



Horkesley Park Application 090231

6th April 2011

Colchester Borough Council has now sent letters dated 29th March 2011 to all who originally wrote concerning the HP Application. They invite comment on recent documents on the CBC web site under the headings of:

- Planning Policy Considerations
- Transport and Traffic issues
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments
- "Vision Statement" for the key "Experiences" that form part of this proposal.

Letters or e-mails relating to these **must** be received within 21 days by the Council which means by **April 19th**. They must reference Application Number 090231 and should be addressed to:

**Mr Alistair Day, Environmental and Protective Services, Colchester Borough Council,
PO Box 889, Rowan House, Colchester CO3 3WG.**

They should preferably be sent by e-mail to: planning.services@colchester.gov.uk

Please see the Horkesley Park Key Issues page of our web site for our detailed comments on these, specifically our Newsletter of 27th January 2011 and our letter to CBC of March 2nd 2011.

In summary, the key points are:

1 Planning Policy Considerations:

The Report of the Strategic Policy and Regeneration (SP&R) department of the CBC to which this refers, appeared on the CBC web site in January 2011.

It concludes that HP does not meet the very stringent requirements for a large scale development in open countryside, partially within and adjacent to an AONB, as covered by National and Local policies. To the extent that Regional policies have not yet actually been revoked, it is also considered to be in conflict with these.

We generally welcome and support its findings.

2 Transport and Traffic issues:

The Savell Bird and Axon report to which this refers was commissioned by the CBC to consider matters relating to transportation planning policy. They conclude that:

"the proposed development does not support the aims of National or Local Policy."

We welcome and support the findings of the report.

3 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments:

This refers to the Natural England letter to CBC dated 17th January 2011. In it they say that:

“Following receipt of further information Natural England believes it may be possible to design appropriate mitigation into the proposal to sufficiently ensure that there would no adverse effects on the features of interest for which the Dedham Vale AONB is designated. However until it can be demonstrated that the proposed mitigation measures can be formalized and secured as planning conditions we sustain our objection of 22nd April 2009.”

We do not agree with their findings and, in our view, even the most rigorous mitigation measures would be insufficient to prevent seriously adverse impacts on the Dedham Vale AONB from Horkesley Park and we would encourage you to make this point very strongly in any letter you may write to the CBC.

There are some helpful points in their letter including the strong point that Natural England is disappointed that the Transport Assessment has not been revised to include an investigation of impacts upon the AONB and specifically the narrow lanes, rather than solely the impacts on highways capacity i.e. „A“ roads as is currently the case.

We have always maintained that the impact on the narrow lanes and minor roads of 485,000 additional visitors would be disastrous and we thoroughly endorse Natural England’s concern in this respect. Please re-state these concerns in any letter to CBC.

4 ‘Vision Statement’ for the key ‘Experiences’ that form part of this proposal.

There are three long documents which give Buntings’ vision as to how the Food Experience, the Horticultural Experience and the Lecture Theatre, Exhibition Area etc will all work at Horkesley Park.

The statements for the **Food Experience** and the **Horticultural Experience**, are an attempt to pretend that „black is white“ and that the Food and Horticultural Experiences are not retail activities. How they can pretend that annual income of **£4.7M** from the Food Experience, **£1.75M** from the Specialist Garden Centre with a further **£2.3M** coming from other merchandise sales, is anything other than retail activity, beggars belief.

We encourage you to read the original documents and to write and say that these Vision Statements are no more than a thinly disguised attempt to pretend that HP is not a retail outlet. They must be set to one side and Horkesley Park must be assessed as no more than an out-of-town retail park for planning purposes.

The statement for the **Lecture Theatre, Exhibition Area etc (LTEASR)** describes how this is intended to be used. It makes reference to the LTEASR being available for occasional evening hire for unspecified events. This open-ended statement of intent is quite unacceptable and represents potential for major noise and traffic pollution particularly at weekends when the peace and tranquillity of the AONB is all-important.

We encourage you to write to this effect.

The LTEASR Document specifically deals with the question of visitor numbers. It states that the “The viability of Horkesley Park has been tested by independent specialist consultants, Sykes Leisure Projects, who have a great deal of practical experience.” They have estimated 485,000 visitors in the first year of opening.

The whole rationale for Horkesley Park is built on these assumptions of numbers of visitors and the associated revenue.

If visitor numbers and per capita revenues are wrong then the whole project must fail and the jobs predicted will not be delivered. It is certain that they cannot be secured through a Section 106 Agreement.

Other equally professional consultants and bodies come to very different conclusions to those of Sykes both in respect of visitor numbers and revenues:

- **Nathaniel Lichfield** in their report of March 2010 conclude that “on its own with the proposed admission fee it is unlikely to achieve 275,000 visitors per annum...”
- **The Council’s own Strategy Policy and Regeneration (SP&R) Department’s** report of 2011 states that “the estimate of 485,000 visitors annually is extremely ambitious and implies that the proposal would instantly capture an equivalent market to Colchester Zoo.”
- **Visitor Attraction Consultants** in their Report for the Stour Valley Action Group state that visitor numbers could be somewhere between those of Castle Howard (200,000) and Shugborough (100,000) and with reduced entry fees.
- **The Budenberg Eddis** report included in the SVAG response of April 17th 2009 concludes that the highest possible annual visitor numbers for Horkesley Park would be 170,000 per annum. This number has been derived by comparison with similar attractions as detailed in their report.

Because of the importance of visitor numbers and associated revenue to the viability of the whole project, you may wish to include a comment on this in your letter. We all believe that Horkesley Park has every potential of being a commercial disaster! What happens then?

Newsflash:

Please look at the Newsflash on our web site entitled „Horkesley Park: in Search of Enlightenment“ , which may help you write a letter of response. In a more recent document, Buntings are now seeking to compare HP with the Eden Project in Cornwall! As anyone who has visited the Eden project will know, it is a highly original and well- defined concept housed in stunningly designed buildings, hidden in the countryside in a vast disused quarry. This is very different from the Horkesley Park mishmash, sited in open countryside on the crest of one of the most famous and beautiful valleys in England. All the constituent elements of Horkesley Park can already be found in the area and, more to the point, in their present form , they neither exploit, nor threaten to wreck, the landscape.

Conclusion:

Please write to the CBC on any or all of these points and anything else of particular concern to you.

Horkesley Park must be stopped. Watch our web-site www.stourvalleyactiongroup.org.uk for latest news. Be there on May 26th.

Will Pavry
Chairman: Stour Valley Action Group