

# Heritage centre proposals 'to be heard in weeks'

THE great Horkesley Park debate is due to be decided within a matter of weeks.

Colchester Council's principal planning officer John Davies is looking at more than 10,000 responses to a bid for a heritage and conservation centre in Great Horkesley.

The issue has divided the community, with supporters claiming it will be an asset to the area and generate jobs, while objectors insist it will destroy a prized area of outstanding natural beauty.

The public consultation period has now ended and Mr Davies said it was hoped the application would be considered by the planning committee by June 10 – the 16-week deadline from when the application was submitted.

Mr Davies said all submissions would be considered, including a 22,839 signature petition which the applicants Bunting and Sons collected before the application was submitted, but which the company

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says it relates specifically to.

Mr Davies said: "We will refer to it in the manner it has been produced along with the other responses.

"It was not collected in relation to this application, but it will not be discounted. It will be included in the report."

But he added: "At the end of the day, the main consideration will be the policy issues – local policies along with the core strategy and the national guidance – these are going to be crucial in determining the application.

"We will, obviously, have regard to what people are saying. We will refer to the submissions, both for and against the application, and will bring members' attention to them."

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Bunting and Sons' application for the centre, off the A134 London Road, Great Horkesley, is the fourth application in eight years.

If agreed this time, it would be based on 117 acres of land, of which 101 acres would be the setting for a country park.

The project includes new buildings on the site of redundant tomato greenhouses while a fine art gallery would be accommodated in the Georgian building The Chantry.

Bunting and Sons hopes the project will create 155 jobs and attract 485,000 visitors a year.

But protesters, including the Stour Valley Action Group and the Dedham Vale Society, are opposed to the plans.

They dispute the number of new jobs and said the village roads would not be able to cope with the volume of traffic generated.

The protesters also said it would endanger the peace and tranquility of the Dedham Vale and felt the retail aspect of Horkesley Park should not be allowed in the protected area.