



Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council held on Thursday, 29th February 2024 at 7pm at Cuxton Library

Present: Cllr Chalker (Chair), Cllr Thorley, Cllr Wilson, Cllr Nightingale, Cllr Porter, Cllr White, Cllr Chamberlain, Cllr Vye & Ward Cllr, Phil Filmer.

In attendance: Mrs N Jackson - Clerk

Gary & Steven from MDCVUK

22 members of the public

231) Apologies for absence

Cllr Jensen, Cllr Burley & Cllr Manning gave their apologies.

It was resolved to accept these apologies.

232) Declarations of Interest (DPI, conflict of interest and personal interests) and alterations to the Register

None

233) Presentation from Vineyard Farms

After introductions, the chairman explained that the council were happy to hear the presentation, as part of their consultations, but would not be forming a decision solely on the strength of it, nor making any comments at this time.

A hard copy presentation was shared with councillors detailing revised plans/proposed site for a winery at Upper Bush.

Supporting presentation points:

- History of the planning process. Winery planning application deferred in Dec 2022. Proposal refused March 2023. Appeal lost on AONB grounds.
- There are vines in the ground already yielding 3-4 tonnes, they need somewhere to process those grapes.
- The thought process was to keep the winery and ancillary buildings next to the vineyard, although 2 other sites were explored (later revealed to both be in the Upper Bush area as well).
- Fosters and Partners, and Carter Jonas were employed to help create the winery in Upper Bush.
- Vines are similar to champagne, due to good ground.
- They have sister companies in Provence and are a big producer in France.
- They have a focus on sustainability, carbon neutrality and biodiversity.

- MDC holding company has 700 acres plus, increasing to 800 acres. The scale of the vineyards mean they can make affordable wine, £15 per bottle.
- The “Wine Experience” – it is quite normal for other vineyards to have the processing site next to the vines.
- They have recently acquired land in Cobham, up to Cobham roundabout.
- Significant changes to their proposal include reduced use of the road network.
- New building still has a high-end design perspective (later clarified that the alternative is rudimentary processing field / buildings).
- Their application for a ‘shed’ / plan b / storage space has been ‘parked’ pending approval, whilst they are talking about a new application for a winery. (It was later confirmed that they could move the building proposed for Tyre field).
- In the previous case, the enquiry found that based on the ratios of planned space designated to each activity i.e. bottling, storing, leisure etc, the building could be classed as ‘agricultural’ and therefore was an appropriate use of greenbelt land.
- There were / are impacts, with varying degrees of harm, to the AONB, including car parking and access to the site.
- The new building proposed is 55,000m³ smaller (one third) than the original proposal - with substantial maturing cellar removed.
- Remote car park offering park and ride across their land, taking traffic away from Bush Road. Disabled car parking only on site.
- The design features a timber roof – and will have no visitor access to that roof.
- Their energy centre a biogas burner where pumice is burned to make high-grade fertiliser. It is a neat and sustainable solution to heat the site with no waste products. They are willing to discuss it, but the alternatives do involve taking the waste away.
- They confirmed that this was the very early stages of a full consultation, and they are looking to respond to the inspectors’ findings / comments, as well as consult with the local communities.
- They have spoken to Medway Cabinet and Medway Council Planning Department. They will be speaking to Cobham.

Councillors and members of the public then asked questions that resulted in the following clarifications:

- The removal of the maturing cellar is due to greater demand for Prosecco than Champagne, which can be produced in tanks within 30 days.
- They are in conversations with a Medway Swale Estuary Partnership about being part of a proposed National Nature Reserve and believe that they would be a perfect hub for that.
- Learning lessons about previous consultations with the village, they intend to be more thorough with that this time around.
- Councillors made the point that they felt that the previous 106 offer was insufficient.

- Several members of the public stated that they felt that this meeting was a good step forward in what they saw as a more collaborative approach. They were asked to share information on their website.
- Following confirmation that a restaurant was still included in the plans, a query was raised about whether the new building, with its reduced fermenting capacity, would still meet the ratios required to be considered 'primarily agricultural' use.
- They confirmed that though still a large building it is being built purely to process the local vines, they are not building extra capacity to process grapes brought in from other areas.
- They currently have no plans for Keeper's Barn, at Upper Bush, but do have planning permission.
- They have no intention of building houses on their land as they have already invested hugely in their aims of creating the UK's largest organic vineyard and did not put their site forward to the Medway Local Plan for housing consideration.
- The access road to the previously proposed car park will remain for park and ride collections, staff and disabled visitors.
- The logistics vehicles could be made smaller and scheduled to avoid peak times when moving through Cuxton, although this was mentioned before and has not happened.

Gary and Steven, from MDCVUK, and all members of the public left.

234) Information Exchange

Councillors discussed the presentation and agreed that it would be good to engage with other local parish councils / clerks.

The Chairman proposed that the clerk contact Cobham and Luddesdown clerks to discuss. This was seconded by Cllr Thorley and agreed by unanimous vote.

It was resolved that the clerk will contact Cobham and Luddesdown Parish Councils.

235) Members Future Agenda Items

None

The Chairman closed the meeting at 20.30hrs

Next meeting 21st March 2024, 7pm at Cuxton Library

Signed

Chairman

On the

day of

2024