

Protesters' joy as plans denied

CAMPAIGNERS opposed to a planning application for a £25million heritage and conservation centre in Great Horkesley are delighted it has been refused.

The plan for Horkesley Park, a 117-acre development proposed by family firm Bunting & Sons, was the fourth submitted in 10 years and the only one to reach committee stage.

It had aroused fierce opposition, led by the Stour Valley Action Group, and on Thursday Colchester Borough Council's planning committee backed the recommendation of their planning officer by voting 11-1 to reject it.

Bunting and Sons, however, claims the officer's report was flawed and intends to appeal the decision.

The packed meeting was attended by around 150 protesters, with more turned away outside, and 50 Bunting family members and employees.

There were 25 speakers in all, for and against the application. Objectors included Dr John Constable, representatives of

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Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society, Nayland and Little Horkesley parish councils, the Dedham Vale Project and Suffolk Preservation Society.

Among those supporting the plan were the Buntings' traffic, landscape, tourism and planning consultants, family members and others.

Buntings had predicted the "celebration of the English countryside" would attract about 485,000 visitors a year and create 220 jobs.

The scheme included an art gallery, show gardens, Suffolk Punch breeding centre, nurseries, restaurants and a 101-acre country park.

Stour Valley Action Group chairman Will Pavry said: "Our reaction to the planning committee's decision to reject Horkesley Park so resoundingly is one of absolute relief and joy.

"We have been fighting Horkesley Park and its predecessor's applications for more than 10 years and this is the final vindica-

tion it would have been a totally inappropriate commercial enterprise on the edge of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for which there is no justification.

"It would have had disastrous consequences for Nayland and surrounding villages and destroyed the peace and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale."

But Buntings remains undeterred.

Partner Stephen Bunting said: "We shall continue with the proposals until they come to fruition. Horkesley Park will be an asset for the borough and this is recognised by many people.

"In fact, the council has received more than 28,000 representations in support of the proposals.

"It will be an important draw for tourism, providing a wealth of information and education about the countryside, benefiting biodiversity and wildlife habitats, while creating hundreds of jobs."

Fellow partner Kate Bunting added: "We consider Horkesley Park to be a sustainable site and the activities proposed are a logical extension of our business and the horticulture that has been carried on there for many years."