



Mr Alistair Day,
Colchester Borough Council
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The Walnut Tree
Little Horkesley
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March 2nd 2011

Dear Mr Day,

Application No 090231, Horkesley Park Heritage and Conservation Centre. Bunting Memorandum dated 08.02.11 ref KSB/314 with attachment H/M/Vision Food Experience Vers 2.2, H/M/Vision Horticultural Experience Vers 2.2, H/M/Vision for the Lecture Theatre, Exhibition Area etc., at Horkesley Park, Version 3. All dated 12.01.11.

We note the additional documents referred to above which have now been lodged by Bunting and Sons in relation to the Horkesley Park Application. We are concerned that so many new documents can be lodged so late into the consideration of this Application by the Applicant and are of the view that the time must now be approaching when the whole Application should go out for re-consultation to all parties in view of the additional information that has been submitted. We do however have some specific comments regarding the documents referred to above:

The Food Experience:

The Bunting letter of 08.02.11 and the Vision Statement must be regarded as an attempt by the Applicant to disguise the inescapable fact that the so-called Food Experience is nothing more than a retail outlet for a large number of small vendors generating income of £4,752,000 in the first year of operation according to the Applicant's business plan.

The Applicant asserts in para 2 of Page 2 of his Memorandum that Horkesley Park already has commitments from over 120 Vendors. No evidence is given for this and we question whether these are binding commitments or just expressions of interest. We would strongly suggest that such evidence is demanded by the Council. The Applicant expects vendor numbers to increase to 300 by the time Horkesley Park opens for which no evidence is given. We question whether the potential Vendors actually know the cost to them of renting space at the proposed Horkesley Park. This cost, added to the customer's entry ticket cost will surely make the whole proposition unattractive and financially unviable for most Vendors.

In Para 4 of the same page, the Applicant also refers to feedback from other farmers and producers indicating a need for the elements of the proposed development. No evidence is given for this statement and such evidence must surely be provided. Contrary to this, there is a letter of objection on the Council website from a large number of local farmers who strongly object to the whole concept of Horkesley Park.

The whole vision for the Food Experience as set out in these documents is no more than just that – a vision. In our view it would not attract the large number of visitors projected, is completely unrealistic as a commercial proposition and would be unenforceable through a Section 106 Agreement. It would very soon deteriorate into

a simple retail outlet without ticket entry if the levels of income and margins necessary for overall financial viability are to be achieved.

The Horticultural Experience:

As with the Food Experience documents, the Vision statement for the Horticultural Experience is no more than an attempt to disguise the fact that the Specialist Garden Centre element is a retail outlet.

It is intended to generate £1,758,000 of revenue with a further £2,307,000 coming from other merchandise sales from various outlets in Horkesley Park as set out in the Applicant's own original documents. It must be regarded as a retail outlet however it is packaged up by the Applicant.

As we have pointed out in our letter of August 31st 2010, it is disingenuous to claim that the Garden Centre is can justify the term 'Specialist'; the Applicant makes it clear in his own documents that it will sell 'gardening products commonly sold from high quality garden centre.' (There is of course no shortage of high quality Garden Centers within a few miles of Horkesley Park).

On Page 4 of the document, the Applicant states that he already has commitments from many suppliers (farmers, horticulturalists, market gardeners and other producers) who want to present, showcase and market their products and/or services, and be part of the supplier group. We question what the Applicant means by 'many' – semantically it only has to be more than one. Also what actual form do these commitments take? Are they binding? Do the potential participants actually know the cost of being an exhibitor or supplier at the proposed Horkesley Park?

As with the Food Experience, we doubt whether the proposed method of operation of the Garden Centre could be enforced through a Section 106 Agreement and that the harsh reality of economics would soon force it to become yet another Garden centre, open generally to the public without ticket entry.

The precedent for not allowing retail sales from the Horkesley Park site has been established by the Council in their ruling on Application 071084 in 2007 when a temporary change of use was allowed for a micro brewery with the very specific proviso that no retail sales should be allowed from the site to "comply with the Council's retail policies." This must surely be retained as a precedent in respect of the Food Experience and the Garden Centre aspects of Horkesley Park.

Vision for the Lecture Theatre and Exhibition Area (LTEASR):

We note the proposed uses for the LTEASR. Whether or not these stated intentions can be enforced by a Section 106 Agreement is a matter for the Council to determine. We do however note that there is mention of the LTEASR being available for occasional evening hire for unspecified events. Without some definition of 'occasional' and the nature of the events and the numbers involved, we find this open-ended statement of intent to be quite unacceptable. It represents a potential for major noise and traffic pollution at weekends in particular when the tranquility of the neighborhood is all-important.

On page 3 of the LTEASR Document, the Applicant specifically deals with the question of Visitor numbers. He 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 per annum.

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

The use of the word 'consultants' is misleading as the Applicant is relying on only one 'consultant' in reaching this figure. Other 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 in para 6.23 that "on its own with the proposed admission fee it is unlikely to achieve 275,000 visitors per annum..."
- 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 Council's own Strategy Policy and Regeneration (SP&R) Department's report of 2011 (undated) 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. The Zoo has taken a number of years to build up its market, and furthermore has an easily understood theme in contrast to the complicated mix at Horkesley Park."
- The SP&R report points out that that Sykes do not provide the assumptions behind the penetration rates used in calculating their visitor numbers . *These are absolutely crucial* in reaching the figure of 485,000.
- 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.
- In our letter of August 31st 2010 we point out the inconsistencies between the Sykes report and their own quoted reference of Anian Leisure Consultants. Anian states that the majority of visitors would travel less than one hour in each direction. Sykes extends this to *two hours* in each direction without any apparent justification thus vastly increasing the potential visitor market. We go on to point out that the penetration rates used by Sykes are not properly justified as also pointed out by SP&R above. In our view, a realistic assessment of potential visitor population and penetration rates yields a number of between 184,000 and 250,000 visitors – far short of the Horkesley Park estimate.

We request that all of the above comments are given due consideration by the Council and put on record. However the Applicant wishes to dress up his offering, Horkesley Park is little more than a retail development in a totally inappropriate countryside location and should be rejected by the Council for all the reasons given by SP&R, Nathaniel Lichfield, Savell Bird & Axon and many, many others.

Yours sincerely

W. L. Pavry
Chairman: Stour Valley Action Group

