

£20m heritage centre unveiled

EXCLUSIVE

by Wendy Brading
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NEW plans were today unveiled for a £20 million heritage and conservation centre in the Dedham Vale.

The plans for the Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre detail the new proposals by Bunting and Sons.

Earlier plans were submitted in 2005, but were withdrawn to allow further studies to be completed.

Now, following a series of roadshows and public consultations, the new plans were this week submitted to Colchester Council.

The centre, off the A134 London Road, Great Horkesley, would be based on 117 acres of land, of which 101 acres would be the setting for a country park.

If the plans are approved, new buildings – including the main building and Suffolk Punch breeding centre – would be built on the site of redundant tomato greenhouses.

A nature watch building, The Warren,

Scheme pledges 155 new jobs

would be created underground and would feature educational resources, including hidden cameras to observe wildlife.

A fine art gallery would be accommodated in the Georgian building The Chantry with outbuildings used for creative design and craft studios.

Plans also include widening the A134 and creating a pedestrian and cycle path alongside.

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

If the scheme wins planning permission, Bunting and Sons aim to open Horkesley Park by 2011 – in time for the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Kate Bunting, a partner in Bunting and Sons, said: "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 and providing hundreds of jobs. It will be a big thing for Colchester."

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Eye to the future – Hector Bunting studies the plans for Horkesley Park. (Pedzy-21)

A place to celebrate the English countryside

But residents fear the impact of heritage and conservation centre

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A NEW heritage and conservation centre would be a "celebration of the English countryside", it has been claimed.

Plans were unveiled for the new centre in Great Horkesley which, Bunting and Sons say, would be a new venue for tourism and recreation, and a cultural centre devoted to agricultural and artistic traditions.

However, concerns have been raised about the impact of traffic on the surrounding villages.

Colchester councillor for the area Christopher Arnold said: "With previous applications, the villagers' greatest fear has been the impact of traffic on the country lanes and the already overloaded A134.

"With councillor Nigel Chapman, I will be pressing to make sure the most thorough analysis is undertaken of this application."

An environmental impact assessment has been carried out on the scheme, and a report states the built development can be absorbed without causing harm to the Dedham Vale landscape.

Any new buildings – apart from the underground Warren – would be confined to one corner of the site outside the area of outstanding natural beauty.

The main elements of the proposed centre include:

- A Rotunda entrance leading to a Stour Valley walkway, featuring exhibitions, displays and interpretations of the landscape
- The Life and Times of John Constable Experience, offering a presentation of life in the artist's day
- An exhibition of Colchester engineering history from the 19th and 20th century
- An exhibition space chronicling farming through the ages
- A 250-seat lecture theatre
- Parking for more than 220 cars and 28 coaches
- A purpose-built workshop in which craftsmen will restore and reconstruct Stour Lighters barges and heritage

farm equipment

- A food experience described as a cross between an exhibition, farmers' market and a food show
- A variety of gardens and wildlife features, including five acres of gardens around the Chantry, where Georgian and walled gardens would be restored and a Chinese garden created
- The creation of an art gallery in The Chantry to display paintings by John Constable and other artists of the region
- A Suffolk punch breeding centre
- A farm barn which is mainly underground and covered by pasture, featuring domesticated farm animals and rare breeds
- The Hollow rustic play

area

- The underground Warren to provide an entrance into the western part of the country park, housing displays and wildlife observation cameras;
 - 101 acres of country park featuring parkland pastures and wildflower meadows, with areas designated for falconry, fishing lakes, cricket bat willow plantations and an aerial walkway through the trees.
- Kate Bunting said the new plans had been drawn up after listening to the issues raised during public consultation, including concerns about sustainability.
- She added: "We are extremely grateful for all the suggestions, feedback and support we have received

over the years.

"We have taken it all into account, and this has helped to enable the proposals and designs for Horkesley Park to evolve and be enhanced.

"We believe that they now truly reflect what the majority would like to see created, and this makes us feel that the long period we have allowed for ongoing open public engagement and consultation has been time well spent."

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Big plans – Kate and Hector Bunting surveying the area in which the new heritage and conservation centre is planned. Above, artist's impressions of the centre.

Picture: STEVE ARGENT (PEDZY-60)