

TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (as amended)

SECTION 78

THE TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING APPEALS (DETERMINATION BY INSPECTORS) (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE) (ENGLAND) RULES (“the Inspectors Rules”)

Appeal by Bunting & Sons (“the Appellant”) against a refusal of planning permission by Colchester Borough Council (“the Council”) for the change of use and development of land at London Road, Little Horkesley, Colchester, CO6 4AJ such land being known as Horkesley Park (“the Appeal Site”) to form ‘The Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park’ comprising a country park; art and craft studios (‘The Chantry’); public gardens; a central building complex to provide an indoor display ring; ‘Suffolk Punch breeding centre’; entrance building, shop, cafe, ‘field to fork’, ‘Farming through the Ages’, Active Learning, ‘Nature Watch, and retained greenhouse as demonstration nursery and gardens, and ‘Energy Centre’; main and overflow car parks, service yard, highway improvements, ancillary works and infrastructure provision

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF MR JOHN ALEXANDER FOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE NAYLAND WITH WISSINGTON CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Appeal Reference:	APP/A1530/A/13/2195924
Council Reference:	120965
Our Reference:	JA/22.08.13
Date of Inquiry:	1 – 4 October, 8 – 11 October and 15 – 18 October 2013 (12 days)

John Alexander of Longwood Barn Fen Street Nayland Suffolk CO64HT will say: -

1 I am a Chartered Engineer and Chairman of a civil engineering company. I am also the Chairman of the Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society, which has a membership of approximately 250 members, the overwhelming majority of whom are against the implementation of the Stour Valley Visitor Centre. The Society was established for the public benefit in 1974, one of its aims being to secure the preservation and protection of features of historic or public interest in the parish of Nayland and Wiston and areas immediately adjacent.

2 The Society has previously outlined its objections, both at the time of the planning application and in connection with this appeal. It stands by its comments, but, as other objectors are dealing with the issues it has raised, I wish to confine my evidence to two aspects of harm that will be caused to the Dedham Vale AONB (“AONB”) if this scheme is implemented, namely (a) the impact of increased traffic upon villages such as Nayland, and upon the delightful and tranquil country lanes which play an integral part in the enjoyment of the AONB and (b) the impact of increased visitor numbers upon the villages of the AONB, in particular the village of Nayland. The issue of harm arises from paragraphs 115 and 116 of the NPPF (in particular the third criteria to paragraph 116) and from Colchester Borough Council Development Policies DP9, DP10 and DP22.

3 The increased vehicular traffic flows will cause harm to the AONB in three ways. Firstly visitors travelling to and from the Appeal Site using unapproved routes; secondly visitors exploring by car the narrow lanes of the AONB following their visit to the Appeal Site, and thirdly visitors specifically driving from the Appeal Site to other significant tourist locations within the AONB e.g. Dedham and Flatford Mill using the narrow country lanes as their route.

4 I deal firstly with the issue of access to and from the Appeal Site. In evidence at the committee hearing, the Council’s Highways officer confirmed that no account is currently taken of the impact of satellite navigation systems in identifying likely traffic flows.

5 One of the committee members of our Society undertook an exercise reviewing recommended routes by Google Maps, Tom Tom, the RAC and the AA. I attach a copy of his report numbered TP5NWCS2, from which it will be noted that Tom Tom, Google Maps and the RAC recommend the use of minor roads and not the proposed recommended routes.

6 There are a number of routes from the A12, which can have a significant impact upon local villages. Mr. Pavry has already mentioned the route commencing at the Eight Ash Green exit from the A12 (Junction 26). By way of another example I attach to my statement a plan numbered "TP5NWCS3" showing a satellite navigation route produced by Google Maps commonly found on Smart Phones. Visitors travelling south on the A12 will exit the A12 at the junction with the B1029 and take the first turning on the right into School Lane, a particularly narrow single-track road for much of its length. This road leads to Higham where it joins the B1068 leading to Stoke by Nayland where a left turn on to the B1087 takes you into Nayland. From Nayland the Appeal Site will be accessed from the A134. In addition to School Lane there are many parts of this route where it is difficult for two vehicles to pass each other at the same time. In particular the road just to the east of Higham Bridge is often limited to a single car width as a result of residents' cars being parked on the road. Similarly the approach to Stoke by Nayland is affected by cars parking outside the shop on the southern side of the B1068.

7 Nayland is the village most likely to be severely affected however. This is an early medieval village and is not designed to take current traffic flows let alone any increased flow. Particular bottlenecks are Birch Street, where the B1087 enters the village; most of the length of Bear Street and Mill Street leading to High Street and Court Street. I attach a map of the road network in Nayland marked "TP5NWCS4". Each number on TP5NWCS4 represents the location of the position shown on the photograph bearing the same number in the bundle of photos attached to this statement marked "TP5NWCS5". The two photographs numbered 1 show a view of Birch Street, facing east. Resident's cars effectively limit this road to a single vehicle width. The photograph numbered 2 shows the Mill Street, Birch Street and Bear Street junction view looking west. The three photographs numbered 3 shows the road width approximately half way along Bear Street looking west. The photograph

numbered 4 shows Mill Street looking North where the road width is limited to a single vehicle width and the photograph numbered 5 shows High Street looking south west. It is clearly evident that every through route in Nayland is at some stage limited to a single vehicle width.

