

# Comment & Letters

## Who are advisers working for here?

I UNDERSTAND the council's planning officers have decided to recommend the planning committee approves the controversial Horkesley Park application, despite its numerous conflicts with planning policies.

This invites some searching questions:

The application has been progressed under a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA), which assumes a common interest and requires a defined "shared vision" between the applicant and the council.

Yet the PPA includes no shared vision, and how could it when the application conflicts with local planning policies?

The planning service commissioned three independent reviews of the application, all of which suggested refusal. The council's own planning policy unit also suggested refusal.

Yet, in the face of this overwhelming advice, it declared that it "would be minded to support the application if evidence of regional status could be produced" and commissioned an additional report to find this.

Was the planning service unaware that the revocation of regional strategies had just been

announced, rendering this report irrelevant?

The report did, indeed, find some evidence of regional status, but still found the application economically unsustainable, so the planning service had to commission yet another report to find evidence of commercial viability.

This new report was revealed four days after public consultation on the application had closed and confirmed that the consultants were now working "in collaboration" with the applicant, all pretence of independence having been dropped.

The planning service's handling of applications must be seen to be impartial, it must be guided by public interest, as defined by the Adopted Development Plan, and its recommendation to the planning committee must not appear to be prejudicial.

So, why is it so difficult to avoid the conclusion that it has instructed its consultants, at public expense, to collaborate with the applicant in order to reverse their previous independent conclusions?

Is there another "shared vision" that we, and the Planning Committee, have not been told about?

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## It's a question of council's conduct

COLCHESTER Borough Council's planning officers were due to publish their recommendation on the Horkesley Park application on February 14, but delayed it in order to take additional legal advice on what they call "interesting procedural points", raised in a document prepared by a QC acting for the Stour Valley Action Group, submitted to them on February 10 and published on the SVAG website.

These procedural points are surely more than "interesting"?

They question the secrecy with which this application has been conducted by the planning office, the unusual access which has been permitted to the applicant and, most crucially, the officers' premature statement of their intention to support the application even before the completion of consultation either within their own planning department or with the public, as required by the democratic process.

This is no longer just a question of whether Horkesley Park will have Constables or not, or whether it would ever be viable, or even what it would do to the Dedham Vale.

It is a question of how our council's officers conduct themselves.

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