

MP urges inspector to refuse appeal

A government inspector heard arguments for and against the creation of a visitor centre at Horkesley Park during an appeal hearing last week.

Family firm Bunting and Sons was appealing against the refusal by Colchester Borough Council of its planning application to develop its redundant glasshouse site off the A134 at Great Horkesley into a Stour Valley Visitor Centre.

The business claims the multi-million pound project would be a top tourist attraction while opponents say it would have a disastrous effect on the peace and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale area of outstanding natural beauty.

Tim Yeo, MP for South Suffolk, spoke at the inquiry at Langham Community centre, despite the area falling outside his constituency, as he claimed it would have a substantial impact on Suffolk.

"A major new development in the valuable open countryside of the type now under examination is completely unjustified," he said, adding that the application fails the tests set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

Mr Yeo also told planning inspector Colin Ball, who visited the site on Thursday, of his concerns over the development's potential impacts on traffic, visitor numbers and employment

levels and a lack of need for the project.

"The damage caused by permitting this development will impact negatively on the merits of other tourists attractions in the neighbourhood," said Mr Yeo.

"I remain concerned also that if, as I and many others expect, visitor numbers fall well below the appellant's expectations, then the project will not be viable financially."

The inquiry was shorter than expected after Bunting and Sons decided it would not pay for legal representation at the hearing.

Mr Ball will report back to the Secretary of State and a decision on the appeal is expected in the new year.