

300,000 tourists expected to descend on park Constable Country visitor centre 'will earn Essex £3.9m'

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A BUSINESS plan published by Bunting & Sons says a visitor centre in Constable Country would attract more than 300,000 people and £3.9million in spending a year.

Bunting & Sons appealed against Colchester Council's decision to refuse its application for the Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park.

A planning inspector will hear the first of 12 days of evidence on October 1 before making a recommendation to the Government.

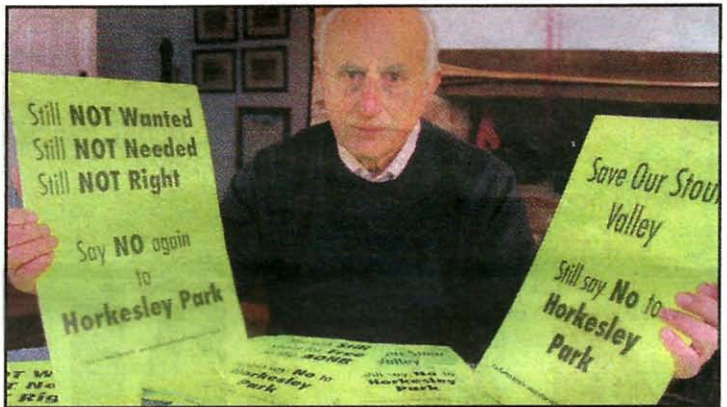
Documents published ahead of the hearing reveal how much Bunting & Sons expects to spend and make on the project, details previously kept secret.

It says Horkesley Park will attract 316,000 visitors a year who will spend £3.9million on entry tickets, refreshments and souvenirs. The centre will cost £12.9million to build.

The business plan was one of the main areas of concern when the application was rejected in February this year.

The documents reveal there are eight differences of opinion the inspector must resolve before making his recommendation.

Will Pavry, chairman of Stour Valley Action Group, opponents of the scheme, said he had seen nothing to change his mind about the application.



■ Saying no – protest organiser Will Pavry

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He said: "We're confident the council will put in an extremely good defence of its decision to reject this application.

"We are working with the council to give it any information it needs."

The group has hired a solicitor who specialises in planning appeals to attend the hearings at Langham Community Centre and Colchester's Moot Hall.

Also speaking against the appeal are Sunday Times columnist Charles Clover, representing the Dedham Vale Society, Little Horkesley Parish Council, the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Partnership and the Colne and Stour Valley Countryside Association.

Buntings has hired a host of consultants to speak on its behalf. Colchester MP Sir Bob Russell is also scheduled to offer

his support. The centre would be on 101 acres and include gardens, art and craft studios, a Suffolk Punch breeding centre and an art gallery.

Buntings lodged an appeal against Colchester Council's decision after a five-hour debate in Charter Hall, watched by 350 campaigners and supporters. A minister is due to make a final announcement on the project, which has been mooted for more than a decade, in January.

Among questions facing the inquiry will be whether Horkesley Park will bring benefits to the public and what would its impact be on the Dedham Vale area of natural beauty.

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