

To Medway and Gravesham Planning Departments

Intolerable lorry traffic along Bush Road, Warren Road and Luddesdown Road in Medway and Gravesham

This link is a video of two 'Silverhand' lorries meeting in a 'wider' part of Bush Road on the edge of Cuxton. It is the sole route for lorries delivering to Silverhand Estate and their fields. One of the lorries mounts the grass verge and only by luck can they negotiate past each other at the entrance to Dean Farm. Please watch: you will get an idea of the inappropriateness of these monsters travelling through a village, along a country lane and on to single track.

On the tight bend, where Bush Road (in Medway) changes into Warren Road (in Gravesham), lorries have had to reverse back round the blind corner to make way for other lorries; if they meet a car, the lorry forces the car to reverse. There is not room to pass. There is no visibility. It is frightening. Luddesdown Road is worse.

Silverhand's lorry traffic has been relentless, sometimes early morning, sometimes dusk, more often than not at school time. A year ago, this traffic was appalling; but this year there are more lorries bringing more compost to more areas of vineyard, and more lorries bringing more bottles for more wine, and more lorries bringing yet more presses and tanks for more processing. Next year as more vines come into production, this pressure of growth will increase. And the year after.... And the year after...

A week ago Thursday there was a total of thirty-six movements of these massive 6-axled lorries. This did not include smaller lorries and white vans, or the vineyard's own pickup trucks.

The company may be celebrating autumn with their 'much-loved' Community Harvest Celebration, but our community has been looking at threats to safety and quality of life.

Within Cuxton the 6-axled lorries are too lengthy to negotiate the traffic calming chicanes easily. At school drop-off and collection time, they create frightening chaos often passing close to the kerb edge. Vehicles frequently mount the kerb to pass. This is an unsafe environment for school children, for everybody, and the school has made a formal complaint. It is ridiculous to require a road death to classify the situation as dangerous.

The North Downs Way, a National and International Long-Distance Footpath, shares this 'lorry route' along Bush Road for one hundred metres where the narrow road is in places only four and a half metres wide. Here, where the two routes combine (the ancient pilgrims' route predating any road), safety for walkers needs to be provided.

Lorries, in addition, share the North Downs Way along two hundred and fifty metres of the rural lane leading from Lower Bush to Upper Bush. This Conservation Area, of which the Medway Council Appraisal states: *When approaching by road from the north the settlement is almost **invisible** ... The distinctive character of the access road is recognised by its classification as a **rural lane**... The key characteristic of Upper Bush is*

unspoilt rural setting, had, on Thursday, as on other days, a very visible queue of 6 axled vehicles, which had driven up the North Downs Way, waiting to enter the farmyard at Upper Bush. White vans added to the mayhem. With the accumulation of lorries, not to mention pallets dumped within the conservation area, there was clearly no recognition of either the Conservation Area, the National Landscape, or the National Long-Distance Footpath designations.

The lane from the turn off to Cobhambury Hill, winding narrowly through trees and ups and downs to Luddesdown, does not allow two cars to pass. I presume, by constant use, Silverhand is intending to permanently wear down the grass-banked verges to make the roads wide enough for their delivery lorries, to join up their illegal carved-out passing places, breaking off over-hanging tree branches in the process, as they have done for the last two years.

Poor Luddesdown is unrecognisable from the remote secluded village it used to be. Its quietness has been destroyed by the vineyard vehicles, the aggressive reversing beeps, the enlarged car park, the shining metal tanks, the seasonal mud on the road, and brash lighting.

All this area lies within the recently designated North Kent Woods and Downs National Nature Reserve, the first National Nature Reserve to include a vineyard, *'demonstrating how conservation can work alongside land management and business.'* *'This approach is expected to serve as a model for future NNRs, showing how environmental and commercial interests can be balanced.'* At the moment, the scale of this operation is already too large for the countryside within which it is based.

The company may have the right to goods vehicle access, but the vehicles need to be an appropriate and safe size for the road infrastructure, and not of a quantity that creates chaos and fear for children, parents, walkers, and road users.

Currently, it feels as though councils are choosing to support the operations of a commercial company in preference to safeguarding National Landscape assets – and this a company which has never, it seems, requested **prior** planning permission for the installation of an amazing fifty two tanks at Luddesdown and who are belatedly requesting permission for that and seven more, now the tanks are in situ. It is interesting that the glowing report in Vineyardmagazine.co.uk on the 19th June 2025 proudly boasts that Silverhand has 91 tanks! It has always seemed an infinitely variable number.

Fifty-nine tanks is a fait accompli for a major processing plant created little by little in a remote quiet area that deserves better protection than it has been given. Linked to the expansion of the (Golden) Lion and its carpark, to the creation of the Cellar Door, this constitutes a development which is having a considerable impact on various communities and the environment.

Silverhand's parent company's last strategic report states: *The Group's vision is to bring the finest English wines to the UK market, with **extensive infrastructure** to support this.*

*The projection is to be the largest producer of English wine within the next ten years.
...The scale of the infrastructure makes the operation one of the most efficient in the world...*

This extensive infrastructure, the scale of operations, growing year upon year, requiring yet more lorries when we can't cope with what is there already, is something that will put profit in the hands of a few people but is destroying not just the landscape but the quietness of these areas, unique in that they are so close to sectors of dense population. Hotel, spa, restaurant, winery, the influx of visitors, and the vast conglomerate of traffic associated with the largest vineyard in the UK - what will this do to an area of tiny winding lanes, footpaths and quiet views?

Loss of tranquillity was one of the main reasons the Inspector cited for refusal at the 2023 Appeal for a winery in Bush Valley, along with Vineyard Farms' lack of a necessary plan required by the NPPF to consider the processing of grapes outside the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It appears these two elements have not been addressed in this expansion of wine tanks and grape presses that has somehow eluded planning permission.

Silverhand's lush advertising would look very different if it included the reality of its monstrous lorries on the narrow lanes, the traffic confrontations, the danger, the aggravation.

I understand the Medway and Gravesham authorities will be consulting on this matter. Please give full consideration.

