

Buntings to appeal after £25m heritage centre bid thrown out



Determined: Ben, Kate, Stephen, Tom, Hector and Daniel Bunting at the site of the proposed heritage centre.

Picture: Steve Argent CO43634-14



We will not take No for an answer

Officers deny bias

COUNCILLOR Richard Martin was warned after he criticised planning officers in the debate.

Mr Martin, who represents Tiptree, was the only councillor to vote for the plans and said the project would bring in new jobs.

He said during the meeting: "The report is too long and confusing. I think it is a negative sort of document. To my mind, someone started with a view it was going to be turned down. They have written it accordingly."

Planning committee chairman Ray Gamble said: "You have had to be warned before about the things you have said about council officers, so I would be careful."

Planning officer Vincent Pearce said: "I can assure you, over the past 2½ years, we have sought to undertake and to dig into the application to find all the benefits and the negatives. I would refute it was written with any bias and any idea we knew what the outcome would be."

Lauren Oldershaw

BEATEN - but unbowed.

Defiant Stephen Bunting has said he will continue to press on with his plans for a heritage centre in the heart of the countryside, even though it has been overwhelmingly rejected by Colchester Council.

More than 200 people, both for and against the plans for Horkesley Park, packed into the Moot Hall, in Colchester, to hear the debate.

After almost four hours, members of the council's planning committee agreed to go with officers' recommendations to turn down the proposals, deciding the benefits to the region would be far outweighed by the damage to the area of outstanding natural beauty.

Protesters, who have fought the plans for almost a decade, celebrated the decision.

However, Mr Bunting said the project was not dead yet, adding Bunting and Sons would appeal.

The £25million heritage centre was set to feature a country park, art gallery, show gardens and food and horticultural centre.

It was expected to attract 485,000 visitors a year, but concerns were raised about the effect of the traffic generated on the country roads.

Dr John Constable, a descendant of the world-renowned artist whose life

and times would have been remembered in the project, said: "I still return to the Stour Valley, go fishing on the river, and enjoy the outstanding beauty."

"I now bring my own son and I want him to be able to bring his son, and this will not be possible if this centre goes ahead."

The planning committee heard the main building of the conservation centre would be as long as almost half of Colchester High Street.

Planning officer Alistair Day said, from the front, it would be as wide as the length from the top of High Street at its junction with Head Street, down to where Marks and Spencer is, and would stretch back to where Culver Square is.

Councillors Peter Chillingworth and Steve Ford said they could see both sides of the argument.

However, Mr Chillingworth argued the project was not sustainable and Mr Ford said he did not think the roads would cope.

A total of 25 speakers had their say for and against, including representatives from groups, including the Colne-Stour Association, the Suffolk Preservation Society and members of the Bunting family.

Councillors voted 11 to one to turn down the scheme.

After the meeting, Mr Bunting, who has spent £1.5million on preparing the

planning application, said: "The outcome of the planning committee meeting was entirely expected."

"In view of the opinion of Queen's Counsel, we believe the planning officer's report and its approach to policy to be fundamentally flawed."

"The report gave the committee members incorrect guidance on how they should determine the application but, nevertheless, they attributed great weight to it and, predictably, went with the planning officer's recommendation to refuse the application."

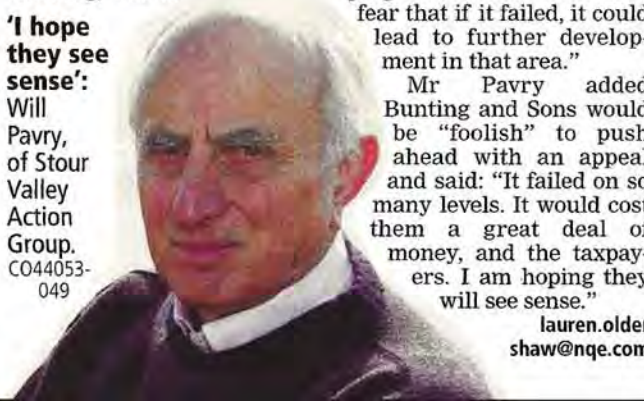
"We are fully committed to the Horkesley Park scheme and the benefits it will deliver, and we shall continue with the proposals until they come to fruition."

"Once the official confirmation of the decision is received from the council, we will start moving forward with the appeal process."

His daughter, Kate Bunting, who is

'I hope they see sense':

Will Pavry, of Stour Valley Action Group. CO44053-049



also a partner of the firm, said: "The Horkesley Park scheme has been rigorously tested by independent specialist consultants, who have concluded that, across the board, it will deliver a raft of benefits, with no significant adverse effects."

But Will Pavry, chairman of the Stour Valley Action Group, was delighted at the victory. The group has consistently objected to the proposals, which it said would destroy the tranquility of a treasured part of countryside.

He said: "We are obviously very pleased that the councillors found in line with the officer's recommendation and rejected it."

"We listened carefully to what the councillors had to say, and one of their chief concerns was loss of peace and tranquillity, and that is something we had been saying all along."

"It was quite clear, it is effectively a plan for a shopping centre and there is a fear that if it failed, it could lead to further development in that area."

Mr Pavry added Bunting and Sons would be "foolish" to push ahead with an appeal and said: "It failed on so many levels. It would cost them a great deal of money, and the taxpayers. I am hoping they will see sense."

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