

West Sussex Growers' Association (WSGA)

Executive Meeting – 20th February 2017 – Fargo

Report to Members – John Hall (Consultant)

1) Brexit

In response to the letter of concern from WSGA, addressed to Defra Ministers and MPs; a reply has been received from Defra Minister: George Eustice MP. The following extracts are the key points:

- Government wants to ensure continued access to European markets and to develop even more opportunities to sell to third countries.
- Defra welcomes the opportunity to engage with Rural Groups in the process of improving business growth and productivity.
- Defra and the Government are fully aware of the complex issues concerning the free movement of EU migrant labour post Brexit.
- The Low Pay Commission recognises the challenge for employers of the new minimum rates under the National Living Wage. The Government believes that increasing productivity is the key to offsetting increased costs.

Following feedback from the NFU Horticulture Board, employers and labour providers, the NFU has updated the industry proposal for a seasonal labour scheme. Kent MP Helen Whately has met with the Immigration Minister to keep the pressure on for a trial scheme to start ASAP, and a meeting was held with Home Secretary: Amber Rudd.

In light of concerns raised by many businesses and the NFU about the Prime Minister's plans to control migration from inside and outside the EU following Brexit, the Economic Affairs Committee has launched a consultation to examine competing claims about the reliance of the UK economy on migrant labour.

WSGA has sent in a written response to the consultation which closes on 20th February 2017.

2) Business Rates

The 2017 rating list comes into force on the 1st April 2017; it is part of the ongoing revaluation of all commercial property throughout England & Wales.

Reports have been received from around the country, that Local Authority Valuation Offices are reviewing the Business Rates status of some nurseries, pack-houses and ancillary operations. We understand that revaluation demand notices have already been issued to some businesses.

Clearly this is a very serious matter, and in some cases, could be business threatening.

Please inform WSGA if your business receives new or additional Business Rates demands from Local Authorities.

3) Improvements to the A27 – Options

It would appear that the Northern Options for the proposed upgrade to the A27 at Chichester are back on the table.

As soon as we have the new details of the various options; WSGA will re-consult with members as to their preferences.

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

4) AHDB - Consultation

On 19th December 2016, WSGA gave a detailed written response to the consultation on the future direction of the Agriculture & Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) – Horticulture sector.

A copy of the WSGA response was circulated to members and we await with interest to see the conclusions of the AHDB consultation.

5) 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.

6) Arun District Council (ADC)

Discussions have commenced with ADC, concerning the proposed Horticultural Conference for autumn 2017.

The format is likely to be similar to the conference held with CDC at Farbridge, Lavant in November 2015; including speakers on a range of relevant subjects.

7) Water

Discussions continue with NFU, the Environment Agency, Defra, Portsmouth Water and Southern Water and other stakeholders to address issues around the planned reforms to water abstraction and water trading.

AHDB, Ricardo & NFU are carrying out further surveys on water use for irrigation on farms and nurseries.

Portsmouth Water records show that at 31st December 2016, ground water levels were running at 67% of the long-term average.

8) Autumn Dinner

Following the very successful Autumn Dinner, held at the Vicar's Hall, Chichester on 2nd December 2016; the same venue has been booked for Friday 24th November 2017.

9) Membership & Subscriptions

Annual subscription requests for 2017 have been sent out and the majority of payments have been received. Please see the detailed report from Secretary David Fox.

10) Recent Visitors and Meetings

- 5th December – WSGA Executive Meeting at Growtrain.
- 9th December – Environment Agency Meeting – Worthing.
- 13th December – Meeting with Defra Minister – London.
- 12th January – Coastal West Sussex Partnership meeting – Worthing.
- 26th January – Portsmouth Water – Customer Challenge Group.
- 2nd February – Tangmere Airfield Nurseries + Chichester Chamber of Commerce

11) Upcoming Events & Meetings

- 20th February – WSGA Executive Meeting – Fargo.
- 23rd February – Coastal West Sussex Partnership Meeting – Littlehampton.
- 14th March – French Growers visit to West Sussex.
- 16th March – Defra visit to WSGA – Labour & Productivity.
- 21st March – Farming & Rural Issues Group South East – Brinsbury College.
- 23rd March – Coastal West Sussex Partnership – Bank of England Update – Littlehampton.
- 31st March – Environment Agency Meeting – Worthing
- 10th April – WSGA Executive Meeting – Aldingbourne.
- 9th May – Portsmouth Water – Customer Challenge Group – Havant
- 5th June – WSGA Executive Meeting – Aldingbourne
- 15th June – Coastal West Sussex Partnership Meeting – Shoreham
- 3rd July – Chichester Chamber of Commerce & Industry/WSGA – Meeting at Tangmere Airfield Nurseries.
- 19th July – Coastal West Sussex Partnership Meeting – WSGA
- 15th November – Horticultural Conference with Arun District Council.
- 24th November – Autumn Dinner – The Vicar’s Hall, Chichester.

John Hall – 20th February 2017

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