



Stour Valley Action Group

www.stourvalleyactiongroup.org.uk

Newsletter



19th January 2013

The Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park 120965

A meeting was held in Little Horkesley Village Hall on January 16th to discuss the current situation regarding Horkesley Park. The level of interest in the meeting showed the level of concern over the current situation. Over 120 people turned out on the coldest night of the year –minus 7C outside!

Kate Charlton-Jones opened the meeting and welcomed everyone and related some of the recent history. She emphasised that the meeting was for opponents to Horkesley Park only.

Will Pavry gave a brief on the current situation. In summary:

- ◆ December 20th . Colchester Borough Council advised their intent to recommend Approval.
- ◆ December 21st . Planning Policy department report published that application was against policy at local, regional and national level (and therefore should be refused).
- ◆ January 3rd . Meeting held with Planning Officers. We insisted on release of Consultant documents. Officers attempted to defend their position on basis regional status given in supplementary Britton McGrath report.
- ◆ January 7th . Britton McGrath, Vectos and Nathaniel Lichfield reports issued on CBC web site in heavily redacted form with applicant's responses.
- ◆ January 8th . Supplementary Planning Policy report issued following removal of Regional policy by Secretary of State. Horkesley Park still contrary to policy at Local and National levels.
- ◆ January 12th . Announcement that representations on newly-released documents could be submitted until January 28th .
- ◆ Announced that the officer's recommendation to Councillors would be released on February 14th .
- ◆ Announced date of Planning Committee on February 28th . To be held in the Charter Hall. Speakers to be allowed 36 minutes on each side. Each speaker to be allowed a maximum of three minutes precisely.

He said that it was very unusual for officers to make their position known before receipt of all reports and representations from the public as they had done by their announcement in December. It was even more unusual for them to recommend approval against the advice of their Planning Policy department. It was clear from the Britton McGrath supplementary report that their decision had been made under threat of appeal by the applicant.

He gave a very brief overview of the three consultant reports.

The Britton McGrath reports deal with viability and tourism. The first report concludes that the scheme is not viable and would lose £1.8m per year. They forecast that it would attract a maximum of 130,000 visitors compared with the 316,250 predicted by Buntings – less than 50%. The Bunting figures are redacted but it is possible to deduce that Britton McGrath are predicting less than half the number of new jobs than those forecast by Buntings. New jobs claimed by Buntings are 106.4 on site which is completely unrealistic.

In the second Britton McGrath report, it records the Buntings threat to the Council that they will go to an appeal if they do not indicate their intention to recommend approval by December 20th. They then review the attractions and conclude that the application might be of regional significance based on further assurances concerning the Chantry Art Gallery, the Chinese Garden and the Suffolk Punches. (The Chantry would apparently have original Constable paintings according to Buntings.) On this basis the Council felt that they could recommend approval. At no stage does Britton McGrath rescind its statement from the first report on viability. They do indicate that visitor numbers could possibly reach 150,000 – still less than half the numbers stated by Buntings.

Britton McGrath issued two subsequent papers showing that penetration rates were over-stated and visitor numbers would be lucky to reach 130,000.

Vectos looked at traffic and sustainability issues. They concluded that the development would not be sustainable from a transport viewpoint and would be dependant on private cars for at least 82% of journeys and probably much closer to 90%. Only 4% of visitors would arrive by public transport. Coach percentage was also probably over-estimated by Buntings. They said that the 720 car park spaces was more akin to a supermarket than a visitor centre and much greater than that required by planning guidelines.

Nathaniel Lichfield had looked at planning policy issues and concluded that there were considerable questions about compliance with National, Regional and Local planning policy. They said that *need* had not been established for the attraction and that there were many other attractions offering similar features in East Anglia. They also compared Horkesley Park with other attractions and reached much the same conclusions as Britton McGrath regarding visitor numbers. They made comments about the potential increase in retail activities if the business did not meet the revenues anticipated.

Mr Pavry said that the reports needed to be read in full to understand all the issues. They were however all very difficult to find and badly presented on the CBC web site (in stark contrast to the Bunting responses).

In conclusion, he said that the planning officers were making a recommendation for approval in the face of advice to the contrary from all their experts, except that from Britton McGrath in their supplementary report as stated above even though they do not change their position on lack of viability and visitor numbers being less than half those predicted by Buntings.

He said that it was vital that as many people and organisations as possible should write to express their objections to the current position. They should send their letters/e-mails to the address shown at the end of this letter. **The deadline is January 28th**

He said that SVAG was taking leading professional advice and that this would require further funds. This was reinforced by the Treasurer, Carolyn Pisarro. She indicated a need for a further £10,000. Please see below.

Contributions are requested to the address given below. Please be as generous as possible.

Fred Grosch gave a statement that publicity material would be available in time for the 'show around' by councillors prior to the February meeting and that further information on this would be sent out by e-mail and on the web site.

There was very extensive discussion on all the issues, very ably assisted by the SVAG consultant, Mr Robert Pomery. It is not intended to cover these in this Newsletter but Robin Duthy in particular read out an excellent letter to the council which undermines the Buntings' claims on access to original Constables which is a key part of their proposition. Lesley Watson made the point that she did not think that any account had been taken of Buntings' current employees in their employment predictions and that predictions should be reduced accordingly.

In conclusion Will Pavry said that Colchester Borough Council should recognise the strength of feeling on Horkesley Park coming not just from SVAG but also from the Dedham Vale Society, CPRE Essex, Colne Stour Countryside Association, Little Horkesley Parish Council, Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society, Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project, Suffolk Preservation Society and many other parish councils. SVAG may be the "noisiest" but the other august bodies of objection show how deep the local feelings are that the Dedham Vale should not be destroyed by Horkesley Park.

Write to Colchester Borough Council by January 28th with your objections. Address :

Ms Sue Jackson Principal Planning Officer Colchester Borough Council Rowan House, 33 Sheepen Road, Colchester, CO3 3WG or e-mail:

planning.services@colchester.gov.uk

Letters and e-mails must reference Application No 120965

**BE AT THE COUNCIL MEETING ON FEBRUARY
28TH, CHARTER HALL
COLCHESTER.6.00PM.ARRIVE EARLY.**

If you are prepared to contribute to our costs, please send cheques to Stour Valley Action Group to The Walnut Tree, Little Horkesley, Colchester CO6 4DG. Alternatively make a Bank Transfer to: Barclays, Account no 10332712, Sort code 20-41-50. We really appreciate any support you can give.

W L Pavry, Chairman SVAG.

Watch our web site for up-

dates:www.stourvalleyactiongroup.org.uk

