

Farmers and traders oppose heritage plan

TWENTY Stour Valley farmers and 32 owners of small businesses have signed letters to Colchester Council objecting to the proposed Horkesley Park heritage and conservation centre.

The centre, planned by Bunting and Sons on their redundant greenhouse site, has aroused considerable opposition locally, highlighted by a recent go-slow vehicle rally between Nayland and Great Horkesley, organised by the Stour Valley Action Group.

The farmers say moving cumbersome machinery around the lanes and main roads is already difficult.

Their open letter asks: "How are farmers in the vicinity of Horkesley Park to be expected to go about their daily lives with so many more cars on the roads? With visitor numbers expected to peak in August, just when most of us have the harvest to get in, an already tricky operation will be made well-nigh impossible... Ever-increasing traffic numbers will only add further to the difficulties farmers are facing."

Owners of small businesses, including 18 from Nayland and Weston, claim the development will threaten their livelihoods and "the very fabric of the community".

Their letter to council planners

by Pat Bray

says: "To introduce such a giant retail and tourist enterprise as Horkesley Park into this small area would swamp the infrastructure of the local community and economy.

"The proposal itself admits the possibility of the 'displacement' of 178 local jobs and we contend the loss could well be greater than this... It would be our jobs and businesses, built up in some cases over many years, which are likely to disappear."

But partner Stephen Bunting commented: "It is impossible to see how 26 of these firms could be adversely affected by Horkesley Park. The four B&Bs and holiday lets will certainly be beneficially affected.

"That leaves six firms that could possibly be affected either way, although working with Horkesley Park and taking advantage of the additional visitors it will bring would have a beneficial effect.

"As far as the so-called farmers' petition is concerned, we believe many of the 20 who signed did so because they have been misinformed about the details of our application.

"More than 100 active farmers and producers have confirmed they want Horkesley Park, because they see it as a unique opportunity to promote their produce and provide valuable educational opportunities about farming for schools."