

STOUR VALLEY ACTION GROUP PRESS RELEASE

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HORKESLEY PARK PLANNING APPLICATION WITHDRAWN

News broke on Monday that Bunting and Sons have officially withdrawn their planning application for the Horkesley Park Heritage Centre, in reaction to protest from local people and conservation groups.

But Mr Stephen Bunting says that the application will be resubmitted at some point within the next twelve months, when revisions have been made in view of objections raised and in view of the new Colchester Borough Council Strategy Document, Local Development Framework 2006-2021. He is reported in the East Anglian Daily Times as saying that it is a question of details needing to be altered and addressed.

It is hard to see how any amount of tinkering with details will placate the many objectors who have opposed the project on principle.

Over 1000 letters of objection and extensive debate in both local and national press have raised profound doubts about this project that still remain to be answered:

- that an additional 760,000 people a year will terminally destroy the peace and tranquillity of the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- that retail and restaurants will predominate over the 'heritage' elements of this highly commercial £20 million development
- that there may be no Constable works of any note to show in the art gallery
- that the cultural aspects of the plan amount to no more than what one commentator in The Guardian called 'travesty tourism'

The controversy has received extensive press coverage, nationally as well as locally, with articles in the Financial Times, the Daily Telegraph, the Guardian, The Mail on Sunday, Private Eye, and items on the Today Programme and on BBC2's The Culture Show. Interviews have also been held with BBC Radio 4 'You and Yours', and local radio. This week (April 6th) it is the subject of an outspoken leader in Country Life.

The two local MPs whose constituencies will be directly affected, Bernard Jenkin and Tim Yeo, have both spoken against the application. .

Will Pavry, Chairman of the Stour Valley Action Group, said that he was delighted to see the application once more withdrawn by the developers, the second time since its initial submission in 2001. 'We do believe,' he said, 'that Bunting and Sons must now be aware of the very strong opposition.' However he continued, 'It is perhaps too much to hope that Buntings will now take the advice of those who are the true protectors of our countryside and withdraw entirely, allowing people to get on with their lives without the threat of overt commercial exploitation hanging over them for months or years to come.' Campaigners must be prepared to start the fight again if and when the application is resubmitted.

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