

## FEARS OVER PLANS FOR MORE FLIGHTS OVERHEAD

# Dedham gearing up for new noise fight

By REBECCA CREED

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THE battle to protect the peace and tranquillity of Dedham Vale seems to be a constant one.

The stunning countryside, made famous by the paintings of John Constable, is protected as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

But residents and campaigners have spent the past few years battling aircraft noise and what they believe would be a damaging visitor centre.

Now, groups like the Dedham Vale Society face another battle to preserve Constable Country for future generations.

Last week, a consultation was launched to assess the impact of changes to flight paths into London City and London Biggin Hill airports.

The proposals would see an extra two flights an hour in the daytime from the two airports, across the Dedham Vale.

This is not the first time the society has battled Nats (National Air Traffic Services), which provides air traffic services in the UK, and the Civil Aviation Authority.

In December 2005, it took both to the High Court.

After four days of legal dispute, the judge, Mr Justice Newman, came out on the side of the society.

President of the society, Robert Erith, said this new consultation could be the beginning of a new battle.

He said: "Dedham Vale will be affected by those changes, but as yet we don't know quite what it will be.

"This is only the first part of the consultation - there will be further consultations into Gatwick and Stansted.

"We would consider all options in relation to these current changes.

"The Dedham Vale area of outstanding natural beauty was established to preserve the tranquil land and enhance its beauty - that is the whole point and that is why we fight for it.

"I think Constable would recognise the landscape if he were to look at it now and we want to preserve it for future generations."

Mr Erith said the recession had seen fewer flights over the Dedham Vale area in recent years.

He added: "I would say we have seen improvements since 2008.

"The amount of traffic using Stansted airport has fallen because of the recession.

"There are other factors to be taken into account, such as the noise factor. That is why we are having the consultation - to find out what people think.

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■ Tranquil - Dedham Vale is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Picture: Allen Burton



■ Uncertain times - Robert Erith

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"I personally think we should put flight paths where they already have lots of noise."

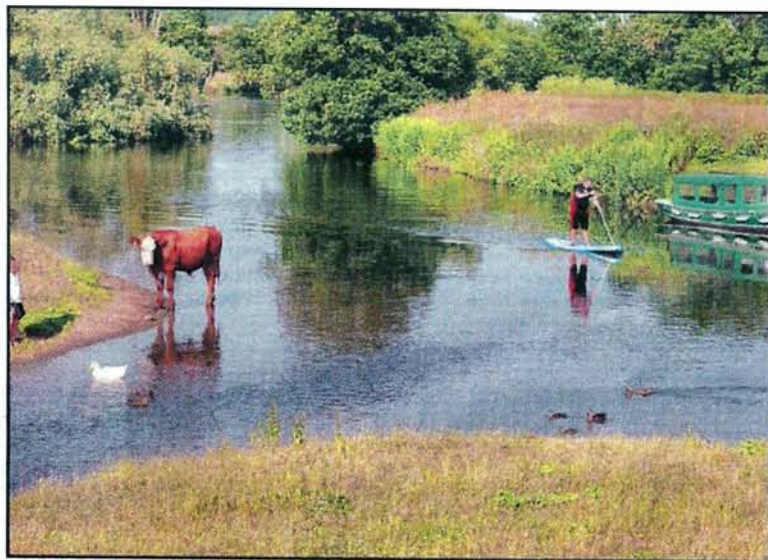
Meanwhile, the society is looking at the possibility of giving Dedham Vale even more protection by applying for World Heritage Status.

If successful, the area would be placed alongside ancient temples in Cambodia, national parks in the USA and, closer to home, the Tower of London.

The status is awarded by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, to encourage the protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage, which is considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.

But an answer to the bid, made in 2009, is still awaited.

Mr Erith said: "It is a very long haul - the reason for that being the organisation has lots to con-



■ Picture perfect - the area was an inspiration to Constable

sider. It is also establishing campaigns in the third world countries.

"It is going to be difficult and we will have to look at it long term."

The bid for Heritage status came at the same time as the society was fighting plans to build the Stour Valley Visitor Centre at Horkesley Park.

Last week, the long-running saga took another twist as it was revealed Bunting & Sons, the applicant, had entered administration.

However, the battle is not over as the administrators say if an appeal held this month against a

decision by Colchester Council to refuse the plans goes in the Bunting family's favour, the visitor centre could still be built.

Mr Erith said: "The arguments we put forward as to why it shouldn't go ahead are overwhelming from our perspective, but we will have to see if the inspector agrees."

A decision is expected next year.

Whatever happens, the protectors of Dedham Vale expect further struggles in the future.

The consultation on flight paths runs until January 21. To have your say visit [londonairspaceconsultation.co.uk](http://londonairspaceconsultation.co.uk).