



20th April 2009

SVAG submitted its formal response to the Horkesley Park Proposals to Colchester Borough Council on 17th April

There are a number of detailed reasons given why the Horkesley Park proposals are defective but the main conclusions are that:

- The Application is contrary to the whole ethos of government and local planning policy and must be rejected on these grounds alone. Full expert opinion is given concerning this lack of conformance with planning policy at all levels.
- Over 75% of revenues predicted by Bunting and Sons would come from retail activities. The Application is therefore a retail development and must be treated as such in the assessment of conformance with planning law.
- Bunting and Sons have failed to demonstrate that there is any overriding need for the development with nearly all the so called 'heritage and conservation' elements being readily available elsewhere within the region.
- SVAG concludes that the Application is no more than a thinly disguised attempt to get planning permission for the buildings and infrastructure for a shopping village using the disguise of a visitor attraction.
- The visitor numbers forecast in the Application are grossly optimistic compared with similar mature attractions. Expert opinion predicts visitor numbers of between 150,000 and 200,000 per annum as being more likely (compared with the 485,200 in the first year forecast by Bunting and Sons) and even these figures will not be achieved until the Park is mature – after two to three years.
- The expenditure of £27.65 for every man woman and child who visits the Park forecast by Buntings is considered to be grossly optimistic. Comparison with other similar attractions suggests that a figure of £10.00 per head is more realistic.
- The combination of realistic visitor numbers and visitor expenditure shows that the Park is not viable. It would make a loss of £6.0m with the cost base shown by Buntings. SVAG reaches the conclusion that this is clearly not realistic. The cost base would have to be drastically reduced and the number of employees would be much less than the 155FTE forecast by Buntings. Equally, the number of secondary jobs at local or regional level would be severely reduced.
- The job creation numbers given by Buntings cannot be relied on in any way.
- Unless Bunting and Sons have already secured the £24.0 m that they say will be required to build the Heritage Centre, it is inconceivable that they would be able to raise the money in the market with their existing business plan and in the current financial climate. Are they simply seeking to get planning consent using unsustainable visitor numbers and job creation promises with a view to selling the site to others in the future?
- The Application is contrary to national, regional and local policy in respect of traffic issues. The local road infrastructure is not sufficient to cope with the predicted influx of visitors.
- The design of the main building is seriously deficient in respect of fire and safety regulations.
- No carbon footprint has been carried out. Visitor journeys alone would generate an additional 3000 unnecessary tonnes of carbon dioxide per annum.

SVAG employed its own independent consultants to help in the preparation of this document. Their findings are included as appendices to the document. In forming our opinions we have also taken note of a number of other weighty objections to the proposal made by the following bodies and individuals, all of whom have particular knowledge of the areas of heritage and conservation in which Buntings claim Horkesley Park would be involved: The National Trust, the Joint Advisory Committee to the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley AONB, The Colne-Stour Society, The Dedham Vale Society, Gainsborough's House, and Dr Ronald Blythe. These informed opinions support our belief that the development would irreparably damage the landscape and the tourist destinations of Constable Country, and that the Buntings proposal shows neither the intention nor the capability to mount exhibits of genuine cultural value.

(All these letters can be seen on the [CBC website](#) or through links on [SVAG's Campaign Watch](#) web page.)

Our conclusion is that the Application is defective on so many grounds that it should be withdrawn and abandoned by Bunting and Sons before any more public resources are wasted on its evaluation.

Please read for yourselves the full text of the document. See [Horkesley Park Key Issues](#) page