horkesley Park will be an asset for the community, an amenity for local people and a draw for tourists, giving open access to the countryside, benefiting biodiversity and habitats, and providing a large number of jobs."

There is no target date for the new

plans to be submitted to Colchester Council.

When they are submitted, Bunting and Sons plans to put together a draft Section 106 agreement, which would commit the firm to providing community and sustainability features.

■ The public consultation, at the Women's Institute Hall, Great Horkesley, continues today, from 3pm to 9pm.

ryan.jennings@nqe.com

**HORKESLEY PARK**



New bid: Kate Hector and Stephen Bunting. 02112

centre to area' by 80 per cent following campaigners' concerns

## Fresh bid revives three-year saga

THE LAST plans to develop Horkesley Park were submitted in February 2009.

In May last year, Colchester Council refused planning permission, after two years of consulting with environmental, transport and ecological experts.

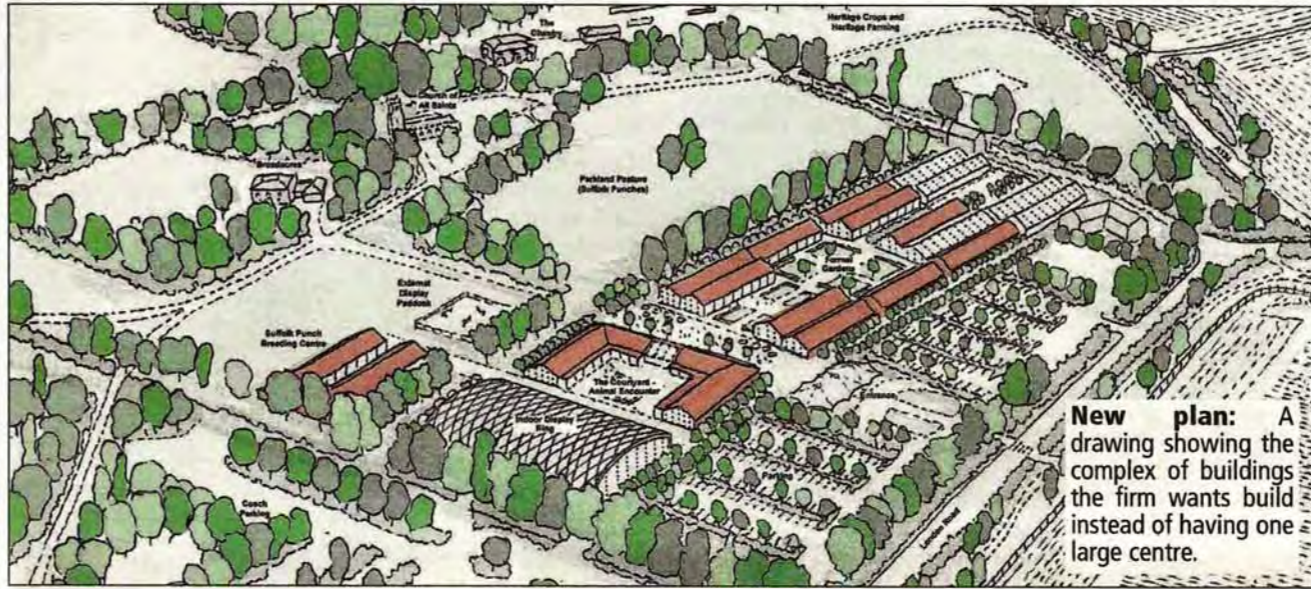
The main grievances were with the size and scale of the development, especially the underground garden centre.

Some 5,513 letters of support for the initial plans were received, while there were 1,285 letters of objection.

Bunting and Sons had claimed the centre would become a sustainable tourism attraction, which would attract 485,000 visitors a year and bring 220 jobs to Colchester's economy.

But the proposal ran contrary to a number of national and local planning policies and opponents of the scheme claimed it would destroy the peace and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale.

Will Pavry, a spokesman for the objectors to the firm's plans, said: "We believe that it is actually very surprising that they have put in a fifth application, with the others having been so firmly rejected each time around, some of which without even going to council."



**New plan:** A drawing showing the complex of buildings the firm wants build instead of having one large centre.

## Olympic architect brings new ideas

THE fresh plans have been drawn up by architect Sir Michael Hopkins, who is new to the team.

Hopkins Architects' previous projects include the Olympic Velodrome, in Stratford, and the Apex, in Bury St Edmunds.

Stephen Bunting, senior partner of Bunting and Sons, said: "We are delighted and honoured Sir

Michael Hopkins is working with us and has redesigned the scheme to take into full account the comments and feedback made by Colchester Borough Council and others about the previous planning application, which was refused last May. "His ideas and designs are both innovative and inspiring. He has brought a

fresh approach to making Horkesley Park a celebration of the English Countryside." He added: "Unlike the previous proposal, which provided for all of the existing glasshouses, industrial building and other structures on our already developed nursery site to be demolished and replaced by a major build, Sir Michael has retained in the new

design some of the glasshouses and adopting the 'grain' of them created a complex of a range of buildings, interspersed with open space, gardens and courtyards, to be very sympathetic to the landscape context. "I truly believe that having Hopkins-designed buildings in the borough will be a coup for Colchester."



**Flashback:** As part of a Stour Valley Action Group walk against the Horkesley park development, Jonathan Minter and Chas Bazeley carry the coffin.