

The Hepple Spirits Company – Planning Statement

The Hepple Spirits Company would like to base its manufacturing operation in redundant buildings in the Stable Yard at Whitefield. The proposed operation would require only slight external change to the rear of the buildings [addressing NNPA policy 7]. From the buildings the company would manufacture gin and whisky of exceptionally high quality on the most advanced equipment geared to low energy use and maximum ecological sensitivity.

There are three principal reasons for siting the company's manufacturing in the park. First, we are linking the company's products to our ingredients. Our Gin is based like all gins on Juniper, of which Whitefield has an unusual quantity, but also draws on a variety of other wild plants that are found prolifically on the estate. It is unconventional to build a gin in this way as in the past manufacturing was based in English ports and drew on the spices of "Empire". We are using plants that actually grow together, and that are all fed by the same water that we use in the spirit. We feel that the pristine quality of their shared habitat is reflected in the spirit; their symbiosis in nature strengthens in the bottle.

Second, we want to demonstrate a new advanced production system that can enhance the quality and yield derived from our botanicals compared to a traditional pot still. Simply put, this new system cold presses 100% of the flavour from ingredients rather than the normal level of 15-20% in a pot still. We have found that by using this system the flavours are brighter, stronger and closer to their original. It also significantly reduces the quantity of raw material required to make the end product. Furthermore, this system uses a fraction of the energy and no water compared to traditional distilling. Initially we will require a pot still to run alongside this system however the effective capacity of our manufacturing is significantly increased. It means that we can occupy a smaller manufacturing space than would be normal for a conventional distiller to produce on the scale we envisage. It means that in more ways than one we will tread much more softly than a traditional manufacturer.

Third, it is a central principal for the company to support the continued vigour of natural ecosystem that surrounds it. Our harvesting of various local materials will be done in close association with the National Park, as will the programme to expand the populations of various rare plants that are uniquely prolific in this area. It is our aim that the company procures as much from within the park as is consonant with vigorous natural and aided regeneration, which means that the Estate will support the expansion of these rare shrub populations well into the future.

Addressing NNPA policy 3:

As explained above, the core principals of the business are to distil, preserve and invigorate the unusual natural environment at Whitefield. There will be limited structural alteration to the rear exterior of the building. We will be adding a lean-to in the style of a farm building to the rear. The estate will

plant a new belt of mixed trees to the north of the site to screen these changes from the estate drive.

The manufacturing process is quiet. The raw materials that have been processed are recyclable and are valuable as compost. It is notable that a competitor recently started operation from a lean-to in a residential street in a very well heeled area of London – this is not an un-neighbourly activity. There will be some works traffic to the site, but even at maximum capacity (not for five years at least) it would be less than three small HGVs per day. Due to the symbiotic nature of the business with the farming and conservation activities at Whitefield it is likely that such a business will increase local employment opportunities.

Addressing NNPA policy 14:

The resonance between the business's brand, the principals of the NNPA and the special qualities of the Park should be clear from the explanation above. We feel that our innovative manufacturing technique that lowers our environmental impact is a good example of the way business should operate in ecologically pristine environments – and fits the NNPA principals in relation to economic development in the Park.

The business will employ one full time employee who will live locally. In addition the need to maintain the “look” of the place as a well-kept haven for wild nature (which is incumbent on the Estate rather than the business) will provide very significant conservation and landscape management work.

Longer-term business expansion will be off-site, outside the Whitefield Estate, possibly in a semi-industrial location nearby, for instance in Rothbury.

Addressing Policy 25 concerning renewable power supply

It is one of the key principals of the business to run in the most environmentally conscientious way possible. Our manufacturing process will use considerably less energy and consume fewer botanical raw materials to create our product than a conventional distillery (for our gin - almost half the power and up to half the botanicals dependent on our preparation system). We also plan to generate the steam we require for our still entirely with renewable power. We are aiming to run entirely on biogas generated from Anaerobic Digestion from a combination of our waste product and the cattle muck from Whitefield farm however we will require separate consents for this, so in the short term we would propose using either bought-in biomethane or B100 biodiesel. As the still heating system constitutes around 90% of the total power requirement of the distillery at capacity, both electrical and heat we will easily meet the NNPA's 10% threshold for renewable power on new projects. It is our intention to work with Newcastle University's Sustainability Institute to raise the energy efficiency in the distillery even higher in the future.

Utility linkages

The old coach house currently has a single-phase electricity supply. This may require upgrading to three-phase power for the occasional use of pumps in the still. If we do require changes to the electricity we would like to bury the cable between the farm and the stable yard, to improve the look of the wider area.

Traffic Statement

At maximum capacity, there will be fewer than three deliveries or collections per day with single axle trucks. While we may sell direct over the internet from the distillery we do not want a retail outlet at the distillery so there will be no provision for more than two cars at the distillery for visitors. We want to keep traffic to an absolute minimum to retain the quiet of the place that is an essential element to the company's brand.

Waste Management Plan

The gin manufacturing process has a single type of non-toxic waste material in the form of compost, which will be used by the estate in the juniper nursery and elsewhere. To proceed with whisky production we will want to link to a reed bed or micro anaerobic digestion plant (application to follow) that could provide us with the bulk of our biomethane in-house. There will be a single toilet and washbasin in the distillery office that will link into the existing package treatment plant that services Whitefield Hall and the Stable Yard cottages. The Non-Mains drainage form is attached.

Bin storage is provisioned on the plans as being in the position of the old kennels that will be removed. The business will require two bins the same size as a single residential dwelling for recycling and non-recycling waste.

External Lighting

There is to be as little external lighting as is possible – we strongly dislike it and it is counter to the spirit and ethos of the brand. That said we may need some minimum level for health and safety during loading or unloading during the winter or if there was to be a security breach during the night. We will always prefer to have no lights, but if any are required they will be positioned to maximally limit light pollution. We would like to discuss the exact specification with the planning committee in due course.