



Sue Jackson
Principal Planning Officer
Environmental and protective Services
Colchester Borough Council
PO Box 889
Rowan House
Colchester CO3 3WG

February 13th 2013.

Dear Ms Jackson,

The Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park, Application No 120965

Further to our letter and attachments of February 7th 2013, additional information has come to our notice concerning the lack of credibility of the Sykes Leisure Projects (SLP) Tourism Evaluation Report (TER) of May 2012. This report attempts to justify the potential number of visitors for Horkesley Park at 316,250 annually and this figure, together with estimates of income from entrance fees and on-site sales of goods and services, is fundamental to the viability of the attraction. The conclusions of this report have been seriously questioned in the Britton McGrath reports, which give an absolute maximum number of visitors at 150,000 with 130,000 being more probable with the consequent impact on revenues from all sources. They predict an annual loss of £1.8m.

SLP produced a further report dated November 2012 in answer to the Britton McGrath reports.

This second SLP report refers to three " precedents " which they claim support their view that in assessing likely visitor numbers the catchment area to consider is a drive time of up to 2 hours. It is this assumption rather than the industry rule of thumb of 60minutes which is critical to getting to 316,250 visitors per annum which is so crucial to the Horkesley Park application that they forecast.

The first precedent is a report commissioned from Anian Leisure Consultants by the West Country Tourist Board. The first thing to note is that this report was written in 1986 - over 25 years ago. It also looks at trends in the West Country which has a very different tourism profile to that of the East of England. We have spoken to Professor Terry Stevens who was the author of that report. His view as expressed in the attached letter is, inter alia, that:

“the Anian report is irrelevant to the situation that prevails in the context of the Horkesley project in 2012/13”

It should be noted that prior to being contacted by SVAG, Professor Stevens had no knowledge of the Horkesley Park project so his view is completely objective. Professor Stevens is Visiting Professor at several universities and Honorary Professor in Tourism Innovation at Cardiff Metropolitan University. He has published over 300 articles and book chapters on his specialist field. His views need to be taken very seriously.

The second precedent referred to by the Sykes report is Colchester Zoo where they

state that: "(Horkesley Park) is likely to have a catchment area along the lines of Colchester Zoo. This would indicate that the Horkesley Park catchment area will be a 2 hour drive time. It is anticipated that approximately 60% of the Horkesley Park attraction visitors will travel less than one hour in each direction and 40% will travel between one hour and two hours." We have spoken to Mrs Alex Downing, Communications and Development Director at Colchester Zoo. **She advises that they have done no detailed analysis of the drive time of their visitors and that any claim by Sykes in this regard is pure supposition.** She also makes the point that Colchester Zoo has been established for 50 years to get to its current visitor numbers.

The third precedent is a very outdated survey in May 1997 by MEW Research commissioned by the East of England Tourist Board which suggested that a "Constable Country" themed attraction would be capable of attracting visitors from a two hour catchment area. They make no statement as to the percentage of visitors that would be prepared to make this two hour journey and SLP cannot rely on this to justify his 40% claim for visitors coming from between one and two hours.

In summary we have one precedent where the author of the research has given the view that it is irrelevant to any forecasts for HP. A second where any views expressed by SLP are pure supposition and a third which gives no basis for the excessive numbers of visitors claimed by SLP coming from a one to two hour drive time. These latest findings further undermine the credibility of the Horkesley Park visitor number projections and SLP has produced no evidence to support their numbers. On the contrary all independent analysis points to visitor numbers at least half that suggested by SLP leading to a proposal that is not financially viable.

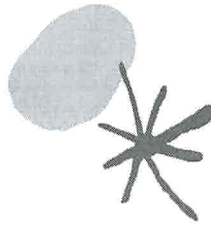
We have said repeatedly that the SLP report is seriously flawed and this has been supported by the conclusions of the Britton McGrath reports. The further evidence given in this letter confirms that position and the SLP report must be set to one side by the Council. Without the justification of the Sykes Leisure Projects report, the whole application is not viable and falls like a pack of cards. It must be rejected by the officers even before coming to the Planning Committee.

We trust you will treat this letter with the seriousness it deserves.

Yours sincerely

W L Pavry
Chairman, Stour Valley Action Group
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MR JONATHAN EDDIS
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7th February 2013.

Dear Mr Eddis

**RE: THE HORKESLEY PARK VISITOR ATTRACTION PROJECT
PLANNING APPLICATION : 120965**

I refer to our recent conversation in respect of this project and to the fact that Sykes Leisure Projects have referenced a report prepared by my Company, Anian Leisure Ltd for the (former) West Country Tourist Board in the 1980's as part of their justification for the business plan they have prepared for the Stour Valley Visitor Centre and related developments for their Client.

It is my opinion that the Anian report they refer to, and the research upon which it was based, is irrelevant to the situation that prevails in the context of the Horkesley project in 2012/2013.

Not only is the West Country report (authored by myself) some 30 years old and, as a result, represents a trading period with a completely different economic, socio-cultural and leisure context; it is also for a predominantly rural region without a dominant urban centre shaping consumer demand.

Over the past thirty years consumer demands have changed significantly, there are significantly more and more sophisticated leisure opportunities competing for the consumers time, budgets and interest and transportation links have improved.

Clearly, there are also many more studies and research documents that would reflect current patterns of demand and supply that would be more relevant to this project than our report from the 1980s.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR TERRY STEVENS