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Principal Planning Officer  
Colchester Borough Council  
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CO3 3WG

**By email only**

25 January 2013

Dear Ms Jackson,

**120965 Change of use and development of land to form 'The Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park'.**

The Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and Stour Valley Project have seen the four documents listed below placed on Colchester Borough Council's website:

Independent Project Review: BrittonMcGrathAssociates  
Horkesley Park Planning Appraisal: Nathaniel Lichfield and partners  
Horkesley Park Planning Application review: Vectos Transport Planning Specialists  
120965: CBC Planning Policy (Revised edition 04/01/2013)

that relate to this development application and wish to make the following observations:

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Joint Advisory Committee stand by their comments made to reflect its Partnership view made at the time of the application in a letter dated 2 Aug 2012.

The proposed development straddles the boundary of the nationally protected Dedham Vale AONB and as such should note the position statement agreed by the Dedham vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership on development applications affecting the setting of the AONB<sup>1</sup>. The primary purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve its natural beauty as laid out in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside (1949) Act to in order to secure their permanent protection against development that would damage their special qualities<sup>2</sup>.

The accolade 'natural beauty' encompasses the abundance and variety of plants and wildlife found in AONBs, together with characteristic rocks and landforms that lend AONBs their scenic beauty and much envied tranquility<sup>3</sup>.

The issue of tranquility is of particular importance in relation to this development proposal given its location, the proposed size and type of operation. In addition the applicant's estimate 82% of the expected visitors would be expected to arrive by car<sup>4</sup> and this would inevitably impact on the AONBs tranquility and therefore natural beauty, as defined above. This reliance on car transport indicates the proposed development is at an unsustainable location.

We welcome the applicant's assertion that the application be assessed on planning policy<sup>5</sup>. We note that the National Planning Policy Statement paragraph 14 notes that at the heart of the framework there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and that for determination of applications this means:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dedhamvalestourvalley.org/assets/planning/Setting-of-Dedham-Vale-AONB.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designations/aonb/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/west\\_midlands/ourwork/finestcountryside.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/west_midlands/ourwork/finestcountryside.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in paragraph 3.1.29 of CBC Planning Policy review of application

<sup>5</sup> Para 2.1 SVVC at HP Response and Answers to CBC Policy Response 16 Nov 2012 Bunting and Sons

*'For decision making this means: approving development proposals that accord to the development plan without delay, (unless material considerations indicate otherwise)'<sup>6</sup>*

In light of the new information contained in the four reports the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project consider this application should not be given consent on three grounds:

1. The development proposal does not comply with policy that is at the heart of the decision making process as outlined above. Where the application varies from planning policy is outlined in Colchester Borough Council's Planning Policy response to the application dated 4 Jan 2013, The Vectos report conclusions<sup>7</sup> and in the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Partnership original response dated 2 August 2012. In brief it does not comply with national and local policy and does not adhere to the AONB management plan.
2. The development proposal is in an unsustainable location and would have an adverse impact upon the nationally protected AONB as suggested by the Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners report in its conclusion in paragraph 6.10 that states: *'The Council will need to consider whether the benefits of the tourist elements of the scheme out-weigh the disbenefits of major development in the open countryside, in particular the impact on the AONB and sustainability and transport impacts'*<sup>8</sup>. The proposals are for a development in the open countryside, including elements in the AONB, which has the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty<sup>9</sup>. The applicant states that 82% of visitors will arrive by car, which would adversely impact upon the AONBs primary purpose and tranquillity.
3. The development proposal is unsustainable development as suggested by the Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners report that concludes in paragraph 6.9 that; *'There is no guarantee that the tourist attractions will be maintained and viable in the longer term'*<sup>10</sup>. The presumption in favour of sustainable development in the National Planning Policy Framework notes the three dimensions of sustainable development as being economic, social and environmental<sup>11</sup>. The conclusion of the executive summary of the BrittonMcGrathAssociates states: *'If one were to apply even the most positive interpretation of our revised estimates to the P+L [Profit and Loss] outlined in the BP [Business Plan] it is quickly apparent that the business as currently proposed is unviable'*.<sup>12</sup>

The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project therefore consider the application fails to convince on policy, environmental and economic grounds and we therefore maintain our objection to the application.

The comments above reflect the Project's Joint Advisory Committee on behalf of its Partnership. Individual organisations within the Partnership may submit their own response reflecting their organisations full remit.

Yours sincerely

*S.Amstutz*

Simon Amstutz  
AONB Manager

For and on behalf of the Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Joint Advisory Committee.

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<sup>6</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 14

<sup>7</sup> Planning Application Review: Vectos, Paragraph 5.2.1

<sup>8</sup> Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners Horkesley Park Planning Appraisal paragraph 6.10 page 27

<sup>9</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 115

<sup>10</sup> Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners Horkesley Park Planning Appraisal paragraph 6.9 page 27

<sup>11</sup> National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 7

<sup>12</sup> Stour Valley Visitor Centre Horkesley Park: Independent Project Review: BrittonMcGrathAssociates Nov 2012, page 6