

Public pack debate over heritage centre

By **LAUREN OLDERSHAW**

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MORE than 200 people packed into a meeting to discuss controversial plans for a £25million heritage centre.

Members of Colchester Council's planning committee were last night debating the Horkesley Park scheme, which would see a country park, art gallery, show gardens and food and horticultural centre created.

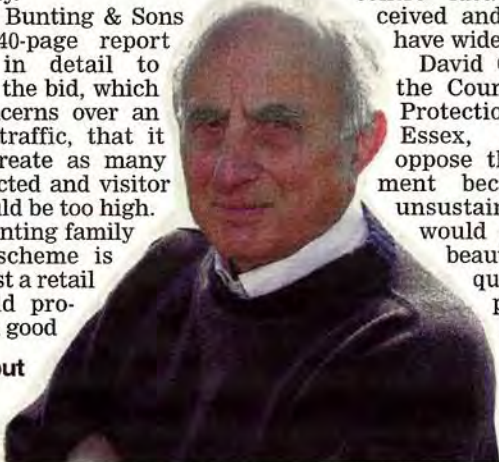
Due to the scale and importance of the scheme, the normal rules on the number of people speaking were suspended to allow more than one from each side to have their say.

The council's planning officers had recommended the bid be turned down because its potential benefits would be far outweighed by the damage caused to the countryside which includes part of the Dedham Vale area of outstanding natural beauty.

Applicants Bunting & Sons lodged a 140-page report responding in detail to objections to the bid, which included concerns over an increase in traffic, that it would not create as many jobs as predicted and visitor numbers would be too high.

But the Bunting family claims the scheme is more than just a retail centre, would provide jobs, is a good

■ **Nothing, but a shopping centre**
- Will Pavry



Over 200 listen to applicants defend scheme

balance of conservation and commercial elements and will not give rise to any real traffic problems.

Earlier this month more than 200 campaigners gathered at the site of the development in protest against the scheme.

Will Pavry, of Stour Valley Action Group, which opposes the bid, told the meeting in the Moot Hall: "It would be a shopping centre, masquerading as a heritage centre in a quite inappropriate location."

Dr John Constable, a descendant of the artist whose work often featured the area, said: "I find myself unable to support the scheme. In my opinion the Constable centre idea is ill-conceived and would not have wider support."

David Green, from the Council For the Protection of Rural Essex, said: "We oppose this development because it is unsustainable and would damage the beauty and tranquillity of this part of Essex."

Speaking in favour of the bid, Stephen Bunting, of



■ **Substantiating their bid - Daniel and Stephen Bunting, look over the disused green houses** *Picture: STEVE ARGENT* CO43634_05

Bunting & Sons, said: "Everything that has been submitted has been fully substantiated.

"This contrasts to the objectors, who can state whatever they like knowing they do not have to substantiate it.

"It is sad they put so much effort

“ **We oppose this development because it is unsustainable and would damage the beauty and tranquillity and of this part of Essex**

into objecting. If it is not to go ahead, would they provide any benefits to the rural area instead?"

John Powers, 19, an apprentice with Bunting & Sons, spoke of the opportunities he had enjoyed from working at the business.

He said: "One day I was claiming jobseekers' allowance, the next I was working with amazing animals.

"This scheme would give the opportunities I have had to others."

Councillors only began having their say at 9pm and the meeting was still ongoing as the Gazette went to press.

See gazette-news.co.uk for more details.