

From: Richard Balfour-Lynn
Sent: 24 February 2019 10:47
To: Lorraine Neale
Cc: Leroy Bradley; Sarah Easton
Subject: Minor amendment to the Hush Heath Licence

Dear Lorraine

I felt it important to rectify a number of misconceptions and misunderstandings arising from our application to amend our premises licence. Please do submit this email to the Licensing Committee.

Firstly many complainants have referred to the Winery increasing our opening hours. This is not correct. In the winter months we are open from 10am to 5pm, and in summer from 10am to 6pm. We do not intend to alter this. The reference to 7pm (that everyone assumes we are changing our times to), was put on our amendment application to demonstrate that we will not open in the evenings. We are not, and have no intention of being open in the evenings, apart from up to 12 permitted events in the year.

There is some confusion surrounding our permitted opening times and days of permissible operation allowed under the grant of our current planning permission. To be clear there are no restrictions on any of our opening days or times of operation under our current 2017 planning permission.

Secondly there appears to be an assumption that we intend to turn into a bar, restaurant or large scale hospitality and events venue. This is completely incorrect. We are a sophisticated, well run and internationally recognised winery. Visit England have just awarded us their highest accolade of a gold standard for Visit England Visitor Attractions and we are immensely proud of this achievement. Our visitors are typically aged between 30 - 75 and enjoy walking the Estate through the vineyards, apple orchards and ancient oak woodlands, learning about English wine making and tasting and enjoying our wines, and with the grant of our minor licence amendment, being able to enjoy a glass of wine whilst looking at our stunning views across the estate.

As we are open to the public for walk-ins, it is not appropriate nor desired to be an events space which will restrict those visitors. For this reason, we have decided from the outset to have no wedding events here, which usually take place in the evenings, and can be noisy. Event spaces allow furniture to be rearranged, as in hotels, we do not.

Equally we are not, and have no intention of becoming a restaurant. We employ no chefs or cooks at the Winery. What we do, however, is offer customers three choices of cold sharing platters which are prepared by our Cellar Door staff. The three platters require no cooking, and are quite simply, a plate of local cheeses, local charcuterie, or local vegetables. These are available between 12pm-3pm during the winter and 12pm-5pm in the summer. As is stated on our website, we have acquired a number of local pubs, The Goudhurst Inn and The Tickled Trout for example, where we suggest guests enjoy lunch or dinner or boutique hotel rooms for those visiting the area overnight.

Hush Heath Winery fulfils some of the major government and local government objectives of creating employment for local residents, enhancing the local economy through increased

tourism, and growing tourism in the rural economy; with all the added benefits. Hush Heath is a family business, and is supported by the vast majority of local residents who not only enjoy our facilities, but are also proud of our world-beating wines that are distributed throughout the UK and exported to the USA, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, mainland China and a number of European countries. Indeed, our local MP Helen Grant brought Liz Truss the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to our Winery a few weeks ago and they both spoke in glowing terms of our wine tourism and facilities we have in the heart of Kent.

I also attach below, a strong letter of support for both our tourism facilities and the removal of the minor licensing condition, from the Deputy Chief Executive of Visit Kent.

Hush Heath comprises 400 acres of farmland and our Winery building. The whole estate is run with conservation and biodiversity in mind, and by way of example, in late autumn last year we planted over 15 acres of wild flower meadowland around the Winery, in all the adjacent fields. This encourages native birdlife, wildlife and insects. We now have over 80 acres of vineyards planted, 10 acres of apple orchards, and considerable arable and woodland. It should be noted, that all agricultural vehicle movements take place across the estate and not on public roads.

The production of wine predominantly from grapes grown at Hush Heath, is our main business, both in terms of square footage and turnover. We do not make wine for third parties and this is an important distinction from other commercial Wineries. In other words, we are not a contract winemaker. Thus much less vehicle movements than other wineries.

We have a tasting room which again remains ancillary to our business of wine production. Indeed, our wines are now distributed at Tesco, M&S, Co-op, Waitrose and Morrisons. As well as being distributed through our UK distributor Liberty Wines. The relevance of this, is that there is very little traffic relating to the distribution of our wines as our production is sold through a very limited customer base, who account for a considerable majority of our production. This is important from a local road user perspective

We have permission both from a planning and premises licence perspective, to allow visitors to sample our wines. The fact that visitors will in addition be able to enjoy a glass of our wine at the same time will not in any way increase visitor numbers nor road traffic, particularly as explained earlier, we are not a bar or restaurant, and are not open in the evenings. It would seriously harm the visitor experience if we were not allowed to let our guests enjoy a glass of our wine when visiting the Winery. Indeed I cannot think of any other winery, open to the public that does not allow this. Visitors will only be allowed to drink products produced by Hush Heath and this does not include spirits.

Complainants have referred to coaches. Since we first opened in 2010, we have in the summer months about one coach per week visit us, usually with a tour from either Belgium, Germany or France. This has not increased, and for the record no coaches have visited us since September 2018. However, from around May to August, we will continue to receive up to one coach per week.

In terms of passenger travel, due to drink driving restrictions, visitors; if coming by car, usually have one non-drinking designated driver and three passengers. There have been to date since first opening in 2010 no road accidents, crashes, driving into ditches, drunken behaviour, or arrests by the police. Indeed we have received no police complaints. Hush

Heath is a responsible organisation and we operate a Challenge 25 system, whereby if a person looks under 25 years old we ask them for sufficient ID and do not serve them if we are not satisfied. If we consider a visitor has tasted too much we stop serving. We have a very strict policy in this regard.

The increase in numbers visiting the Winery, is largely driven by visitors from abroad and from London. London Bridge station is 45 minutes from Marden station, and we run a pick-up service with a small 12-seater minibus, thus minimising road traffic. In other words, there is virtually no increase in road traffic.

On the occasion last September when we had an Open Weekend at the Winery, we had two members of staff situated on the Winery entrance gates, ensuring traffic entering or leaving did so safely and at no risk to local residents, walkers, or anyone else.

We are growing our wine production, but as explained this growth does not increase any Winery traffic from the production or distribution of those wines. HGV traffic has not increased since the erection of our new building and increased wine production.

There have been references to 50,000 visitors per annum coming to the Winery in the next five years. Press articles are written by the press but are not necessarily an accurate representation of the facts. We could not accommodate 50,000 visitors per annum, nor do we have any intention of doing so. The beauty that visitors find when coming to the Winery is about tranquility, and enjoying our products. We do not wish to change this, and I would add that I, along with my wife and family, live a few hundred yards from the Winery and do not wish to turn the estate into a theme park, general tourist destination or children's playground, and wish to continue to enjoy the wonderful atmosphere on the estate; which is available for wine lovers and wine tourists.

Our car park accommodates up to 75 vehicles. A small minibus as explained earlier is used to pick up visitors from Marden station, and as stated earlier in the summer months we have approximately one coach per week.

Reference has been made to English Wine Tasting Tours and to Belmond British Pullman. However this amply demonstrates the use of small minibuses to transport visitors and the fact that we are not significantly increasing individual passenger road traffic through the use of more visitor cars.

A small local minority have from the outset been determined by any means possible to prevent Hush Heath Winery either operating or growing. Their opinion does not represent those of central or local government, Visit Kent, and the majority of local residents who continue to enjoy and are proud of the Winery and our wines.

I very much hope that the Licensing Committee will allow the minor amendment to our current premises licence.

Yours sincerely

Richard and Leslie Balfour-Lynn.