

HORKESLEY PARK

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Protesters: Conservation centre is a 'Trojan horse'

Group condemns fifth proposal

Wendy Brading

OPPOSITION remains steadfast to proposals for a heritage and conservation centre in the Dedham Vale.

More than 100 members of the Stour Valley Action Group (SVAG) attended a meeting to discuss the latest and fifth application from established family firm Bunting and Sons.

The fresh plans predict 316,250 tourists will go to the Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park each year, with 150 jobs being created.

The proposals, a scaled-down version of the project rejected by Colchester Council last year, aim to transform the redundant glass-house nursery site into a country park, Suffolk Punch breeding centre, art gallery and visitor centre.

It does not include any new building in the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but members of the lobby group said they still found the scheme unacceptable.

The group's chairman,

Will Pavry said among the main reasons were the potential destruction of the peace and tranquillity of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the unacceptable increase in traffic, particularly on the minor roads.

Mr Pavry also described the centre as a Trojan Horse, allowing retail into the protected area.

He added: "There is no need for any of the major elements of Horkesley Park.

"All the elements are available elsewhere in East Anglia, at other attractions or, in the case of the open countryside, freely available for all in the Stour Valley."

Mr Pavry also questioned the predicted visitor numbers, estimating they were likely to be closer to 150,000, and he challenged the centre's financial viability.

He said it also fell foul of planning policies as set out in Colchester's borough plan.

Other groups have also registered their objection to the scheme, including the Dedham Vale Society, the Colne Stour Countryside Association, Nayland with

IN THE POSTBAG

IN 1992, an entrepreneurial family firm had "a vision and confidence beyond normal" - to create the House of Bruar (HofB). In 1995, Scottish/Victorian Baronial style buildings were built in beautiful countryside. Cairngorms National Park and Perthshire boast about this retail experience. There is employment for 250 people. The economic benefits are local and far-reaching. Sales in the year to January 2011 reached £18.9million. The EU "Innovative Small & Medium-sized Enterprises' Product and Services in Natural Areas -

for 'destructive' scheme Campaign branded 'jaundiced'

Good Practice Guide" recognises nature conservation is "not a major matter" at HofB, but hails it as "an extraordinary business at an extraordinary location."

In North Essex, another entrepreneurial family company has a vision and confidence beyond normal, too - to create a conservation/nature-led venue. The Cairngorms NP is proud to have 11 acres of 100 per cent retail buildings and car parking in it. The only concession to nature is allowing pedestrian access to the Atholl Estate-owned Falls of Bruar.

Yes, Dedham Vale is different to the Cairngorms. but not superior to it. Why does one area recognise vision. but another doesn't?

**Mrs H A Johnson
Capel Road, Colchester**

CONSERVATION and Heritage are two words omitted from the Buntings' latest application for Horkesley Park.

We are then left with retail and "A Celebration of the English Countryside". We are all familiar with the arguments on traffic, destroying the peace and tranquillity of the AONB, a development away from the designated area for building outside Colchester, but look at it from the view point of a visitor.

A family of four could pay more than £49, based on average quoted ticket prices of £12.41.

They find a cafe, a shop, some Suffolk horses, which they could see in at least 12 other places in East Anglia, along with some displays about the River Stour (the real thing is less than half

a mile away), and a walk in the country park. If they feel like some "culture", there is always the Chantry Art Gallery with a display including, presumably, John Constable copies.

Then it is time to go home. Would they ever want to go there again?

Visitors will not come twice to an artificial recreation of the English countryside, with the real thing on the doorstep.

One of the reasons the scheme was refused in 2011 was because Colchester Planning Committee "was not convinced that the attraction would sustain 485,000 visitors in the long term".

Surely, with the latest estimate of 316,250, it is even less likely to succeed. The only realistic long-term

use for the site is to return it to agriculture or horticulture, which would also create local jobs.

**Andora Carver
Mill House, Nayland**

"FIND out the facts... and then express your views." So says a leaflet distributed through Stour valley villages by Bunting and Sons.

The first paragraph describes the projected visitor centre at Horkesley Park as "a vibrant and exciting ticketed visitor attraction set within a beautiful country park created out of a private estate".

But, as anyone who drives by on the A134 will know, the site is hardly a "private estate", but an expanse of derelict greenhouses with farmland attached.

If that's not true, then how can we believe the statement that follows? It says that "studies completed by independent professionally qualified consultants confirm Horkesley Park will be beneficial across the board". But are these consultants not paid by Buntings?

It says that "Horkesley Park will not ... cause traffic problems; adversely affect footpaths; damage businesses; ruin the countryside... This is claimed by those spreading misinformation and scaremongering."

It is surely not scaremongering to point out some misleading description here?

**Georgina Harding
Old Hall Farm
Little Horkesley**

which the vast majority of people just do not share.

"We believe SVAG has a completely false impression of what Horkesley Park will be like and is going to stick to that come what may."

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 country-

side, benefiting bio-diversity and habitats and providing a large number of jobs.

"Far-reaching professional studies and assessments have been undertaken, which confirm the Stour Val-

ley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park will be beneficial across the board with no significant adverse effects."

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Flashback: Stour Valley Action Group members walk out in protest against the Horkesley Park. Inset, chairman Will Pavry. C044783-002