

Chinese firm pledges to back Horkesley bid

Big corporation to build Confucianist garden at visitor centre

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A CHINESE corporation with a turnover of more than £1 billion has pledged to invest in the proposed Horkesley Park development, it has been disclosed.

Information published ahead of a planning inquiry next month claims a “major Chinese corporation” and one of the 225 largest construction companies in the world is backing the controversial visitor attraction.

Proofs of evidence have been submitted ahead of an appeal by Bunting & Sons against Colchester Council’s decision in February to refuse its application for the Stour Valley Visitor Centre, which will begin on October 1.

Part of the disclosures centres

around the proposed 0.5 hectare Chinese garden, about which Colchester Council asked for more information after the original planning application was rejected.

In one submission, Stephen Bunting, of Bunting & Sons, reveals the construction company is subsidising the cost of building the garden, which would resemble those introduced to England during the 18th century.

It states the garden would be led by “Daoist principles” and “Confucianist influences” and include rockery mountains, ponds linked by zigzag water streams, bamboo and a tea pavilion.

The submission includes a letter from Fan Zhigang, China-Jiangsu Representative for Economic and Trade Affairs in the

UK, who said it would “certainly attract investors and tourists from China”.

Other letters from George Keifer, chairman of Visit Essex, and a personal letter from Peter Manning, head of international trade at Essex County Council, also claim the garden would further boost links between the county and China’s Jiangsu province.

Georgina Harding, a spokesman for the Stour Valley Action Group, said: “They’re pushing Horkesley Park as a celebration of the English countryside when there’s a small garden which will apparently bring in coachloads of Chinese tourists. The whole thing is a bit confusing.

“It’s very hard to see how the Chinese garden fits with the rest of an attraction supposed to cele-

brate the English countryside and John Constable, and it seems utterly inappropriate to site it here within the Dedham Vale AONB.”

The centre, covering 101 acres, would also include other gardens, art and craft studios, a Suffolk Punch breeding centre and an art gallery.

Colchester Council has disputed claims by Bunting & Sons that it would attract 316,250 visitors a year and rake in an annual income of £7.5million.

A minister is due to make a final announcement on the project in January.

Stephen Bunting said all the information was in the submission and declined to comment further.

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