

# Buntings in crisis:

## 193-year-old business goes into administration 'due to

Wendy Brading

ONE of Colchester's oldest businesses, Bunting and Sons, has gone into administration.

The firm, which dates back to 1820, has blamed the protracted planning application for the controversial visitor centre at Horkeley Park, for its demise.

Administrators Deloitte has now been appointed to handle its affairs.

It said it would continue to trade "to secure the best outcome".

Aspects of the family's business concerns affected include Westwood Park, which hosts wedding and conferences, and its

agricultural interests at Horkeley Park.

It does not include Carter's Vineyard, in Boxted.

In a statement, partner Stephen Bunting, part of the sixth generation of

the family to run the business, said: "Bunting and Sons has been placed in administration by the bank.

"The partners of Bunting and Sons are deeply saddened by this turn of events, which has become unavoidable due to the protracted nature of

the ongoing planning application for the creation of the Stour Valley Visitor Centre, at Horkeley Park.

"The partners are committed to working with the bank's administrators in dealing with this situation.

"All parties involved remain confident of a

positive outcome and swift resolution."

Bunting and Sons had hoped to create a £25million visitor centre on 113 acres of land in the Dedham Vale.

However, the project created a storm of opposition from protesters, who said it would destroy the peace and tranquillity of an area of outstanding natural beauty.

Earlier this year, Colchester Council refused the planning application - the fifth by the business in 12 years - but the company appealed against the decision.

A planning inquiry was held in Langham earlier this month, but Bunting and Sons revealed just before the hearing started that it could not afford barristers to represent the firm.

The family said at the time funds were still available for the project if planning permission was given.

The London-based financial experts will continue to trade the business, which has 33 staff on its books and is based at the Grade

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STEPHEN BUNTING

II\*-listed Tudor manor house, Westwood Park, in Little Horkeley.

Weddings and conferences will continue to be staged at Westwood Park, which is set in 15 acres of gardens and grounds.

Deloitte could also look to get a new buyer for the Stour Valley Visitor Centre project - if it gets planning

# 12 year park bid blamed

## the protracted nature of the Stour Valley Visitor Centre application'

### Administration is not the end

A company is placed in administration when it is "technically bankrupt." Administrators take control of the company and then start to assess the value of the company and see what can be sold off to pay creditors. If the asset base is not of sufficient value to cover the debts of the company and nobody is willing to provide further lending to revive its fortunes, then the next stage is "bankruptcy" and the firm will be liquidated by order of the courts and "wound up" (cease trading completely).

permission from the Secretary of State.

Charles Clover, chairman of the Dedham Vale Society said the group would continue to fight the plans.

He said: "This doesn't mean, by any means, the fight is over.

"The administrator could sell this property and the subsequent owner could start this all over again. It is important to be aware this highly vexatious planning application, which has taken us so many years to oppose, could be restarted by another buyer.

"The Dedham Vale Society will continue to fight this development."

Will Pavry, chairman of the Stour Valley Action Group, added: "From the outset we have been concerned about the appropriateness of the proposals and their impact on the area of outstanding natural beauty.

"That is why we have vigorously defended the status quo over the years. It is, of course, a shame it has come to this."

**Business venture:** Hector, Kate and Ben Bunting earlier this year in the grounds of Westwood Park, Little Horkeley, the Tudor manor house, where the firm hosts weddings and conference. CO75004-41

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**Family business:** Daniel, Stephen, Kate and Hector Bunting. CO68669



# From tiny seeds a mighty business grew

BUNTING and Sons are almost the oldest family-run Colchester business, founded on Lexden Road in 1820 by Isaac Bunting, a nurseryman.

Many mature trees which today line Lexden Road came from his nursery.

As business prospered, he added 'florist' to his title and gradually acquired meadows stretching down to the River Colne. Here flowers were grown and seeds gathered as Buntings won contracts for garden design and tree planting all over Colchester and district.

Isaac also bought land on what is now North Station Road, where his eldest son, William, set up as "gardener and seedsman".

In due course, both businesses passed to William and his three sons, one of whom, Isaac, took the extraordinary step of moving to Japan with his wife at a time when very few British people lived there. From here he developed an extensive business growing and exporting Japanese lilies, and Bunting and Sons became major suppliers of the plants, which were grown in glass houses at North Station Road.

William Bunting's two other sons, William Ellis and Alfred,



**Family:** William Bunting (1812-1895) seated left, his wife, three sons (standing) and their families.

joined the family business and by the time William died in 1895, they were a leading Colchester family, active in the social and political life of the district.

The floral decorations the firm supplied for the Colchester Oyster



**Successful:** Alfred Bunting.

Feast were always a feature of the occasion.

After William's death, the Bunting empire split between his two eldest sons, William Ellis, who traded from Lexden Road, and Alfred, who ran the North Station Road business.

William Ellis passed his business to his son, William Whorlow, but after his death the Lexden business closed, and the trading title Bunting and Sons was acquired by Alfred's son, Eric.

Eric Bunting developed a further nursery at Marks Tey, where

tomatoes, which the firm had cultivated during the First World War, were grown.

Eric was joined by his son Peter after the Second World War. There followed a rapid expansion of the business. The production of Japanese lilies was expanded to include tulips, freesias, mushrooms and tomatoes. In 1969, the firm moved from North Station to Great Horkeley and in the mid-1970s, the firm diversified into the biological control of pests on crops. Intensive cultivation of tomatoes under five acres of heated glasshouse followed in the 1980s. In 1983 Stephen Bunting, Eric's son, won the industry's National Award for outstanding services to horticulture. In 1991, Bunting Biological Control was awarded the Queen's Award for Export.

By 2000, the production of tomatoes was no longer viable and alternative crops were trialled.

Further diversification has included the Westwood Park Centre for Business, Carter's Vineyard and the Suffolk Punch display team.

Since 2007, led by the sixth and seventh generation of the Bunting family, proposals for a Horkeley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre have been the subject of an ongoing campaign.