



Stour Valley Action Group

www.stourvalleyactiongroup.org.uk



Newsletter

13 June 2012

The Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park Application No: 120965

Dear Member,

The latest Application for Horkesley Park has now been published on the Colchester Borough Council web-site. In our view it is entirely unacceptable and continues to have many of the objectionable features of all the previous Applications. Our main objections and a summary of the main features of the Application are given below.

We are advised that there will be a **42 day** consultation period from June 15th 2012. Letters and comments must be sent by **July 26th** to:

Colchester Borough Council, Application 120965, Environmental and Protective Services, PO Box 889, Rowan House, Sheepen Road, Colchester CO3 3WG.

Or e-mail to planning.services@colchester.gov.uk or use the form on the CBC web site.

We strongly recommend that you write and express your opposition to this latest attempt to exploit our precious countryside.

There will be a meeting in Little Horkesley Village Hall at 7.00 pm on July 4th to plan our campaign. Please come and bring your friends.

1 Reasons for opposition:

You will form your own views about why you should object to Horkesley Park. We think it is entirely undesirable for the following reasons:

- **Need:**

There is no need for any of the elements of Horkesley Park. All the elements are already available in East Anglia. The Stour Valley has many freely available sites and a huge network of footpaths to see the countryside. There are existing facilities such as Flatford Mill, Gainsborough's House Museum, Museum of East Anglian Life, the Suffolk Punch centre at Hollesley Bay, Christchurch Mansion in Ipswich (for genuine Constables), Sir Alfred Munnings Museum, Assington Mill Rural Skills and Craft Centre, Easton Farm Park to name but a few. Importantly, we do not consider that it would be of Regional significance.

There is no single element of Horkesley Park that is a compelling attraction that would persuade people to drive up to two hours (as envisaged in the Application) to visit.

- **Traffic:**

The Application fails to deal adequately with the additional load on minor roads and villages such as Nayland which could well become swamped in peak summer months. It does not recognise the traffic that would access the site from the south through Eight Ash Green and West Bergholt and the north through Higham, Stoke-by-Nayland and Nayland. Residents of Great Horkesley are already concerned about the Traffic on the A134 and any unnecessary increase would be most unwelcome whatever Essex Highways may say to the contrary.

- **Retail:**

The retail space in the latest proposal has been reduced from the previous proposal and is now said to be entirely 'ancillary'. We cannot accept that retail is ancillary for two reasons:

Firstly, there is nothing to stop Buntings using any of the other covered space for retail activities. They could well use the covered areas for events such as local farmers' markets or other retail activities and they could set up stalls elsewhere on the site.

Secondly, the numbers simply don't add up. Buntings have a PPA (Planning Performance Agreement) with the Council and have not published a Business Plan. However, it is reasonable to extrapolate the figures given in the 2009 Application which would suggest that substantially more than 50% of revenues will have to come from sales of goods and services if it is to be viable.

We are of the view that it is primarily a 'for profit' retail development in spite of the reduction in retail space compared with the previous Application. This is unacceptable in a rural location.

- **Visitor numbers and viability:**

Analysis of Buntings' documents suggests that visitor numbers are probably significantly overstated and they have assumed very high entrance fees by comparison with similar attractions. We contend that the project is therefore almost certainly not viable.

If consent were to be given and the project were to fail as we contend it will, the pressure for permission for further exploitation for retail development and commercial exploitation of the site would be very difficult for the Council to resist.

- **Loss of tranquillity:**

Whatever Buntings may claim to the contrary, Horkesley Park would damage the peace and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale AONB and surrounding villages and countryside forever. The damage it would do would be irreversible and the anticipated 316,000 additional visitors would be an intolerable burden on the whole area.

We owe it to those who had the vision to create the AONB and to future generations not to put it at unnecessary risk in the cause of commercial exploitation.

- **Employment:**

Because we do not believe that the project can possibly be viable, we do not believe the claimed creation of 106.5 full time employees can be relied on. Guarantee of job creation is not embodied in any way in the draft Section 106 Agreement.

We consider that any claimed creation of second order jobs in the wider economy is entirely speculative and could never be demonstrated in practice.

- **Planning policy:**

The previous Application was rejected on a number of key Planning Policy grounds. We believe that many of these reasons for rejection still apply. The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012 gives great weight to the Local Plan and Colchester is fortunate in having a very well developed Core Strategy and Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF would almost certainly preclude development on the Horkesley Park site as it is not designated for such development.

One of Buntings' main arguments is that the Regional Plan is still actually in force and that Horkesley Park must be judged in this context. We contest this as we do not believe that Horkesley Park can possibly be considered to be of Regional significance.

2 The Proposal:

It is now to be considered one Attraction with its new name as above. It will comprise:

The Chantry Art Gallery and Gardens, Park and Farmland, the Nursery site (site of main new buildings), Hillside and Chantry Lodge (private use).

Total area will be 117.16 acres (47.41 ha)

The Nursery site will have new buildings with a total covered area of 8950 SqM comprising Entrance, Courtyard animal encounter, Suffolk Punch Breeding centre, Indoor display ring, nature watch, active learning, field-to-fork production area, demonstration nursery and gardens, renewable energy centre, visitor shop, cafe. The main building will be the covered display ring with a total area of 2080 SqM.

The 'attractions' will include:

Country Park for informal recreation, Chantry Art Gallery, creative design workshops in outbuildings of the Chantry, Chinese Garden including a tea pavilion, indoor covered display ring, Suffolk Punch breeding centre and demonstrations in the indoor ring, blacksmith and farriers area etc, history of the Suffolk Punch, working Suffolk Punches, animal encounter area, farm animal rare breeds, Stour Valley walkway and exhibitions, display area for conservation societies, exhibition of the history of Colchester engineering, nature watch exhibits, active learning area, history of Bunting and Sons, life and times of John Constable, studio of local dialects etc, renewable energy centre, farming through the ages exhibition, cooks school and demonstration area, field-to-fork production kitchen, creative design workshops, restored gardens, demonstration nursery and gardens.

There will also be a visitor centre, shop, eating and refreshment areas.

The Attraction will be entirely 'gated' with entrance fees ranging from £9.45 for children in groups to £14.95 for an individual adult. There are other discounts quoted. The average admission price is given as £12.41.

It is claimed that the Attraction will attract 310,000 day visitors and 6250 daytime special events visitors giving an annual total of 316,250.

It is claimed that the Attraction will employ 106.5 people (Full Time Equivalent) on site and create a further net 69.8 people in indirect employment. Within this net total, 60.3 people currently in employment are anticipated to lose their jobs.

There will be a 15 minute bus service to Colchester Station and the centre of Colchester. There will be other bus services to Dedham etc. None of these are necessarily free.

Opening hours would be every day of the year, except Christmas Day, on average 8 hours per day.

3 Purpose:

The Application makes it clear that Buntings have failed to find a viable horticultural use for the greenhouses since they ceased production in 2000. They are therefore putting forward this latest proposal for Horkesley Park for the benefit of Bunting and Sons. It is not being proposed for charitable purposes.

We will keep you informed through our web site on www.stourvalleyactiongroup.org.uk as this new Application develops and will do everything we can to prevent it being approved.

It is essential that you write and express your opposition to the plan and please write (or e-mail) your objections to the Council to the address given at the start of this letter as soon as possible.

Please pass this on to any of your friends who are of like mind.

Please let us have your e-mail contact if we do not already have it. Send it to info@stourvalleyactiongroup.org.uk

W L Pavry. Chairman, Stour Valley Action Group