

Protesters step up Stour centre fight

by Pat Bray

A PROTEST group is stepping up its fight to stop the creation of a 117-acre heritage and conservation centre on the edge of an area of outstanding natural beauty.

The Stour Valley Action Group (SVAG), backed by Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society, is urging objectors to "Say No to Horkesley Park" when a new application is submitted.

Members demonstrated with placards as landowner Bunting & Sons held three days of consultation and exhibitions in Colchester and Great Horkesley.

The firm intends to submit a fourth application for its "celebration of the English countryside" on its glasshouse site off the A134 at Great Horkesley once feedback has been collated.

The £20million project will house a Suffolk Punch horse breeding centre, fine art gallery, specialist garden centre, sculpture trails, craft studios, workshops, cafes and restaurants, a rustic adventure playground and country park.

Bosses say they have listened to feedback for and against their last plan which was withdrawn before it went to Colchester Borough Council in March last year.

Changes to the plans include:

- The site not opening after 6pm except for special events
- A garden centre not having retailing outside
- Numerous ticket options, including free admission to the art gallery
- Visitor numbers down to 500,000 in the first year, instead of the previously anticipated 700,000.

Buntings say Horkesley Park will create 230 jobs.

The changes failed to impress members of SVAG who say the new plan has not changed substantially and will do "irreparable damage" to the countryside and Stour Valley communities, turning a natural landscape into an artificial theme park.

Spokesman Fred Grosch said: "Changes to the scheme being 'showcased' by Buntings



Going to town... members at SVAG outside Colchester town hall

Submitted picture

What do you think?

ARE you for or against? Write to: The Editor, Free Press, Borehamgate, Sudbury CO10 2EE; email mark.crossley@sudburytoday.co.uk or add a comment to the story at www.sudburytoday.co.uk We will publish views in next week's *Free Press*.

are clearly cosmetic. The whole thing seems to be aimed at Colchester in terms of jobs and a tourist attraction to visit.

"No real thought has gone into the effect it will have on local people, the countryside and rural roads network.

"Damage to this famous age-old landscape is just too great a price to pay. What heritage? And what are they 'conserving' by

building a visitor centre? It's not wanted, not needed and not right."

But senior partner Stephen Bunting said: "People really appreciated the opportunity to see everything laid out at our exhibition. Many had a completely different idea of what the centre was going to be and now they fully support us.

"Attendance was very good and the comments excellent. Traffic was a concern but visitors were able to talk to our specialists who eased their fears.

"We've made significant changes and want to encourage people to come to us with feedback because we'll take it all into account before we produce the final plans."

A site exhibition and chances to find out more are being held this week from 10am to 6pm. Admission should be pre-booked on 01206 274040.

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