



13th April 2009

SVAG Rally Easter Monday

"Constable Country speaks for itself", read some of the car stickers, and indeed it did. To SAY NO TO HORKESELEY PARK, the by-now-familiar posters, were added other slogans: 'Constable would have HATED it!', "Save the Stour Valley", "Bures against Buntingland". "Dedham Vale is not For Sale", the plain words 'SAY NO' on a tractor's forks, the No message painted in giant letters along the side of an articulated truck, and, most important for the protesters, the simple "SAY NO: Email by Friday"

The Stour Valley Action Group rally brought together people of all ages and types from the length of the valley, students, the elderly, long-time residents and new ones, farmers and hauliers. There were cyclists too, and some 80 protesters with placards on the roadside close to Nayland and by the entrance to the greenhouse site on London Road. It was a chance for anyone and everyone to show their concern. For many this was the first time they had ever demonstrated against anything in their lives. Many came with banners, handmade signs, and balloons, putting an element of carnival into the protest.

The organisers hoped for 80 cars, but an estimated 200 vehicles turned up: small cars, big cars, vintage cars, land rovers, half a dozen tractors, horse boxes, the haulier's lorry, even a 1936 fire engine drawing attention to the fact that in that sort of traffic an emergency vehicle would have a hard time making its way down the A134. Some repeated the circuit between Nayland and Great Horkeley a number of times, others made a briefer appearance.

The demonstration lasted for one hour. It was intended as a demonstration in the truest sense of the word, showing people how things might be. With all that traffic on the road, the route from Nayland to Great Horkeley took 10-15 minutes. That was slow (so much so that the delay was publicised on Essex radio traffic news) but this delay was over a mere couple of miles, for one hour, on one day, ever - or so we hope. If Horkeley Park were to happen, and if it were to get its 485,000 visitors in its first year, the traffic on an Easter Monday could be much heavier than this.

Just do the maths. They envisage 485,000 visitors in the first year. That's over 1300 per day on average, but of course numbers will peak in summer, on weekends and particularly on holiday weekends - possibly rising to around 5000 on a peak day. Say 80 percent arrive by car, and say each car contains an average of 3 people, and that most will arrive between 10.30 and 12.30 am and leave between 4 and 6 pm: this will mean at least 1200 extra cars on the approach roads in two hours in the morning and 1200 extra cars in the afternoon. That's 10 cars per minute, or one every 6 seconds! And that's a conservative estimate.

That's many more cars than in the demonstration. And that could be every sunny holiday, every August weekend, for ever! More than that if, as any business would hope, visitor numbers were to increase in future years!

Morale among SVAG members was high following the protest. A powerful point was made, that even Bunting and Sons must surely read: that a vast number of the people of the valley, of all types and from all communities, oppose their plans and are capable of uniting to fight them.

But the serious work of the campaign against this Planning Application continues. Objection letters continue to pile in: at last counting on 10th April, Colchester Borough Council had logged 713 individual letters of objection to the application, 278 in support. Letters of objection included detailed and strongly argued submissions from The National Trust and The Joint Advisory Committee to the Dedham Vale AONB, also from the Colne-Stour Association and from individuals such as the respected local writer and historian Dr Ronald Blythe. (Full text of these letters can be found on the website under CAMPAIGN WATCH). The final date for submission of letters to CBC is Friday 17 April.

Hundreds of the people of the Stour Valley took the time on Easter Monday to make their feelings known: Save our Jobs, Save our Roads, Save our Villages. Help Save the Stour Valley. Say NO to Horkeley Park! Their views should be listened to.

