

# Stour Valley Visitor Centre wins backing of planners

## Council officers in favour of controversial Horkesley Park bid

**Wendy Brading**

A BID to build a visitor centre in the north Essex countryside will be supported by Colchester Council planning officers, it has been revealed.

The Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park has been heralded by owners, the Bunting family, as a celebration of the English countryside.

It has drawn fierce criticism from opponents who say it will damage the Dedham Vale.

The application, the fifth version of the scheme in the past decade, is due to be decided by Colchester Council on February 14.



**Delighted:** Kate and Hector Bunting. C068669-09

Vincent Pearce, development services manager, said: "Based on our full professional analysis of the merits of the proposal, the planning service's balanced recommendation will be favourable".

Kate Bunting, a partner at Bunting and Sons, said she was delighted the council officers are supporting our planning application.

She said: "The planning officers have thoroughly reviewed the application and have appreciated the benefits Horkesley Park will deliver."

Hector Bunting, fellow partner, 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, benefiting bio-diversity and habitats, and providing a large number of jobs."

The site spans more than 117 acres, including a 101-

acre country park. Features include sculpture trails, reinstated parkland grazed by Suffolk Punches, an indoor display ring, demonstration nursery and gardens, wildflower meadows and a fine art gallery in the Chantry to display works by John Constable and other artists.

The plans are a scaled-down version of the previous application, which was refused by the council last year.

Under the new plans, expected visitor numbers have been reduced from 485,000 to 316,000 and there will be no new buildings in the area of outstanding natural beauty.

Will Pavry, chairman of

Stour Valley Action Group, said the group would do everything in its power to encourage councillors to reject the recommendation.

He said: "We are totally against this. We don't believe the officers have taken into account the most recent changes in planning policy."

Mr Pavry said the group was also unhappy information on tourist figures and financial viability had not been made public.

He pointed out a report commissioned by the council made it clear the application was not considered viable as proposed.

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