

St. Martin's Vineyard & Winery



St. Martin's, Isles of Scilly

The Planning Department
Council of the Isles of Scilly
St. Mary's

11 October 2019

Dear Planners

We write in support of Planning Applications P/19/060/FUL & P/19/059/FUL

We are the current owners of the well established St Martins Vineyard, and hopefully, some background information will help in your decision making.

The first plantings were in 1996, with the first vintage following in 2000, on part of the family flower farm, this part had previously been a separate farm before my father took it over in the 60's. Sadly we are now in our 'twilight years' and need to retire.

We had hoped to pass it all over to our son, but he has married an Australian lady and has his own vineyard in Victoria, Aus.!

The Duchy have agreed that it can revert to its original size as a distinct entity, and accordingly can issue a new Farm Business Tenancy.

We have advertised the business on St Martins in the hope of someone already living here would take it over. There has been some interest, but no firm commitment.

When the applicants James Faulconbridge and Holly Robbins fell in love with The Vineyard, and the island of St Martins, some 15 months ago, you can imagine our delight and relief.

They are a committed young couple (in their 30's) who have been negotiating with the Duchy over the past year, to find a way of taking over the business. They have a much needed fresh approach with ideas that could improve its sustainability. James is an ecologist and Holly is currently working for John Deere Tractors. They are already in the Agricultural culture.

Many people have said to us that the Vineyard provides an integral and much valued and enjoyed part of the tourism offer on the Island, and it would be such a shame if the vines were grubbed up and the yard joined the large areas of already abandoned land. There is also an existing shop/off licence and winery on site to support the enterprise. We also have apple trees and are very much involved in community apple pressing.

Re P/19/060/FUL – Erection of a staff dwelling with associated landscaping at The Vineyard.

The next challenge is finding somewhere for the couple to live. We live in a house with a separate tenancy, and wish to remain on the island of my birth! We will have more time to contribute to the wellbeing of our very special Island.

The Duchy have said there is nowhere available at the moment, and have given the go ahead for a small staff dwelling to be erected at the farm.

As you can see this is modest, well screened and would totally fit into the rural setting.

There are already timber buildings on the site – Shop/Off licence, tractor shed, winery and general purpose store -for nets etc.

Likewise on the land immediately to the West there already exists several buildings including staff accommodation. To the East there are many more buildings including a school room and further East more staff accommodation, so it would seem they would not be setting a precedent. The site is served by water (we sank a bore well) by electricity (we laid cable to join to the Western Power supply) and a farm track.

Re P/19/059/FUL – Erection of 2x Shepherds hut units for use as holiday accomodation~~r~~ connected to St Martins Vineyard.

We would ask that you also deem it fit to pass the above plans.

This is somewhat personal, but nevertheless essential to explain the need for a way to underpin and give financial security to the Vineyard. We have had the fortune to have our teacher's pensions to fall back on.

As all Scillonian farmers will vouch , farming can be marginal in the Islands, particularly fruit production, and the need for alternative income is often necessary. The provision of two low impact moveable units would seem to be an excellent option. We can think of no farming enterprise that does not have affiliated tourist activities, such as self catering units to secure its viability.

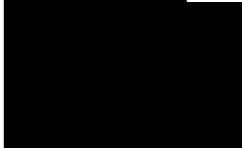
It has been noticed by many that the number of holiday lets on the Island has reduced, with more people residing here, so the addition of two more lets would provide much needed bed spaces. They are of a style which is very popular now and not much in evidence here.

Again they will be well screened, and landscaped.

To offer 'A relaxing holiday at a Vineyard, and a way to come and enjoy our amazing dark skies at an affordable price, must surely be of benefit to the whole island – more people to use the eateries, boats, bakery, general stores etc. We wish we had thought of the idea!!

Finally, we commend this young couple to the folk of these very special Islands; they are genuinely interested in the contnuation of farming, and would fit the island profile perfectly. They have provided the Duchy of Cornwall with very detailed and realistic business plans. Finding people of their callibre , willing to take on very specific farming challenges, has not been easy; we hope you see fit to pass the two sets of plans submitted for your approval.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Val and Graham Thomas.

Val and Graham Thomas