



Stour Valley Action Group



Summary of new proposal for Horkesley Park:

Dear member,

You will all probably be aware that Bunting and Sons held a consultation exhibition in Great Horkesley on May 10th/11th 2012. Many of you will have attended and for those that were unable to attend we believe details of the new proposals will be posted on the Horkesley Park website. We encourage those that were unable to attend the consultation to take the time to review the details on line to form your own opinion on the impact that this latest scheme will have. Having attended the consultation we believe that the main points of the new Horkesley Park proposal will probably be as summarised below but we need to see the full Application to verify these.

It is interesting that forecast visitor numbers have been subject to much change over the last 11 years. The original 2001 proposal anticipated 800,000 visitors per annum as stated at various meetings. This reduced marginally to 760,000 in the 2005 Application and then further to 483,000 in the 2009 Application. The latest forecast of 316,000 is a yet further reduction. It is something of an achievement for SVAG and other major lobby groups to have had an influence on this better realism in numbers but it brings into question why the latest figures should be any more credible than previous ones. 316,000 is still an unacceptably large number for such a sensitive site.

The key features of the new Horkesley Park proposal appear to be:

Size: 47.4 Hectares, (117.1 acres) total

Visitor numbers anticipated: 316,000 per annum.

Jobs: 150 FTE equivalent jobs to be created. (Essex County Standard article).

Buildings: Many new low-form buildings instead of one large building. They look quite attractive but no detailed designs available. One large 'Indoor display ring' for various demonstrations. Apparently this has a fully insulated roof.

The total foot-print said to be half that of existing buildings. No new buildings will be built in the AONB (Underground Warren has been eliminated) unless there are to be any associated with the Chantry which is in the AONB. We have not seen the details.

Chantry:

Still forms part of the offering as an Art Gallery and it is alleged that they have access to genuine Constables. Outbuildings to be converted to craft studios and part of private gardens to public gardens. We do not yet know whether there will be any new buildings associated with the Chantry.

Country Park:

Change of use requested for 27 hectares of land to form a Country Park with informal recreation and visitor facilities.

Attractions:

These are listed as: Suffolk Punch horse breeding centre, animal encounter, nature watch and field to fork experience, Stour Valley exhibitions and demonstration nursery and gardens.

Catering and retail:

Catering just listed as 'ancillary'. No number of covers given.
Retail is not mentioned in any detail but said to be 80% reduction in retail space over the previous application. No information was given about the anticipated level of retail sales.

Parking:

Parking provided in front of new buildings. Overflow and coach parking in first field to west of main site. This is apparently already being planted in the style of a National Trust parking area according to information given verbally at the Consultation.

Planning advisors:

Planning advisors for this project are Collins and Coward (C&C). C&C are of the view that this is a Regional Development and will not therefore be subject to Colchester Local Development Framework (LDF) which has very specific sites for out-of-town developments (which do not include HP). C&C claim that Regional Policies are still in force in spite of the advent of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) which is said to eliminate this level of planning policy. Edward Gittins Associates still have an unspecified role and were present at the meeting. STATS are said to be their environmental advisors.

Business Plan:

We were advised that the Application will be subject to a Planning Performance Agreement with the Council. This will mean that commercially sensitive information may not be made generally available. Since viability is a key element of consideration for such a project under the NPPF, we may wish to challenge the fact that we do not have access to information on the business plan when we see the actual Planning Application.

What is our view?

Quite apart from any Planning issues, our view is that the impact of 316,000 people per annum on the local area will be very significant in terms of traffic and loss of tranquillity. When we see the detailed plans this may prove to be a major cause for opposition.

No detail was given on the cost of the project, entry fees or income from other sources. We believe that there will have to be major sources of income in addition to entry fees if such a major project is to be commercially viable. This would suggest major retail and catering activity. We will not be able to form a judgement on this until we see the final Application.

In our view the Heritage elements presented at the Consultation are not strong and insufficient to attract the level of visitors anticipated. Again, we await details.

Planning considerations:

We have reviewed this outline consultation proposal against the reasons given for rejection of the previous application and it would still appear to be in conflict with many of these. We need to see the final Application before we can be more definitive on this.

The next step:

As soon as the full Application is available we will publish our considered views to our membership. In the mean time you should send any views you may have on the Consultation to Bunting and Sons, Westwood Park, Colchester CO6 4BS.

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May 2012