

West Sussex Growers' Association (WSGA)

Executive Meeting – 5th June 2017 – Aldingbourne

Report from John Hall (Consultant)

1. Access to Labour

Following uncertainties since the outcome of the Brexit referendum, the future availability of labour continues to be a major concern for the Horticultural Industry.

Current workers from Europe, many of whom have returned year after year to work for WSGA businesses, are very uncertain as to their future prospects. Employers have gone out of their way to reassure these workers that they will be ok, and that they will be allowed to return; but the truth is, at the moment – no one knows.

WSGA representatives cooperate fully with Defra and Ministers concerning continued access to the EU labour market and we take every opportunity to raise the issue with them.

Graham Bryant and I were both involved in separate BBC TV debates and interviews on the subject on 19th & 21st May 2017.

2. Business Rates

The new 2017 rating list commenced on the 1st April 2017 and involves the revaluation of all commercial property throughout England & Wales.

The NFU and others have successfully argued the case that horticultural production businesses should remain exempt from Business Rates; however, please inform WSGA if your business receives new or additional Business Rates demands from Local Authorities.

3. National Living Wage (NLW)

The basic hourly rate is predicted to increase to over £9.00 in 2020; an increase of more than 35% in 4 years. No one begrudges workers on the basic hourly rate, earning a decent wage; but, to maintain pay differentials, this has a knock-on effect right up through the pay scales and adds hugely to business costs.

As everyone in the Horticultural Industry knows; the likelihood of being able to pass these increased costs of production on to the customers (supermarkets, food service, retailers & garden centres) is close to zero.

4. Improvements to the A27

Members will be aware that Chris Grayling (Transport Minister) recently withdrew support for the planned improvements to the A27 at Chichester. The main reason that he gave for his decision was, that due to there being no clear consensus as to which option local communities & businesses preferred, he could not approve any of the proposed schemes.

WSGA has continued to stay engaged with the debate and we have attended further meetings with Louise Goldsmith (Leader WSCC). The next meeting is scheduled for 22nd June 2017.

WSGA will also be proactive in engaging with consultations on the proposed improvements to the A27 at Arundel and Worthing.

5. AHDB - Consultation

Following our detailed written response to the Agriculture & Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) consultation, I have now had a further conversation with Steve Tones. He apologises for not responding directly to WSGA, however he did expand on the wider strategy of the AHDB in Horticultural Week and would be pleased to explain further when he visits WSGA on 12th July 2017.

6. Chichester District Council (CDC) – Horticultural Development Areas (HDAs)

WSGA representatives are continuing discussions with senior officers at CDC around issues of land availability within the HDAs.

7. Coast to Capital (C2C)

Coast to Capital (C2C) is the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for our region, made up of five areas. WSGA has a permanent seat on the Coastal West Sussex Partnership (CWSP) and Rural West Sussex Partnership (RWSP) Boards and we are often invited to C2C meetings.

Members should consider if they are eligible for any of the grant schemes managed through C2C such as: EAFRD & LEADER. EAFRD grant schemes include:-

- Business Development (Infrastructure/Capital):
Grant pot = £835,433 Max £200,000 & Min £75,000 Grants.
- Rural Tourism (Infrastructure/Capital):
Grant pot = £1,113,896 Max £200,000 & Min £75,000 Grants.
- Food & Drink (Infrastructure/Capital)
Grant pot = £1,299,545 Max £1,000,000 & Min £100,000 Grants.

Information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rdpe-growth-programme>

8. Water

Following low rainfall in the second half of 2016 and the first 4 months of 2017; some relief has been seen with approximately 90mm of rain falling in our area during May 2017.

9. Crop Lighting

North Mundham Parish Council and local residents have complained to WSGA about light spillage from glasshouses; especially in the Runcton area.

I gave a presentation at the NMPC AGM on 9th May 2017 on the subject of the Horticultural Industry in West Sussex, after which Colin Frampton and I explained the background to occasional light spillages. This is a subject that needs further discussion with members.

10. Website

The website has been redeveloped to provide an improved resource for members and stakeholders. www.wsga.co.uk

Further improvements could be made, with the addition of video clips, showing the wide range of crops and technologies in WSGA members businesses. This will be discussed at future meetings.

11. Autumn Dinner – 24th November 2017

The 2017 Autumn Dinner is planned for 24th November at the Vicars' Hall, Chichester.

Subject to the General Election results on 8th June 2017; Gillian Keegan (Prospective Conservative candidate for Chichester constituency) has accepted our invitation to be the Guest Speaker. She has also accepted an invitation to visit Members businesses on a date yet to be agreed during the summer.

12. Upcoming Events & Meetings – 2017

- 5th June – WSGA Executive Meeting – Aldingbourne
- 15th June – Coastal West Sussex Partnership Meeting – Shoreham
- 16th June – Rural West Sussex Partnership Meeting – Horsham
- 22nd June – A27 Meeting – Bracklesham
- 27th June – Portsmouth Water – Customer Challenge Group.
- 3rd July – Chichester Chamber of Commerce & Industry/WSGA – Meeting at Tangmere Airfield Nurseries.
- 7th July – Environment Agency Meeting – Worthing
- 11th July – Farming & Rural Issues Group South East – NFU Petersfield.
- 12th July – Visit from Jack Ward – British Growers' Association – WSGA
- 12th July – Visit from Steve Tones – AHDB – WSGA
- 19th July – Coastal West Sussex Partnership Meeting – Littlehampton
- 11th September – WSGA Executive Meeting – Aldingbourne
- 15th September – Environment Agency Meeting – Worthing
- 30th October – WSGA Executive Meeting – Fargro
- 8th November – Grow Show South – Roundstone Nursery
- 24th November – Autumn Dinner – The Vicar's Hall, Chichester.

John Hall – 5th June 2017

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