



HORKESLEY PARK HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION CENTRE.

APPLICATION NUMBER 090231

Dear Stour Valley Action Group Member,

I am sure you will all by now be aware that Bunting and Sons have re-submitted their Planning Application for their London Road site for the fourth time since April 2001. This Newsletter sets out the chief issues as we see them and some key facts from the Application.

If successful, this Application would destroy the peace and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale. It must be stopped and we strongly urge you to write with your own comments to:

**Mr John Davies,
Colchester Borough Council
PO Box 889
Town Hall
Colchester CO1 1FL**

You must quote the Application Number 090231. Your letter must be delivered by March 23rd 2009 at the latest.

You can also respond by e-mail to: planning.services@colchester.gov.uk

You must quote the Application Number and your postal address on any e-mail response.

We have asked for an extension on the closure date for this, but we can't count on it. You do not have much time....

You have a right to see the Proposal in full at the CBC offices in Angel Court, High St Colchester. You can also see details on the Colchester Borough Council website on www.colchester.gov.uk/planning and you can request a copy on CD for which you will have to pay.

In our view the key issues raised by this development are:-

Retail Scheme dressed up as Heritage Centre:

Buntings claim that the Horkesley Park will be a 'Celebration of the English Countryside through the themes of Agriculture & Food, Art & Culture, and Countryside and Conservation'.

Horkesley Park is in reality a retail scheme dressed up as a Heritage and Conservation Centre. Most of the revenues will come from Garden Centre and Food sales as well as the extensive restaurant facilities and entry fees. We question whether the other 'attractions' of the Proposal are sufficient in themselves to create a major tourist attraction.

Planning status:

Colchester Borough Council has declared it a Departure Application. This means that it is outside the guidelines of the current Borough Plans. If CBC were to find in favour, the decision would require endorsement (or otherwise) by the Regional Office of Government. The Application is Category D2, Assembly and Leisure. If granted, this would give almost unbridled licence for all kinds of leisure activities.

Protection of Dedham Vale AONB

We are privileged to have the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) on our doorstep. The integrity of the AONB must be protected for future generations at all costs. Most of the proposed development is within the AONB; only the main buildings are just outside it. If the Application were to proceed, it would change the character of the Dedham Vale for ever.

This must not be allowed to happen.

An AONB is subject to the most rigorous planning at National, Regional and Local levels. Most recently this was reinforced by the Core Development Strategy adopted by Colchester Borough Council in December 2008.

This huge development would terminally destroy the character of the AONB. Through the traffic that it generates it will have a major impact on all the surrounding area. The effect on both the landscape and on the quality of life of all who live here would be severe and wholly negative. It would destroy the peace and quiet of the countryside it is supposed to be celebrating, particularly at weekends.

Tourism

Buntings claim that there is a need for a major tourist attraction to relieve the pressure on the other 'honey pots' in the AONB (Flatford Mill and, Dedham in particular). We strongly contest this. An artificial 'countryside experience' as proposed by Buntings is simply not needed. If people are genuinely interested in the countryside and the Stour Valley they can access the real thing through the hundreds of miles of footpaths and bridleways that already exist. They don't need what they already have for free packaged up and served back to them at a price. Furthermore the link with John Constable is tenuous. There is no direct historical link between the site and his work and no evidence has yet been given that Horkesley Park will have any works of note by Constable or other well-known regional artists on show. Constable is properly celebrated at very well run and popular Flatford Mill Centre which was his true home.

Traffic

The Plan anticipates 485,000 visitors in the first year of operation. We believe that the huge increase in traffic will be the element that will have the greatest adverse impact on the quality of life in this area.

Peak traffic flows are anticipated on summer weekends which are a time when the peace and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale is most treasured. Why should villages in the area, particularly Nayland, be subjected to potential grid-lock at weekends?

Although the Buntings claim that most access will be from the A12 in Colchester via the A134, it will be impossible to control how people will arrive and leave from the site. Today, SATNAVS are commonly used and all the feeder roads are likely to experience considerably more traffic than they do now, whether it is the Higham route from the Ipswich direction, the Eight Ash Green route or the Bakers Lane route from the A12 from the London direction.

Our narrow lanes and village roads are over-loaded already and cannot support the considerable increase in traffic volume which will be particularly heavy at weekends.

