

Estimated  
465,000 visitors a year



■ All change? – The land where the proposed Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre would be sited. (PLKUQ-72)

# '77,632 would visit new centre in August alone'

## Report shows huge projected visitor numbers

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THOUSANDS of visitors a day could flock to a new tourist attraction proposed for the Dedham Vale.

Figures compiled by Bunting and Sons for the proposed Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre estimate it would get 465,000 visitors a year.

That is more than four times as many visitors as Colchester Castle, which has 100,000 visitors a year, and twice the numbers going to Sutton Hoo, in Suffolk.

A report which accompanies the application to Colchester Council also predicts 77,632 visitors would go to the centre during the peak summer month of August – an average of 3,505 a day.

The study also reveals a total of £25 million would be spent on setting up the new centre – including £15m on the main building, £900,000 on refurbishing the Chantry, which is to house the art gallery, and £1.5m on a new Suffolk Punch breeding centre.

Almost £1m is allocated to widening the road.

In return, the centre would generate an annual income of £13.4m – a projected pre-tax profit of £1.2m a year.

Ticket prices for the country park would be £10.95 for adults and £7.45 for children with a family ticket for two adults and two children costing £29.95.

For that, visitors would be able to see the Life and Times of John Constable experience, the farming yesteryear exhibition, the restoration workshop, food experience, Suffolk Punch Breeding Centre, farm barn, the Warren nature dis-



■ Popular attraction – Colchester Castle. (55133-9)

plays viewing area, the Hollow play area and the country park and wildflower meadows.

A ticket for the gardens – including the Georgian garden at the Chantry, the walled garden, wildflower meadow, Chinese garden and garden centre – would cost £6.45 for adults with children getting in free.

The cost of an adult ticket for the whole site is expected to be about £14.95.

Entry to the Chantry art gallery would be free.

The 169-page tourism feasibility study states prices would be set to reflect comparative rates in the eastern region.

Kate Bunting, a partner at Bunting and Sons, said: "There has to be a balance between the commercial reality of the centre and sensitively working to get the right number of visitors.

"I think the centre will provide an excellent opportunity to bring people to Colchester and to give local people facilities which were

previously not offered to them.

"I think the centre will make a positive contribution to the area of outstanding natural beauty."

But the plan has been opposed by the Dedham Vale Society and the Stour Valley Action Group, which believe the development would destroy the tranquility of the area.

Charles Clover, chairman of the Dedham Vale Society, questioned whether the visitors figures were accurate – and if the centre would be viable.

"There are major elements of this which don't stack up," he said.

"We must continue to assess if these predicted visitor numbers are too high and if this is really viable.

"We must also ask if the retail element is against planning law.

"And if it all goes wrong, will it become a development which does irreparable damage to both Colchester and the countryside?"

■ Battle of Horkesley Park – special report on centre pages