

Slane distillery gets planning permission

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The Mount Charles family is committing some €2.75 million of its own funds to a new €12 million craft whiskey distillery and visitor centre at Slane Castle in Co Meath.

The development, which is due to enter construction before the end of the year, is being spearheaded by Lord Alex Mount Charles (38), son of Henry, Eighth Marquess Conyngham, and has attracted the backing of family-owned French spirits company Camus Cognac.

It will produce Slane Castle Whiskey, which until last year was distilled on behalf of the Mount Charles family by Cooley Distillery. This production arrangement ceased after Irish-owned Cooley was acquired by US company Beam.

The Mount Charles family hopes the new distillery will attract up to 50,000 visitors annually, with almost half of the overall investment to be spent on redeveloping 18th-century stable yards for the facility and visitor centre.

The project, which received planning permission yesterday, will employ 25 people when it is fully open in 2015.

'Greenest in the world'

Slane Castle Whiskey will use barley from the castle estate and water from the river Boyne, which flows beneath the property. Lord Alex wants the distillery to be "one of the greenest in the world", with by-products of the whiskey-making process to be used for onsite energy generation and

spent barley grains to be fed to the family's cattle.

Between them, the Mount Charles family and Camus Cognac have committed €5.5 million to the project, and hold 51 per cent and 49 per cent stakes respectively. Lord Mount Charles will seek private investment to bring the venture to completion.

Investment call

The family has engaged Dominic Bolton of Iffley Consulting to lead the investment call, with Lord Mount Charles expecting "a good level of commitment".

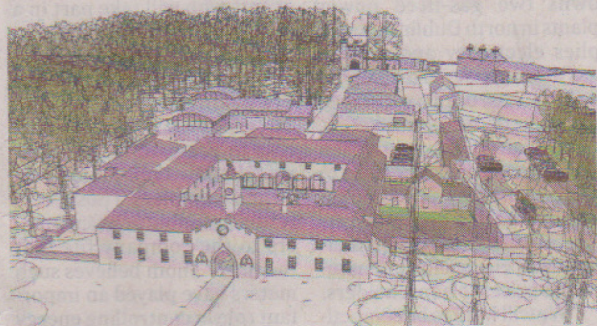
He said it would be "nice" to attract some Irish investment but acknowledged the US was the most likely source of funding because it would be the biggest market for the distillery's products.

The distillery's first whiskey will be a blend priced at about \$24 (€18) per bottle, which Lord Mount Charles expects to be ready in 2018.

His ultimate goal, however, is to enter the premium market with exclusively Irish products such as a pure Pot Still, where prices can climb above \$100 per bottle. This will take time, with a single malt spending more than a decade in production.

Lord Mount Charles yesterday described the cessation of the Cooley deal as "a big blow" but said it helped to push the family into implementing longer-term plans for a distillery in Slane.

"The only way to stay in the game was to invest in our own products," he said.



■ Artist's impression of the new distillery and visitor centre.