

# Traffic questions hold up heritage park plans

A MAJOR project looks set to be delayed – because of a lack of information.

The planning application for Horkesley Park Conservation and Heritage Centre includes 10,000 pages of supporting documents.

However, the Highways Agency, a statutory consultee on planning applications, has said the bid cannot be approved until it has received more information about the traffic implications of the scheme.

And it said the instruction remains in force until November 7.

The company behind the application Bunting and Sons predict the tourist attraction will get 485,000 visitors a year.

Its proposals include improving part of the A134 and the provision of car parks and Hopper buses.

However, the Stour Valley Action

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Group, which is opposing the plans, claims the village roads will not be able to cope with the traffic generated.

In its comments to Colchester Council, the Highways Agency said there was “insufficient information” available to the Secretary of State for Transport to determine the effect on the A12.

It also complained Bunting and Sons’ consultants RPS had used traffic surveys undertaken in 2005.

The Department for Transport guidance on transport assessments states that “assessment should include recent counts, normally surveyed within the last three years”.

The agency also notes no discussions have yet been held with bus operators, although talks are due to

be held over the potential for enhancing transport accessibility.

Criticism of the traffic situation has also come from Suffolk County Council.

The environment and transport service delivery has called for the plans to be refused. It states: “Our preliminary findings are that the proposed development would cause an unacceptable significant increase in traffic flows on the B1068 and B1087.

“These increased traffic flows will also cause a likely increase in accidents on these roads and at the A12/B1068 and the A12/B1070 junctions.

“The accident statistics are already at a high level.”

Kate Bunting, a partner of Bunting and Sons, says: “We are aware of the response from the Highways Agency and the request for further information.

“It is not unusual for statutory consultees to raise questions and ask for further detail on certain matters that particularly interest them, in order to ensure the thoroughness of their reports.

“This request is being dealt with as part of the due process.”

Opinion on the £25 million project has been divided with the National Trust, Natural England, CPRE Essex and the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Joint Advisory Committee all against the scheme.

Those backing it include the East of England Development Agency, the Essex Chambers of Commerce and the Suffolk Horse Society.

If granted, the centre would be based on 117 acres of land off London Road, Great Horkesley, and would include new buildings on the site of redundant greenhouses, an art gallery, show gardens and nurseries.