



Stour Valley Action Group

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Newsletter



5th March 2013

Dear Supporter,

As advised in our earlier e-newsletter of March 1st, I am sure that you will have seen by now that the application 120965 for the Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park was rejected by a majority of 10 to 4 at the Planning Committee Meeting on February 28th. The meeting was held in the Charter Hall in Colchester and attracted over 400 people, the vast majority of whom were wearing yellow "No" stickers.

The meeting opened with a presentation of the proposal by the Planning Officers. There were then presentations "against" and "for" the proposal by 12 speakers on each side, each of whom was allowed up to 3 minutes. The speakers "against" under-ran their time sufficiently to allow a 13th impromptu speaker from Great Horkesley who was very effective. We made every effort to make sure that each of the speakers "against" covered a different aspect of the application and we have had many comments that this was successful. The speakers "for" were mainly members of the applicant's family or consultants employed by them. There were also two presentations by Councillors not on the Planning Committee including Councillor Arnold who gave a very balanced presentation but came down against the Application.

Councillors on the Committee then debated the application with the guidance of the senior Planning Officer. The Planning Officers had made a clear recommendation for approval in their document and they did everything they could to persuade councillors to accept their recommendation. The councillors were, however, concerned about the following issues: the impact on the AONB, the unsustainability of the location, the inadequacy of some of the transport studies -they had not looked at access by SATNAV -, and the unproven viability and deliverability of the application. They were very reluctant to accept the Officers' assurances on viability from a Business Plan which they had not seen and which was not in the Public Domain. They were concerned that approval would change the status of the development from Agricultural to D2 Leisure; this would open the door for possibly less desirable uses in the event of failure of Horkesley Park. They were concerned that the Application was contrary to many of the Policies set out in the Management Strategy as prepared by the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project. They also made it clear that the Applicant should have sought to get the site included in the LDF as one designated for development but had deliberately chosen not to go down this route. Concern was expressed about approving an application which was contrary to the Colchester Plan which had so recently been adopted.

The Planning Services Manager proposed that the decision should be deferred for further clarification of issues raised by the Councillors. The applicant also sought to introduce new material at the very last minute. Both of these were rejected by the Chair and a proposal was made by Cllr Barlow to reject the application. This was seconded and, following an adjournment to define the motion for rejection, was carried on a show of hands by a 10 to 4 majority.

The minutes of the meeting will clarify the detailed reasons for rejection. These will be reviewed and confirmed at a meeting of the Planning Committee to be held on March 28th.

We are delighted by the result but must expect that this will not be the end of the story. The Applicant has the option of lodging an Appeal within six months or even submitting an entirely new application.

We are convinced that the constant support from our members and the support of key organisations including the Dedham Vale Society, the Colne Stour Countryside Association, the Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society, CPRE Essex, Suffolk Preservation Society amongst others, has been crucial in achieving this result and thank you all for your encouragement. Thank you also for the deluge of e-mails I have received on behalf of SVAG since the decision on Thursday, and my apologies if I have not answered all of them.

Will Pavry, Chairman, Stour Valley Action Group