



NEWSEFLASH

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HORKESLEY PARK: In Search of Enlightenment

In the past couple of months CBC have received a number of further documents from Buntings elaborating on their proposals. On 2nd March 2011, SVAG wrote to CBC expressing concern at the late submission of new information and making comments on the content of the 'Vision Statements.' ([click to view letter](#)). The documents can be seen on the [CBC website](#). We encourage everyone to view these new materials and form their own view on the merits of what is now said in support of the application.

We have found elements of the 'Vision Statements' to be somewhat puzzling. Are these documents perhaps intended to reassure us that Horkesley Park will be free of the retail aspects that many – including the writers of the Nathaniel Lichfield report – fear will be too prominent? But what then is their rationale?

- The Horticultural Experience and Food Experience are described in the form of an ongoing trade fair: 'part permanent trade show and part market'.
- A seasonally changing array of vendors will rent stands, exhibit and demonstrate to the public, making on-the-spot sales and off-site orders (of which Buntings would take an unspecified percentage).

The presentation could be imagined to appeal to a number of small traders – so long as the rents were not too high, nor Buntings' percentage, and so long as the public came in the estimated numbers. But would they? Who are the visitors?

- *'As Horkesley Park will be an entirely gated and ticketed attraction, it will attract visitors whose main purposes are leisure, entertainment and enlightenment. Visitors will expect to get full value for their ticket with dwell times of over 3 hours forecast. The primary purpose of the visit is a leisure and entertainment experience, not a shopping experience in the conventional sense of the expression.'*
- *'This is much more than a shopping experience', the statement on the Food Experience repeats '- it has the elements of entertainment, enlightenment and engagement' And again, it 'attracts visitors whose main purposes are leisure, entertainment and enlightenment.'*

Enlightenment? Engagement? But this is a commercial enterprise! Does this stated 'Vision' convince?

If it's not a shopping experience, then are the visitors shopping?
If they're not shopping, then are the vendors selling anything?
If the vendors are not selling anything, then why are they there?

The statements also go into some detail on the content of displays. The Horticultural Experience, for example:

- *'Events and demonstrations will vary depending on the season and will include different aspects of gardening from propagating and flower arranging to advice on pruning, feeding, pest control, sustainable principles and suppliers' product promotion, etc.'* Elsewhere there will be displays in areas as varied as 'orchard management, fungi cultivation and floral challenges including flower arranging and exhibition vegetable carving.'

Buntings have high aspirations for the impact of these 'Experiences' when combined with the rest of the complex. Here are two extracts from another of the new documents, the Buntings' response to the Savill Bird and Axon report.

- *'If using one example, the Eden Project is the type of major visitor attraction with which to compare the Horkesley Park offer.'*
- *'The Eden Project in Cornwall has a similar visitor attraction focus to that to which Horkesley Park will aspire.'*

As anyone who has visited the Eden Project will know, it is a highly original and well defined concept housed in stunningly designed buildings, hidden in the countryside in a vast disused quarry. Very different from the Horkesley Park mishmash – all elements of which we believe can be found already existing in the area – sited in open countryside on the crest of one of the most famous and beautiful valleys in England.