

Businesses petition against country park

A GROUP of small businesses have banded together to sign an open letter against the proposed Horkesley Park development.

The bosses believe the Buntings and Sons application for a £20 million, 117-acre heritage and conservation centre, would "do more harm than good to the local economy".

Nearly 40 signatures have been added to the letter from enterprises such as Nayland Post Office, Fillpots Nursery, Boxted, Gladwins Farm, Nayland, and Country Roses, Lit-

by **KIRSTY DOWMAN**

*kirsty.dowman@
nqe.com*

tle Horkesley.

Plans submitted to Colchester Council for the heritage park, include a garden centre, art gallery, breeding centre for suffolk punch horses, wildlife areas and a restaurant.

The small businesses claim in their letter to the council: "It will threaten our livelihood, the services we offer and the very fabric of the community."

The owners say the Stour

Valley is already a "dynamic" place with very low levels of unemployment, an area which is "lovely to live and visit".

Stephen Bunting, a partner in Bunting and Sons, said: "As we know almost all of the signatories we are in no doubt that Horkesley Park will have extremely beneficial effects on many of those businesses and at worst be neutral for the rest.

"We believe that scaremongering and misinformation perpetrated by a small but extremely active anti-group has caused individuals and

businesses to be unnecessarily concerned.

"Anyone who does not realise that more and more local shops, post offices, pubs and other such rural businesses are disappearing at an alarming fast rate is not in touch with the real world. Action needs to be taken before it is too late.

"Horkesley Park will help to reverse the downward spiral, which if not arrested will have the inevitable effect of rural villages becoming dormitories for people who go to work further afield.

"Horkesley Park will be an

outstanding heritage and conservation centre and will benefit many people. It will not be as the anti-lobby proclaim a giant retail enterprise."

He added with regard to job creation there would "inevitably be an element of displacement", as a proportion of visitors would have visited other attractions if Horkesley Park did not exist.

But it does not imply that displaced workers will become unemployed as Horkesley Park will generate a substantial number of new job opportunities, Mr Bunting said.