

Delight as Horkesley Park appeal rejected

James Calnan

COMMUNITIES secretary Eric Pickles has blocked an appeal to allow Horkesley Park to be turned into a tourist attraction.

The decision spells the end of 13 years of efforts by Bunting & Sons to create the Stour Valley Visitor Centre on 101 acres of land partly in the Dedham Vale.

The family firm, which last year entered administration, wanted to create gardens, art and craft stu-

dios, a Suffolk Punch breeding centre and an art gallery.

But Mr Pickles yesterday revealed he backed the decisions by Colchester Council and an independent inspector to reject the planning application.

Stephen Bunting, senior partner of Bunting & Sons: "We are hugely disappointed by the outcome of the appeal.

"We are very sorry that we will not see the project come to fruition and feel the people of Colchester have sadly missed out on what

would have been a wonderful attraction."

Will Pavry, of the Stour Valley Action Group, said: "We're obviously delighted it's been refused.

"We feel it's a vindication of the decision by the council in February 2013 and we think it's a wonderful result.

"After 13 years of struggle we have now finally got Horkesley Park refused."

Bernard Jenkin, MP for Harwich and North Essex, said: "This comes as a huge relief and a vindication that what protesters have been

saying is valid. This is fantastic news for the future of Dedham Vale and the Stour Valley."

In a 96-page decision, Mr Pickles ruled the increase in tourism and jobs to north Essex would have been a "clear benefit".

But he said estimates by Bunting & Sons that Horkesley Park would attract 316,000 visitors a year were over-optimistic.

He also found it would represent major development in the countryside.

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