Fishponds Hill, which is adjacent to the site, is a Protected Lane and it is difficult to see how Buntings can meet the CBC Planning constraint not to allow any increase in vehicular traffic on this Lane.

Peak summer traffic will cause severe disruption to the access required by local farmers and to genuine rural activities and present a real danger to our children, horse riders, walkers and cyclists.

Employment

Buntings argue that their Heritage Centre will directly create 155 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) jobs on site once it is operational. They also claim that there will be other additional jobs created in the local and regional economy but offset by over 170 jobs lost in other businesses by 'displacement'.

The Heritage Centre jobs will only arise if they get the numbers of visitors forecast (which must be highly questionable). We can however be sure that that a development on this scale will severely damage many already-existing small businesses. Those small businesses operate on a scale that is currently viable. The Heritage Centre will be like a giant supermarket arriving on their doorstep and could wipe them out.

Financial Viability

Although this is an issue that may not be directly considered in the planning process, we should all be concerned about it. The Garden Centre is said to be the financial anchor for the whole project. If visitor numbers are not as forecast, if garden centre sales and restaurant receipts are not high enough to keep the project afloat, the only way to increase income will be through retail expansion: more and more shops. Where might this end? Financial viability and employment creation are inextricably linked.

Visitor Numbers

We question how the consultants who have prepared the Application, LDA Design, can come up with a figure of 485,000 visitors for this Application and yet be prepared to support a figure of 762,812 in the 2005 Application for very much the same offering. There would seem to be some major margins for error in both Applications. In any event we consider that 485,000 in the first year of operation to be highly optimistic based on visitor numbers for other local attractions. Only Colchester Zoo comes anywhere near this; they have a very attractive family offering and have been in business for many years. How attractive **really** is the Horkesley Park offering for the average modern family? We think this is very questionable.

Noise

The Application makes no mention of noise generated by people. The valley the north of the site is exceptionally quiet at present and individual voices can be clearly heard across it. People in the country park, the playground and even the car park will generate considerable noise in the summer months to the detriment of those who live in Little Horkesley.

Light

There is virtually no light pollution from the site at present. The new Centre would inevitably have security lighting for the car parks and the main buildings showing after dark. Any evening events that may be held in the two storey central building will inevitably increase light pollution across the valley.

A very brief summary of the Buntings Proposal:

“A celebration of the English Countryside through the themes of Agriculture & Food, Art & Culture, and Countryside & Conservation.”

The Development includes:-

- Total visitors forecast: 485,000 in opening year.
- A zoned Heritage Centre with a number of ‘heritage’ features.
- 46,000 sq ft covered Garden Centre and Food Experience.
- Café and restaurant facilities with capacity for over 787 covers.
- The Chantry Gallery and Gardens
- Country park area and playground.
- Area is 117 acres along London Road Great Horkesley and running down into the hidden valley to Little Horkesley.
- Existing footpaths will be fenced in to prevent the access of genuine ramblers to the Countryside Park.
- Open **364 days per year** from 10.00am to 6.00pm. (*We are allowed a day of peace on Christmas Day*)
- Scheduled to open in 2011 in time for the Olympic Games in 2012. (*the previous Application was due to open in 2009*).
- Entrance to the Heritage Centre including Garden Centre and Grounds will be by ticket – fee up to £10.95 per person.
- Financial viability of the project depends on income and profit from the garden centre, food experience and restaurants.
- Said to create 155 full-time equivalent jobs on site when operational. At the same time it will displace 178 jobs in existing businesses but also create about the same number of ‘secondary’ jobs in the wider economy.

We are taking professional advice on the proposals on your behalf. We consider the whole project to be entirely unwarranted and unnecessary. We strongly urge you to form your own views from your own perspective and write to the Colchester Borough Council with copies to your local Councillors and anyone else of influence. Help us get this proposal consigned to the dustbin for the fourth time!

DO NOT DELAY – WRITE NOW

PASS THIS INFORMATION TO YOUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS!

For more details, press coverage and news as it comes in, see our website: www.stourvalleyactiongroup.org.uk
Tell other people to look at it too!

Will Pavry, Chairman, STOUR VALLEY ACTION GROUP

March 2009