



■ OUT – Nigel Chapman, Peter Chillingworth, Wyn Foster, Chris Hall and Nigel Offen.

Horkesley Park: the north-south divide on council

ONE of the most controversial developments in Colchester could be decided without any councillors from the area voting on it.

Plans for the £25 million Horkesley Park heritage and conservation centre are due to be decided later this year.

The proposals have split the town – villagers living nearby believe the centre would destroy the area of outstanding natural beauty, but other Colchester residents believe it would provide a much-needed jobs boost to the town.

However, following Colchester Council's committee reshuffle in May, the planning committee does not now have a single representative from the northern wards near Great Horkesley.

No councillors from Great Tey, Fordham and Stour, Dedham and Langham, West Bergholt and Eight Ash Green are on the planning committee.

The areas are all represented by Conservative councillors.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, four of the 12 councillors on the committee represent the Wivenhoe area.

Veteran Conservative councillors Nigel Chapman and Peter Chillingworth – who represent Fordham and Stour and Great Tey – were on the previous planning committee along with Wyn Foster who represents Prettygate.

But they were replaced by Andrew Ellis, Jackie Maclean and Ann Quarrie, who represent Birch and Winstree, Copford and West Stanway and Wivenhoe Quay.

The Liberal Democrats Chris Hall and Nigel Offen, who represent Castle and Shrub End, were replaced by New Town councillor Theresa Higgins and Jon Manning

by Claire Owen
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from Wivenhoe Cross.

Lesley Watson, of Vinesse Road, Little Horkesley, said the matter had come to her attention due to her concerns over Horkesley Park.

"It is astonishing," she said. "It seems to me that residents from the north of Colchester have been disenfranchised as far as planning issues are concerned.

"It is very odd that a planning committee doesn't have a wide geographical spread.

"I'm not saying I think it's illegal or against the rules, I just don't think it's fair."

She added that her concerns stretch further than the Horkesley Park planning row.

'It seems to me that residents from the north of Colchester have been disenfranchised as far as planning issues are concerned'

"Even if that was off the table, I would still think it was inappropriate," she said.

However, Conservative group leader Kevin Bentley said the make-up of the planning committee was non-party political.

He said: "Although each group selects its members, all decisions made by this committee are done on planning issues and governed by planning law.

"While I appreciate that local knowledge is always a benefit, planning members judge each and every application on its merits only."

He added: "Members can substitute for other members at any time providing their have undertaken the correct and proper training."

Mr Bentley added geography was not a factor when deciding which of

his councillors would sit on the planning committee.

"The criteria was based on those with planning experience, those wishing to be nominated and those who wished to gain experience of planning," he said.

"It is common practice for all members of our group to move into different jobs at the beginning of the municipal year so as to gain experience of other parts of the council, this year was no different."

He went on: "A councillor from south Colchester should consider an application equally as well as a councillor from north, east or west Colchester and I have complete faith in all members of the planning committee to do just this."

Mr Chillingworth said he had been happy to step down from the planning committee.

He said: "I'd been on it for some time. We do change about a lot to give other people experience in each department."

Mr Chapman agreed that it was beneficial for councillors to gain experience in all areas.

He added: "I'd been on the planning committee in my first year on the council in 1982 and then not again until last year.

"Planning is not one of my specialities, so I wasn't desperately concerned about staying on it."

Will Pavry, chairman of the Stour Valley Action Group which is vehemently opposed to the Horkesley Park development, said his own concerns had been appeased by the fact Christopher Arnold, who represents Fordham and Stour, would be substituted on to the committee when the controversial application is heard.

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■ IN – Andrew Ellis, Jackie Maclean, Ann Quarrie, Theresa Higgins and Jon Manning.