

# Comment & Letters

## It's a Trojan Horse not Suffolk Punch

COUNCILLOR Young's reply (January 18) to my letter the previous week, is somewhat disingenuous.

The Britton McGrath Supplementary Report he alludes to does not say that Horkesley Park is economically supportable, merely that it might become of regional significance if it included a five-acre Chinese garden with walls, halls and pavilions within the Dedham Vale AONB, in direct contradiction to the Buntings' planning application, stating that "no new buildings will be constructed within the AONB".

As planning portfolio holder, Councillor Young, of all people, should know that such a fundamental reversal would require a fresh planning application.

Whoever is behind the council's push to recommend this mercurial application appears not to know the difference between a Suffolk Punch and a Trojan Horse.

Britton McGrath, hired by the council to advise them, calculated that Horkesley Park as currently proposed would make a loss of almost £1.8million per annum.

Nobody in their right mind would invest £25million in a business likely to lose such sums. The logical assumption, therefore, is that the applicants could have other plans for exploiting the site once the council has granted change of use from agricultural to D2 (cinemas, music halls, bingo etc).

**Chas Bazeley  
Colchester**

## Vague notions to overrule the rules?

CLLR Tim Young's letter (County Standard, January 18) says there exists a not widely known or understood framework of "wider deliberations" which can be more important than the application of planning rules and regulations in determining a recommendation of planning officers to approve the Stour Valley Visitor Centre/Horkesley Park.

Omitting specific detail as to what these "deliberations" may be, other than that they are "complex", they must be particularly compelling in this case, as we know from the council's own reports that Horkesley Park does not comply with national or local planning regulations, is not viable, is in the wrong location, and is not sustainable - amongst many other things.

That there is a Wider Deliberations Framework (perhaps we should call it the "WDF") may come as a surprise to anyone who has made a planning application, or who may wish to do so.

Most have believed there is a set of planning regulations to which planning applications should comply, rather than a vague set of principles which may be cast aside if political expediency (or wherever the WDF derives its authority from) dictates otherwise.

It will be a complete travesty if there is a recommendation for approval of this scheme by officers working on it, in the face of the clear and overwhelming evidence within the regulations against it - not only from the key independent reports commissioned by the council at our expense, but from the council's own planning policy unit.

We should be able to expect better than this - but it may give hope to all those pie in the sky developments we all may wish to make.

I'm planning a "Roman Heritage and Conservation Extravaganza with Ben-Hur Arena and Chariot Experience" in my back garden. I'm confident now this could get the thumbs-up from Colchester Planning Officers - due to the (up until now) not widely-known workings of the WDF.

**Russell Whitehair  
London Road, Great Horkesley**

## Final round of our fight for the vale

AFTER 12 years of slugging out the pros and cons of the Horkesley Park development, we are now entering the final round of the battle to save the Dedham Vale AONB from an unwanted and non-viable minor, local - not regional - "tourist attraction", but which would have a major adverse impact on the surrounding roads, villages and quality of life of local people.

We are told by Cllr Young (County Standard, January 18) that the planners will be making a decision on the scheme by "balancing the three key strands of sustainable development - environmental, economic and social".

However, the adverse environmental impact on the AONB, which is now more strongly protected by the latest NPPF, is not in doubt.

The economic case is very weak, especially as a result of one of the council's consultants, Britton McGrath, concluding that visitor numbers would be less than half those predicted and the project would make a loss of almost £1.8million each year.

It has been suggested that Horkesley Park will be a place to visit by the people who live in Colchester's new homes with small gardens. With tickets costing about £50 per family of four this is unlikely to be on a regular basis.

The social impact would also be a disaster for the area. From the Britton McGrath report it can be reliably inferred that the promised jobs will be no more than 50 per cent of those estimated by the applicant - nearer to 50 than the 106.4 claimed by Buntings.

Those who support the scheme because it will bring employment (James Tanner, County Standard letters, January 11) would be much better off getting a job with a business whose track record is well established, for example Iceland, who are taking on 30 workers in their third Colchester store, rather than risking employment with a business which is said to be non-viable by consultants paid for by Colchester rate payers.

**Andora Carver  
Mill House, Nayland**

**Editor's note:** We have received a lot of letters regarding Horkesley Park, many of which make points encapsulated by the letters printed. We apologise for not being able to print every one.