

Letter to CBC from Hugh Coryn MRCVS:

Planning Application No.090231 change of use of land from horticulture/agriculture to leisure, Horkesley Park Conservation and Heritage Centre.

Before the Council votes on this application perhaps they should consider the statements below, always bearing in mind that we have a miniscule Air Force, a vastly reduced Navy, an Army which is fully stretched and tiny British flagged Merchant Fleet to secure our food safety. A few determined French fishermen recently demonstrated our vulnerability.

"Defra data charting agricultural output for the decade up to the end of 2008 revealed a 22 per cent drop in the dairy herd, a 40 per cent drop in pig numbers, a 25 per cent drop in lamb numbers and a 13 per cent drop in beef herd numbers..... a 25 per cent reduction in area used to grow fresh vegetables and a 30 per cent drop in fruit orchards. Overall, Britain's self sufficiency in indigenous food has fallen 9 per cent to 74 per cent and the trade gap in food and drink has risen by 50 per cent in real terms over the decade. .."

Nick Herbert, Shadow Defra Secretary, is quoted: "Importing increasing quantities of food we can produce ourselves is a waste of potential, creates unnecessary vulnerabilities and adds to the mounting pressure on stretched world markets."

One is reminded of the letter from Sir Anthony Bamford, published in the Financial Times in January. "... billions of unnecessary 'food miles' clock up as we import indigenous foods such as potatoes, apples and sugar, causing congestion, road infrastructure costs, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions."

Since the Ministry of Agriculture became Defra, a strong support of farming has shifted to a woolly focus on 'rural affairs', and lack of interest in food self-sufficiency is further evidence of this. The department should remember that the agri-food sector accounts for 6.9 per cent of the total economy and provides 3.6m jobs which, incidentally, is more than four times as many as the car industry in the UK.²

Any one who has real knowledge of things locally will be aware over the past years of the loss of dairy farms, at least five in the immediate vicinity of this application, apple orchards a larger figure and horticulture with the loss of Land Settlement holdings at Boxted and Ardleigh many more, also several farms growing commercial crops of vegetables. Thus, this is not someone else's problem but means job losses here.

This site, with imaginative thinking and the use of modern technology could be made very profitable. There is a market for really fresh English vegetables, salads and herbs both locally and in the East Anglian catering trade, hotels and hospitals, if some one has the wit to exploit it. Indeed it might even provide some real work for those great Suffolk horses.