

Note for members

The Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park

Application No. 120965

Responses by 26th July 2012

to

Colchester Borough Council, reference Application 120965,
Environmental and Protective Services, PO Box 889, Rowan House,
Sheepen Road, Colchester, CO3 3WG or
Email to: planning.services@colchester.gov.uk

The main points of concern:

1. Impact on the Stour Valley Area of Outstanding Beauty ('AONB'):

91% of the site is within the AONB (Chantry Gardens and Country Park) The newly introduced National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) accords the highest status of protection in relation to AONBs. In particular, paragraph 116 of the NPPF states that planning permission should be refused for major developments in these areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. There are no exceptional circumstances nor is this development in the public interest. Whatever the applicant's claim, the loss of peace and tranquillity in the surrounding countryside will be irreversible.

2. Traffic:

This latest application has not reduced the potential impact of Horkesley Park on our local community. Predicted visitor numbers are estimated at 316,000 per annum with the consequent impact on traffic through the villages and local lanes as well as on the A134. Suffolk Highways did not object to the earlier application because their brief only covered A roads and little consideration was given to the impact on country lanes and the narrow medieval streets of Nayland and surrounding villages. The applicant's transport strategy is ineffective in dealing with the huge increase in traffic movements anticipated by the predicted visitor numbers. In particular traffic movements from the northern approach of the A12 (which might access the site via the B1068 and from the A12 exit at Stratford St. Mary) will not be mitigated by the applicant's proposals, which assumes access will be made from Colchester (A12/J28). The tranquillity of a substantial part of the AONB will be destroyed.

3. The Need? Access to the Countryside:

Similar activities and displays as proposed by the applicant are found at other local centres. Access to the countryside is freely available through footpaths, bridleways and quiet country lanes throughout the Stour Valley. At the moment the public enjoy access to the AONB without charge. The applicant is charging an entrance fee to celebrate an asset which is freely available.

4. Lack of Business viability: In spite of efforts by the applicants to re-state their case, there is no doubt that this remains a retail development in the countryside, offering paid-for facilities which can be found locally either free of charge or by supporting local businesses. Although the latest plan states that retail space has been reduced by 80%, there is nothing to stop the applicant using any of the other covered space for retail.

In the 2009 Application the figures suggested that more than 50% of revenues would have to come from sales of goods and services to be viable. Nothing has changed in this regard

5. Contrary to local and national planning guidelines.

The previous application was rejected on a number of key planning policy grounds. Many of these reasons for rejection still apply. Colchester's well-developed Core Strategy and Local Development framework would almost certainly preclude development on the Horkesley Park site as it is not designated as such and the new NPPF (see 1 above) gives great weight to Local Plans.

In particular the following Development policies are in conflict with the application: -

5.1 *Development Plan policy DP9 states that employment development proposals in the countryside should be of a small scale and should not harm the rural character of the area either by the nature and level of activity or any other detrimental effects such as noise and pollution - This development is not small scale and will cause harm to the nature of the area by the loss of tranquility.*

5.2 *Development Plan policy DP10 states that proposals must be compatible with the rural character of the surrounding area and avoid causing undue harm to the open nature of the countryside or designated sites. Where accessibility is poor, proposals should be of a small scale and/or comprise the conversion of suitable rural buildings – The development is incompatible with the area and accessibility is poor but the development is not small scale.*

5.3 *Policy DP10 states that the urban areas of Colchester will be the focus for larger scale tourist, leisure and cultural facilities and accommodation in-line with the need to concentrate development at the most sustainable and accessible location – The site is clearly outside the Colchester urban area and it is neither a sustainable nor an easily accessible location*

Summary: We trust the Planning Committee will decide that the application does not accord with the Colchester Development Plan and is contrary to a number of key areas of the NPPF, and reject the application.

Posters and car stickers will be ready in early July.

Further information will be sent to members and put on the Society's website when they are available.

**There will be a SVAG meeting on Monday 4th July at 7pm in
Little Horkesley Village Hall.
Please come and bring your friends.**