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United front over £300m leisure project

A BORDER dispute between Sheffield and Rotherham over a proposed £300m leisure development has been resolved.

The two authorities are now united over the future of the YES! project at an old coal mine next to Rother Valley Country Park.

Initial proposals to include a theatre, cinema and bowling alley have been dropped, with the emphasis switching to sports facilities designed to complement the country park. Two of the main attractions will be a "world class" white-water canoeing course and an extreme sports venue.

Also lined up for the proposed Yorkshire Entertainment Sensation complex at Wales Bar are two hotels – one of them a four-star resort spa – a multi-media centre, restaurants and a high-tech golf driving range.

Although Rotherham was keen to say 'yes' to YES!, primarily because of the implications for the local economy and jobs, Sheffield made clear it was saying 'no'.

City council leaders were concerned that the development could hit business in the city centre. There were also specific fears that a theatre capable of staging West End-style productions was a potential threat to the City Hall and the Arena.

A major dispute was brewing, with the likelihood that the parties would end up

By PETER KAY

arguing their respective cases before John Prescott, who would make the final decision.

Now peace has broken out with the announcement of an agreement between developer Oak Holdings plc, Rotherham Borough Council and Sheffield City Council. The strategy has also met with approval by Yorkshire Forward, the regional development agency.

Rotherham leader Coun Roger Stone said: "We are delighted to have been able to work together with Sheffield, Yorkshire Forward and the developers to come up with an excellent scheme that will benefit residents and visitors in both authorities."

"This is an exciting development that will complement Rother Valley Country Park that is used and enjoyed by thousands of people each year from Rotherham, Sheffield and beyond."

Coun Jan Wilson, leader of Sheffield City Council, said good progress had been made in resolving complicated issues.

"I am pleased that our colleagues in Rotherham and Yorkshire Forward together with the developers have worked

together with us to examine these proposals and to look seriously at Sheffield's concerns."

Oak Holdings executive chairman Malcolm Savage said: "We have received so much interest in the sporting and daytime leisure aspects of the scheme that we have decided to focus on these to complement the surroundings of the Rother Valley Country Park."

"We anticipate that the scheme will now move forward quickly with the combined advantages of having support from nearby councils, support from Peel Holdings, which is the developer behind the nearby Robin Hood airport and, of course, our prospective partners Venue Solutions and Sony with which we have just signed Memorandums of Understanding."

The project is calculated to become the largest of its type in Europe, regenerating 320 acres of the former Pithouse West mine. Around 2,700 jobs are envisaged.

Proposals will now go through the formal planning process conducted by Rotherham Borough Council because the land is within its boundaries. Details will still have to be referred to the Government because of the scale and green belt location of the scheme.