

This is why we don't need heritage scheme

Will Pavry, chairman of the Stour Valley Action Group, responds to the Viewpoint in last week's County Standard on the proposed Horkesley Park development

IN the Viewpoint article in the County Standard of December 30, Mr Bunting sets out his case for the controversial Horkesley Park development.

He fails to mention many of the key facts in this proposal which the Stour Valley Action Group (SVAG) and many others find so abhorrent.

Our views are supported by over 1,000 people who have written well informed letters of opposition to the Colchester Borough Council.

In addition, Mr Bunting has failed to convince any of the neighbouring Parish Councils, The Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project, English Heritage, the National Trust, the CPRE amongst others,

who are the true custodians of our countryside.

Our chief concern is that there will be irreversible damage done to the fragile and unique nature of the Dedham Vale AONB if this development is allowed to proceed.

This will certainly occur if the 760,000 visitors a year (a number not disclosed in his article - three times the population of Milton Keynes), visit the site and most of whom will travel by private car.

The impact on local roads and villages will be quite unacceptable. The Countryside Commission published a document in 1997 about the Dedham Vale prepared by Mr Bunting's own national specialists, LDA Associates.

In this they say that "development that will undermine the rural character of the valley sides and place vehicular pressures on the small lanes should be avoided" and in their concluding paragraph they say that "the essence of the Dedham Vale AONB landscape lies in its unspoilt, traditional character.

This will remain so provided it is continually managed with vigilance, sensitivity and care". How can these same national specialists justify the Horkesley Park plan that so clearly flouts these two provisions?

The Colchester Borough Plan adopted in 2004 is rightly protective of the AONB and makes it clear that development in or likely to have an impact on the Dedham Vale AONB

will be subject to special scrutiny and acceptable only if there is overriding national need for the development in that particular location.

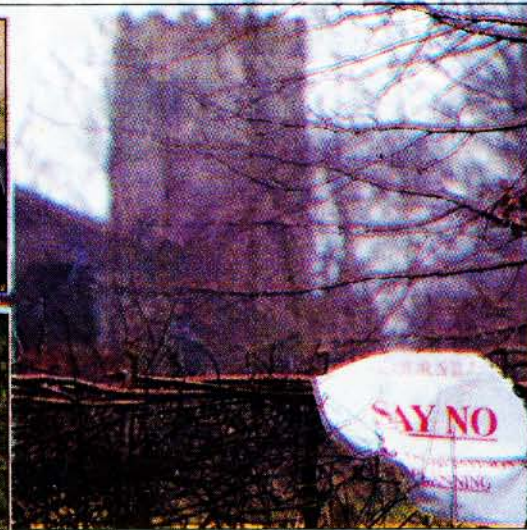
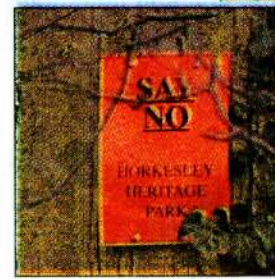
With the Flatford Mill Centre and the extensive network of public footpaths and free open spaces in the Vale, it is simply not possible to claim that there is this overriding national need. Furthermore we contend that people do not want the countryside packaged up and served to them on a plate as Mr Bunting would wish.

The Bunting Development is actually no more or less than a very large retail complex. The Heritage elements are entirely subordinate to the 100,000 sq ft of floor space devoted to the proposed garden centre, the vast restaurant and café facilities with 1125 covers and additional shopping areas.

These elements are forecast to generate over 80% of the sales and are deemed necessary for its financial viability. Equally abhorrent is the D2 Planning classification applied for which could allow virtually unfettered activities on the site if granted. Also why does a Heritage Centre need to be open 364 days per year with its restaurants open to midnight every night?

This is simply commercial exploitation of the site which has little or nothing to do with Heritage or the celebration of the English Countryside.

Mr Bunting also mentions the 460



● Signs of times - some of Great Horkesley's residents' views. (47133-4/5/7)

jobs that will be generated. Careful reading of the documents shows that only 195 of these are in his 'gift' with the rest being forecast in the supply chain and many of these outside the region and maybe outside the country. There is absolutely no guarantee that these additional jobs would eventuate just because of Horkesley Park.

What is certain is that many existing jobs would be lost in local businesses who will have their lives ruined by this monster retail complex on their doorstep.

Concerning the open letter of objection presented by 15 farmers to CBC and published in the County Standard, any one who knows the area will recognise that the leading names on this list (Rix, Taylor and Copesey) are those of farming fami-

lies who have worked this land for several generations - and all generations have been farmers, not horticulturalists or businessmen, and this despite current pressures on the industry.

Other, newer, names, of both farmers and contractors, do inevitably reflect recent changes of ownership, but represent the continuity of investment and understanding and labour that is what this countryside really needs.

Together these farmers speak for a large swathe of the Stour Valley, and almost all of the land immediately surrounding that of the Buntings. Their views should not be lightly dismissed.

We contend that Colchester does not need the Horkesley Heritage Centre.