

# Back to a farming future?

## Campaigners call for Horkesley Park to return to agriculture

James Calnan

CAMPAIGNERS say parts of Horkesley Park could be returned to agricultural use after a 13-year battle to create a tourist attraction came to an end.

Bunting & Sons wanted to replace redundant greenhouses and farm buildings with the Stour Valley Visitor Centre.

The family firm's plans for a tourist attraction on 101 acres of land on the edge of the Dedham Vale ground to a halt last week.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles endorsed a planning inspector's recommendation that planning permission should not be granted, vindicating the decision by Colchester Council planning committee members to reject the original application.

The future for the land is unclear, with Bunting & Sons in administration and the Horkesley Park land being marketed by Deloitte.

Tim Young, councillor responsible for planning,

### No fine art in listed villa

TWO historic buildings are sited at Horkesley Park. The Grade I-listed All Saints Church, which partly dates back to the 12th century, is due to continue to be used as a Church of England place of worship. However, the future of the Chantry, a newly Grade II-listed building, which was earmarked for a fine art

gallery, is unclear. Getting the Georgian regency villa officially listed helped campaigners convince the inspector a Chinese garden in its grounds would be inappropriate. Residents are happy to see the access to the countryside, which includes footpaths and access points, continue.



Listed: The Chantry with the Bunting family.

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said: "Something will have to be done on that site and the land, but obviously it cannot be the type of development they wanted.

"It's been a hugely controversial and contentious issue, but I think this puts it to bed once and for all."

A successful planning application would have increased the value of the land which, with Bunting & Sons' other assets, including Westwood Park business centre, has been estimated at £5million.

Nigel Chapman, councillor for Fordham and Stour,

said he had heard rumours of interest in returning Horkesley Park to agricultural use.

He said: "I don't know how the Buntings and their administrators will handle it, but hopefully whoever buys it will work with the community to come up with a sensible plan for the site.

"I've heard rumours there are people who thought it could still be used for agriculture, but the greenhouses would have to be rebuilt completely."

He added the greenhouses were unsightly and hoped a

better use would be found for the site.

Will Pavry, chairman of the Stour Valley Action Group, said: "As far as the area is concerned, I think we'd like to see the agricultural elements of the site – the glasshouses and car parking – reverting to agricultural use.

"Whatever happens to the site, we would hope something is done which doesn't impact on the tranquillity of the area."

Mr Pavry said Mr Pickles' endorsement of his group's claims the visitor centre

would damage the peace enjoyed by visitors, had been key. Also crucial was the ruling that Horkesley Park's remote location meant it would have been unsustainable and frequented mostly by car users, rather than being served by public transport.

Although strong doubt was shed on claims Horkesley Park would attract 316,250 visitors a year, the viability or otherwise of the site was not a major consideration in the verdict.

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