

Dedham Vale centre could still go ahead

By WENDY BRADING

wendy.brading@nqe.com

THE fight against a controversial visitor centre in the heart of the Dedham Vale will go on, even though the firm behind it has gone into administration.

Bunting and Sons blamed the protracted planning application for the visitor centre at Horkesley Park for its demise.

Administrators Deloitte have now been appointed by the bank to handle the firm's affairs for Westwood Park and Horkesley Park.

The London-based financial experts will continue to trade the business, including weddings and conferences staged at the Grade II* Tudor Westwood Park.

It could also look to get a new buyer for the Stour Valley Visitor Centre project – if it gets planning permission from the Secretary of State.

Colchester Council threw out the plans for the £25million project on 113 acres of land near Little Horkesley in March.

New owners could resurrect controversial Buntings plan

Bunting and Sons appealed against the decision and an inquiry was held earlier this month.

The Government inspector will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Communities, Eric Pickles, who is expected to announce his decision on the project in January.

Opponents have fought the scheme for more than 12 years.

They say it breaches planning regulations and would destroy the peace and tranquility of the Dedham Vale, which is an area of outstanding natural beauty.

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."

Bunting and Sons is Colchester's longest standing business, dating back to 1820. It has 33 staff on its books and Deloitte said the firm would continue to trade "to secure the best outcome".