

Decision day looms on heritage centre plans

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THE final countdown has started over a decision on controversial plans for a heritage centre in the heart of the countryside.

Colchester Council is due to vote next month on the plans for Horkesley Park heritage and conservation centre.

Now the Stour Valley Action Group, which has fought the proposals from the start, has issued a rallying cry to objectors to make a last-ditch bid to defeat the application.

Bunting and Sons wants to develop a heritage centre on 117 acres of land off London Road,

Great Horkesley, 101 acres of which would be a country park.

The project includes new buildings on the site of old greenhouses, an art gallery, show gardens and specialist nurseries.

But the action group claims the centre would be a glorified retail park which had no place in the Dedham Vale area of outstanding natural beauty.

A raft of documents has been submitted to the council, both for and against the development.

Recent submissions have been sent to the council and it has given a deadline of April 19 for new comments to be made.

The application will be dis-

cussed by councillors at a meeting on May 26.

Will Pavry, chairman of the action group, said: "We encourage everyone to view these new materials and form their own view on the merits of what is now said in support of the application."

More than 31,000 representations have been submitted to Colchester Council, including a petition of 22,839 signatures collected by Bunting and Sons before the application was lodged.

Bunting and Sons claim the £25million centre would attract 485,000 visitors a year – a figure challenged by the objectors.

Stephen Bunting, who is behind

the project, said the documents now on the council's website sought to clarify the elements of the application which was submitted more than two years ago.

He said: "I think we have answered all the questions now."

One of the major objections is the effect of traffic on the quiet country lanes around the site.

Mr Bunting said the company was paying for the existing bus service to be extended.

■ The documents can be viewed on Colchester Council's website at colchester.gov.uk under planning application number 090231, or at horkesleypark.co.uk

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