

Experts to advise on heritage centre plan

Traffic impact assessed

A LONG-AWAITED traffic report on the impact of the Horkesley Park development on the area's road network has been completed – although there may still be more work to do.

Bunting and Sons submitted 10,000 pages of information relating to its application to build a heritage centre.

However, questions were raised by the Highways Agency last May and another report was

requested.

This report, which runs to more than 300 pages, has now been submitted to the Highways Agency.

Kate Bunting, of Bunting and Sons, said: "Additional information was requested and this has now been submitted to Colchester Council and to various other groups.

"This will now form part of the usual process. It will be examined and the parties will come back to us if they have any more questions."

CONSULTANTS have been appointed to advise on the controversial Horkesley Park heritage centre.

Leading planning experts Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners have been taken on by Colchester Council to examine the application.

Bunting and Sons wants to develop Horkesley Park heritage and conservation centre on 117 acres of land off London Road, Great Horkesley, of which 101 acres would be a country park.

The project includes new buildings on the site of redundant greenhouses, an art gallery, show gardens and nurseries.

The scheme, earmarked for an area of outstanding natural beauty in the Dedham Vale, has generated a storm of reac-

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tion – both for and against.

More than 31,000 representations have been submitted to Colchester Council, including a petition of 22,839 signatures collected by Bunting and Sons before the application was lodged.

Among those opposing the £25 million plan are the Stour Valley Action Group, the National Trust, Natural England, CPRE Essex and the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Joint Advisory Committee.

Neighbouring parish councils have also expressed their opposition, including those representing Great Horkesley, Little Horkesley, Boxted, Dedham, Nayland with Wissington and Stoke-by-Nayland.

The scheme is estimated to

attract 485,000 visitors a year.

Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners have been brought in to assess whether the forecast is realistic.

The application goes against Colchester Council's strategic core plan and policy on trying to keep retail developments near the town centre.

Vincent Pearce, planning services manager for the council, said: "We have asked the consultants to look at the nature and content of the application and advise us on whether it really is a nationally important attraction.

"Part of the applicant's case is that they see it as such a major attraction to which different policies would apply.

"Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners are experienced planning consultants who can give us an idea of whether they feel the package reflects a regional,

national and internationally important attraction.

"The applicant says it does and conforms to the regional policy of developing tourism.

"We want to know whether, in reality, it will prove to be an attraction of this kind."

Another element being investigated by the consultants is the importance of the retail aspect to the project.

Mr Pearce said: "They will look at the application with a view to seeing if the retail element is ancillary to the proposal for a heritage centre and a centre for Suffolk Punches, or whether the retail element is as big a component as the other parts."

Mr Pearce said he could not give a date for when the application was due to come before Colchester Council.

He added: "There is quite a bit of talking to do yet."

Support for scheme disputed by action group

A MEETING is to be held by opponents to the Horkesley Park scheme.

The Stour Valley Action Group is staging a meeting on Thursday at 7pm, in Little Horkesley village hall, to prepare for the

forthcoming council decision.

Group chairman Will Pavry said protesters had serious concerns about representations made to the council.

He claimed the

submissions from Bunting and Sons misrepresented the support for the development and he disputed there was 22 to 1 backing for the application.

Mr Pavry said: "The fact remains that if the

development were to go ahead against all planning considerations, it would have an unacceptably adverse impact on the peace and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale area of outstanding natural beauty."