

STOUR VALLEY ACTION GROUP NEWSLETTER

Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre
F/COL/05/1558

Dear Member,

Buntings withdraw again

By now I am sure you will all be aware that Buntings have withdrawn their Application once again on the basis that they want to do further work to improve it and no doubt to deal with some of its inherent deficiencies and to take into account the recently published Core Strategy for Colchester Borough's Local Development Framework (LDF).which looks forward to 2021. They say that they plan to re-submit within twelve months which may take us in to 2007 before we see the revised Application but it could be much earlier.

This withdrawal is a serious climb-down by Buntings bearing in mind that it is the second time they have done this voluntarily and after having been so vocal about the expertise of the national experts they used in the preparation of the Environmental Impact Assessment. One must wonder how such experts have apparently failed to anticipate and answer all the main questions that have been raised during the consultation process.

We have been in touch with the Planning Office in Colchester and are advised that any re-submitted Application will be treated as a new Application and will therefore be subject to the same consultation process as the September 2005 Application and under a new number. They have already written to all objectors advising them of the withdrawal and will presumably advise them of any new Application.

Our advice on the Local Development Framework is that it is in the early stages of consultation and is unlikely to be adopted for at least 18 months and will ultimately be considered by an independent Inspector who will decide its final content. Any such LDF will have to conform to regional planning strategy and reflect national policy guidance with which the Buntings proposal fundamentally conflicts. Until it is adopted, we understand that the guiding document for Colchester will be the March 2004 Borough Plan which specifically shows that the Bunting Application is a 'departure' application and outside its provisions. We will do whatever we can to get involved in the consultation on the LDF.

the fundamental objections we have which include:

- Its fundamental conflict with a range of important planning policies at national, regional and local level.
- Buntings have failed to demonstrate a National need for the development required by planning policy guidelines.
- The retail and restaurant elements of the Development predominate over the so-called 'Heritage' elements of the development. It is a retail development not permitted, in our view, by the Colchester Borough Plan.

- 760,000 people in the first year of operation will terminally destroy the peace and tranquility of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

There is no doubt that the membership of the Stour Valley Action Group has been instrumental in bringing the highly undesirable issues surrounding the current Application to the attention of a very wide public, both locally and nationally, and that we may have been able to make Buntings see the folly of their ways.

Thank you for your excellent support in helping to achieve this outcome. In addition, I would also particularly like to thank the membership of the Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society who have been unstinting in their support throughout.

It is perhaps too much to hope that Buntings will now withdraw entirely and allow those who have a true understanding of the need to protect our precious countryside to get on with their lives without the threat of overt commercial exploitation hanging over them for months or years to come.

We will keep you informed of developments as they occur and we will also keep our web site updated with information as we receive it.

We must remain vigilant if we are to prevail in the longer campaign to preserve our countryside and we will need your help to defeat the plan in the longer term. Please be prepared to write again and continue to lobby your local councillors and anyone else who can influence the outcome. Please let us know if you have any ideas about the campaign and how it has been conducted so far and thank you for your continued support and encouragement.

**Will Pavry
Chairman**

April 10th 2006.

P.S.

We have given a summary below of some of the publicity we have achieved over the last six months and a list of major objectors for your information.

Highlights of the campaign:

Throughout the six months since the current application was submitted, SVAG members and sympathisers have kept the Horkesley Park controversy in public view. There has also been a steady barrage of letters, many of them from SVAG members, in the local press, covering all aspects of the issue. There has also been widespread coverage in the national press and media. In case you didn't get to see it all at the time, here are some highlights:

- Over 1,000 letters of objection received by Colchester Borough Council.
- October 10th: Meeting for members In Nayland Village Hall attended by over 250 people.
- December 16th: letter of objection from 15 local farmers published in local press.
- January 6th: 'Viewpoint' article by Will Pavry in the Essex County Standard stating the main arguments against the Heritage Scheme.
- January 6th: BBC 'Look East ' television item with Will Pavry, Andora Carver and Georgina Lewis.
- January 19th: Tim Yeo article in the Mercury entitled "Attractive, unspoilt, just leave it alone!"
- January 31st: letter of objection from 40 small businesses in the Horkesley and Nayland area.
- January 28th: At the end of January the debate reached the national stage with a piece in The Financial Times. Keith Turner of the National Trust was quoted, " Far from diverting visitors away from the actual historic sites, this proposal could bring well over half a million new visitors a year, which would not only cause huge logistical problems but also destroy the rural tranquility of the area."
- January 29th: Danae Brook published an excellent article in the Mail on Sunday on January 29th entitled 'Why this Constable Theme Park may destroy the very countryside he loved'.
- February 4th: Letters from Christopher McCall QC and Will Pavry in the Financial Times.
- February 4th: Excellent Articles in The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph.
- February 4th: Will Pavry of SVAG appeared head to head with Stephen Bunting in an all too-brief encounter on Radio 4's Today Programme broadcast from Colchester.
- February 17th: Ronald Blythe published an excellent article on the countryside issues in the Church Times.
- February 17th: Private Eye ridiculed the intended inclusion of a classical Chinese garden in this 'celebration of the English countryside'. It described Horkesley Park as "a 100,000 sq ft garden centre with a 1,125-seat cafe in Constable country." It concludes with the comment that "if the 'Cornfield' was rename 'The Rice Paddy' everyone would be happy".
- February 23rd: Ronald Blythe, Vicky Minet and Humphrey Taylor spoke against Horkesley Park on BBC2's The Culture Show. The show concluded by asking the question, "Can the only future of the countryside be as a branded heritage experience?"
- February 26th: The Mail on Sunday came out with an investigation into possible undisclosed financial backers in the project, under the shocking headline "Chinese Invade Constable Country."
- April 3rd: Kate Charlton-Jones and Will Pavry interviewed for Radio 4 'You and Yours'. (Yet to be broadcast)
- April 5th: Will Pavry interview on BBC Essex. Also broadcast on BBC Suffolk.

- April 6th: Country Life published an outspoken leader attacking the proposal: “Should we build ersatz heritage when the real thing is on hand nearby?” It says, “Constable Country retains its beauty and tranquility thanks to sustained earlier battles fought by Raymond Erith, the Dedham Vale Society and the National Trust. The Stour Valley Action Group is fighting for an equally worthy cause.”

Objectors:

Well over 1000 well reasoned letters of objection have been recorded with a much smaller number in support, many of which were very short e-mails. Amongst others, letters of objection have been received from the following organisations:

English Heritage
The National Trust
CPRE Colchester Branch
Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Joint Advisory Committee
Colne Stour Countryside Association
Suffolk Preservation Society
Dedham Vale Society
Babergh District Council
Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society
Great Horkesley Parish Council
Little Horkesley Parish Council
Nayland with Wissington Parish Council
Boxted Parish Council
Assington Parish Council
Higham Parish Council
Hadleigh Town Council
Stoke by Nayland Parish Council
Leavenheath Parish Council
Stratford St Mary Parish Council

None of the neighbouring parish councils have given any measure of support.

Suffolk and Essex Highways departments have both raised serious concerns.

Both Bernard Jenkin, MP for Colchester North and Tim Yeo, MP for South Suffolk have expressed their reservations and wrote to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to request that the Application should be ‘Called In’ to a Public Enquiry.