8 I am aware that the Northern Approach Road (“the NAR”) is intending to link the A12 from junction 28 to the A134 and that it is anticipated this link will be completed by 2014. However as revealed by the report TP5NWCS2 annexed, Tom Tom is already aware of junction 28 but chooses to send traffic travelling northwards on the A12 and eastwards on the A120, via minor roads. Furthermore the NAR will not assist in dealing with traffic exploring the AONB or traffic driving through the AONB to tourist destinations such as Dedham

9 I am also aware that the Highways departments of Essex County Council and Suffolk County Council did not object to this application but I respectfully submit that they did not fully consider the possible impact upon the tranquility of the lanes and congestion in the villages within the AONB. The appellant however recognizes this risk and states at paragraph 16.10.40 on page 209 of the Planning Committee Report (“PCR”) “The Horkesley Park website will include travel information and state that narrow lanes should not be used by visitors”.

10 Paragraph 16.10.59 of the PCR estimates that the Appeal Site will attract in August 418 cars on Fridays; 452 cars on Saturdays and 685 cars on Sundays. Nayland, in particular, is already subject to regular traffic congestion and any increase in through traffic, even if one quarter of the anticipated cars were to pass through the village, can only exacerbate the problem.

11 I now turn to the issue of visitors who are tempted to see the real Dedham Vale, following their visit to the Appeal Site. The appellant has described this development as an interpretation of the Stour Valley. There is an inescapable conclusion that visitors will be either expressly or implicitly encouraged to discover the AONB. As by the appellant’s own estimation 82% of visitors will arrive by car there must be a strong likelihood that they will be tempted to have a look at the Dedham Vale using their own vehicles. Paragraph 16.10.45 of the PCR concludes that

“it is ... prudent to assume that only one third of visitors would visit the open countryside”. It should be noted that one third of the appellant’s anticipated visitors will amount to over 105,000 visitors!

12 I have already identified pinch points in the road system within the village of Nayland. On the map numbered “TP5NWCS6” I have identified and coloured by a broken brown line a number of lanes within the AONB or in close proximity to it, all of which are narrow, have limited places for two vehicles to pass and epitomize the tranquil nature of the Dedham Vale AONB. Even if one third of the anticipated visitors (see reference to 16.10.45 above) are tempted on to these lanes traffic chaos will ensue and the peaceful nature of the AONB will be destroyed.

13 I would also suggest that this inquiry should consider the likelihood of visitors choosing to drive from the appeal site to Dedham or Flatford. I attach as document “TP5NWCS7” a map showing a SatNav route from the Appeal Site to Flatford Mill. The visitor will turn left from the Appeal Site onto the A134 and then turn right onto the B1087, passing through the village of Nayland, and up to Stoke by Nayland where they will turn right onto the B1068, passing through Higham and either turning right to pass through Stratford St. Mary to get to Dedham or staying on the B1068 to access the A12 to get to Flatford.

14 Neither of the County Highways’ reports nor the appellant’s Traffic Assessment appear to have taken account of the combined traffic flows of visitors (a) driving to and from the Appeal Site and (b) subsequently touring around the AONB after their visit and (c) driving to particular tourist sites within the AONB. The risk of material traffic chaos and consequent damage to the quiet lanes and villages of the AONB has not been properly assessed.

15 My third identified area of potential harm is that which increased visitor numbers upon villages such as Nayland may cause. This medieval village, which lies within the AONB, is the nearest substantial historic settlement to the Appeal Site. It enjoys connections with John Constable. Two of his aunts used to live here and the Grade 1 listed church of St. James contains one of the few original paintings by Constable to remain in its original position. There is no public car park; no public

convenience and as I have demonstrated, every through route in the village at some stage is reduced to a single vehicle width. Parking is already a problem in the village. Although villagers are permitted to use the Village Hall Car Park, it is not always open (it is shut when the Hall is being used for certain bookings), it is not signposted, it is accessed by a single-track road and in any event is neither designed nor used for visitor parking. Nayland is an ancient village, with many houses built up to the pavement and very little off-street parking. As a result most residents have no alternative to parking outside their homes on the already narrow public highway. Nayland is likely to be a natural destination for visitors to the Appeal Site and any substantial increase in visitors travelling by car will cause substantial damage to its tranquil nature.

16 In conclusion if permission is granted for this development, the harm to the villages and lanes of the AONB will be disastrous. The unsustainable location of the Appeal Site will draw significant traffic, and visitors will, in all likelihood, seek to enjoy the Vale, and use the narrow lanes and roads. The tranquility of the Dedham Vale, and Nayland in particular, will be destroyed by the Stour Valley Visitor Centre, if permission is granted and the harm to the Vale will be irreparable. Ironically, the Stour Valley Visitor Centre would destroy the very countryside, which it claims to celebrate.