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Looks like YES! for leisure plan

ONE of the largest leisure projects in Europe came dramatically closer to reality today when the Government revealed it would not be intervening in the planning procedure.

That essentially means the Secretary of State is giving the £300 million YES! project her blessing - and final planning decisions for the resort proposed for the ex-coalfield site beside Rother Valley Country Park can be made at local level.

Steve Lewis, chief executive officer of Stock Exchange-listed developers Oak Holdings, today said that could mean construction beginning "by Easter next year, at the latest".

He and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council today welcomed the news which could lead to 2,700 new jobs on the 327 acre site and a clean-up of contaminated land.

By David Dunn

"It is an unequivocal endorsement of the case we have brought forward and this approval has come some months in advance of our expectations and is a major step forward for us," said Mr Lewis.

"It is very rare that projects of this size are not called in for Government consideration and thus we are delighted the Government has given the council the power to grant the YES! project with planning permission.

"It has taken out a potential delay.

"Naturally there are still various hurdles to jump but we are nevertheless confident construction at the site will soon be underway."

In May members of the council's planning board voted unanimously in favour of the project. Now the Government Office for

Yorkshire and Humber has entrusted local planners with responsibility for the planning application.

In its correspondence with the council the Government Office stated "local planning authorities are normally best placed to make decisions relating to their areas" and that "having carefully consid-

existing foot and cycles paths and "improve and enlarge" the river course to integrate and extend the 1,000 acre country park.

It has a number of leading entertainment, leisure and utility operators lined up and has secured an agreement with E.ON, the world's largest investor-owned power and gas company.

Rotherham council leader Coun Roger Stone said: "The YES! Project will transform this part of South Yorkshire.

"Those benefits will spread far beyond the project itself, into local communities and local economies - and the local environment.

Adam Wilkinson, executive director of Rotherham's Economic and Development Services, added: "Some people thought this was too ambitious a scheme, but together we're showing we can bring it to reality - and it really will be a sensation."