



PRESS RELEASE
1st November 2012 for immediate use
AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE OF CHIEF PLEAS
SARK, CHANNEL ISLANDS

Concerns Over the Increasing Number of Vineyards on Sark

"We are conscious that many are suspicious of our aims for Sark and imagine that we seek wholesale change. Nothing could be further from the truth. We strongly take the view that Sark's economic future lies with tourism. Tourists are attracted to Sark by its existing, unspoilt, rural character, natural beauty and distinctiveness politically and constitutionally. People like the idea of this very beautiful, tranquil and uniquely British island with its roots deep in Norman and Elizabethan history. These are its principal selling points; it would be madness to jeopardise them. We have no intention of changing the fundamental character of Sark. We seek to improve and enhance the character, not change it."

Point no.6 from A MANIFESTO FOR SARK by Sir David & Sir Frederick Barclay, 21st Nov 2008

The Barclay brothers now own roughly a quarter of Sark: 11 Real Properties, (tenements, freeholds and 150-year leases). These are currently managed by the Barclays' company Sark Estate Management (SEM). To the best of our knowledge SEM have planted vines on 14 fields before the spring of 2012 and since the start of October 2012 another 12 fields have been planted or prepared for planting with vines. This means that over 5% of growing land is now vineyards.

After four years there is little evidence that the vines are succeeding. Meanwhile, Sark's farmers have lost and are losing their land which was leased from SEM, and have been given very little notice to remove their grazing animals. One farmer said that for the last few years he has been asking SEM to write a more secure contract, but to no avail. Farmers have said that they stand to lose more fields in the near future, which would result in the loss of their livelihoods. It is rumoured by staff at SEM vineyards that ALL Barclay-owned land is now to be made into vineyards.

From observation and conversations with SEM vineyard workers, it has been ascertained that fungicides such as Bordeaux mix are regularly 'broadcast' on the vines. Even in light winds the dust drifts. Bordeaux contains copper sulphate and many residents now fear pollution of their drinking water from bore holes and wells. Regular dusting with Bordeaux Mix to prevent mildew and other fungi is harmful to insects, particularly bees, to earthworms and in the long term, also to humans in contact with it. According to Guernsey Biological Records Centre, Sark's biodiversity is greater than average for its land size. This biodiversity will certainly be reduced every time a field is changed from grazing land to vineyard.

The Committee believes that Sark's varied rural landscape has also suffered aesthetically from the scale and mechanical process of the vine planting. Many residents fear that Sark's vital tourist industry will suffer from this large-scale transformation of the traditional rural landscape - the very thing that our tourists come back year after year to see.

The scale of this new monoculture will have a devastating effect on Sark's unique and diverse wildlife. Many species which rely on Sark's healthy fields, from earthworms, insects, butterflies, moths, bats, birds, up to the Peregrine Falcons which nest around our cliffs, will suffer as the traditional environment is impoverished.

We call on SEM to halt present work and reconsider the agricultural plans and priorities for their land in Sark.

Ends - 421 words

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