

West Sussex Growers' Association (WSGA)

Executive Meeting – 6th June 2016

Report to Members – John Hall (Consultant)

1. National Living Wage

Growers continue to be extremely concerned about the detrimental effect on their businesses of the sudden increase in the hourly pay rates under the National Living Wage.

The main points are:-

- This dramatic wage increase will not just affect those few workers on the lowest hourly rate in our Industry, but will have a differential knock on effect right up through the pay scales.
- Most of our members supply fresh produce direct to retailers throughout the UK. In an already very competitive market, retailers are currently putting more and more pressure on suppliers' margins. The likelihood of farmers & growers being able to pass wage rises on to retailers and customers is therefore zero.

NFU is lobbying Government to:-

- No requirement for Employers National Insurance contributions for seasonal workers.
- No pensions auto-enrolment requirement for seasonal workers, so they are not captured by this administratively burdensome process that delivers minimal value in pensions accrued.
- Further support for investment in productive technology, automation and mechanisation, and to support science funding for research and development on the same. This support needs to be made more accessible to smaller business.
- Accommodation Offset to apply to National Living Wage, and the level of the offset to be increased, taking into account increases in rental prices in the wider accommodation market.
- For Government's ambition for NLW to reach 60% of median earnings by 2020 to be pushed back into the next session of Parliament to allow industry time to adapt to the unanticipated substantial increases in labour costs.
- The Low Pay Commission to be given more powers to set minimum and living wage rates independently of government.

- The timing of the NLW and National Minimum wage increases to be aligned in a cost neutral way, rather than having separate rises in April and October.
- A new seasonal agricultural workers scheme (SAWS) accessible to agriculture student workers from anywhere in the world.

2. Improvements to the A27

a) Options

WSGA is fully engaged in the debate and consultations to consider improvement options to the A27 at Chichester. WSGA representatives have met with Mott MacDonald (Consultants to Highways England, Louise Goldsmith (Leader at West Sussex County Council) and Chichester Chamber of Commerce. Further meetings are planned for the end of June 2016.

The 2 Northern Options have been withdrawn by Highways England; leaving 4 Southern Options still on the table. These 4 Options are primarily concerned with improving the main junctions to the South; including flyovers at Bognor and Fishbourne roundabouts. Option 2; that includes a link road between the Fishbourne roundabout and N Mundham, is still on the table.

b) Transport Assessment

In order to add some useful research to the A27 debate; WSGA has carried out a Transport Assessment of members businesses. The results of the survey have been shared with Mott MacDonald, WSCC & CCCI.

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

WSGA representatives have held further meetings with CDC to discuss issues of land availability within the HDAs.

4. Arun District Council (ADC)

ADC has recently carried out a feasibility study into the provision of Food Enterprise Zones – specifically for horticulture. Reading Agricultural Consultants have completed the feasibility study for ADC and the Council is currently considering the report.

WSGA, along with many individual member businesses, have made contributions to the Consultation.

5. Coast to Capital and Coastal West Sussex Partnership

A *Rural Statement* will be circulated by C2C shortly, illustrating some of the socio-economic issues and opportunities for rural businesses in the C2C area. The Statement will include references to WSGA and the Horticultural Industry on the Coastal Plain.

6. Water

Meetings have continued to be held with NFU, the Environment Agency, Portsmouth Water and Southern Water and other stakeholders to address issues around the planned reforms to water abstraction and water trading.

On the 17th May 2016, a group of stakeholders, including: Sarah Hendry (Defra Director) and Henry Leveson-Gower (Defra Leader - Abstraction Reform) visited Tangmere Airfield Nurseries, Madestein UK and Hill Brothers.

Over lunch and during the afternoon, other key stakeholders, including Neville Smith (Managing Director – Portsmouth Water), other representatives from Defra, the EA, Southern Water, WSCC, NFU, East Malling Research, AHDB and Growers; met at Barfoots Board Room for discussions around water issues.

7. Biomass, Combined Heat & Power (CHP) & Alternative Energy

8 x 1MW and a number of smaller biomass boilers have been installed on members' nurseries during the last 12 months. Other installations are in progress and new projects are being considered.

The Forestry Commission has received a grant of £600k from C2C towards the cost of improving the supply chain for wood fuel in the SE of England.

Coast to Capital (Local Enterprise Partnership) is offering further grant aid for carbon reducing projects. Please go to the C2C website for further information.

8. Autumn Dinner – 2nd December 2016

The WSGA Autumn Dinner will be held at the Vicars' Hall, Chichester on the evening of Friday 2nd December 2016.

Our Guest Speaker will be Ali Capper (Chair-NFU Board for Horticulture).

9. Recent Visitors and Meetings – 2016

- 12th April – EU Referendum – Colin Frampton and I attended a NFU meeting at Ardingly to debate the upcoming EU Referendum.
- 17th May – Sarah Hendry (Defra Director) and a wide range of stakeholders visited WSGA Nurseries and attended a meeting to discuss issues around water abstraction & trading.
- 25th May – Nursery visits with Greek Engineers – EU Erasmus Knowledge Exchange
- 26th May – Ali Capper (NFU Horti Board Chair) – Visit to WSGA Nurseries + Growers Meeting.
- 5th June – Open Farm Sunday
- 6th June – WSGA – Executive Meeting – Aldingbourne

10. Upcoming Events & Meetings – 2016

- 8th June – Interview with Taste West Sussex Magazine.
- 23rd June – Meeting with the Environment Agency.
- 29th June – Meeting with Defra in London – Water Abstraction.

- 8th July – Jane King (CEO – AHDB) + Gary Taylor + Steve Tones – Visit to WSGA.
- 11th July – Visit to West Dean Gardens.
- 12th July – Customer Challenge Group Meeting.
- 12th July – Coastal Wes Sussex Partnership Meeting – Littlehampton.
- 13th July – Meeting with Defra Minister – George Eustice – London.
- 21st July – Meeting with Jonathan Sharrock (CEO Coast to Capital), Diane Shepherd & Paul Over (CDC).
- 12th Sept – WSGA – Executive Meeting – Aldingbourne.
- 10th October – Meeting with Defra in London – Water Abstraction.

John Hall – 6th June 2016

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