

West Sussex Growers' Association (WSGA)

AGM & Executive Meeting – 13th April 2015

Annual Report to Members – John Hall (Consultant)

I am pleased to report on our activities with the various organisations, projects and initiatives that have kept us busy over the last 15 months.

1. Growing Together

An updated version of the WSGA strategy: *Growing Together* was issued to members and stakeholders during February 2015. Thanks are due to those members who worked to review and develop the new plan.

2. National Farmers' Union (NFU)

We were pleased to host visits from Guy Poskitt, Chairman of the NFU Board for Horticulture, on 14th June and the new NFU President: Meurig Raymond, on 29th July 2014. Each spent a whole day with us and the main topics discussed were: issues around the difficulties of obtaining planning permission for some horticultural developments, the shortage of suitable development land, water abstraction and trading, and the current economic climate.

During the year we have also had many helpful meetings and discussions with other NFU colleagues, including: Chris Hartfield, William White, James Osman and Tom Ormesher.

3. West Sussex County Council (WSCC)

a) Improvements to the A27

WSGA has been very supportive of the latest WSCC initiative to press the Government for more funds to improve the A27 and its feeder roads. Graham Bryant represented WSGA on a BBC radio programme on the subject and WSGA and several of our members have written in support of the initiative.

b) Broadband

WSCC has recently committed a further £6m towards the “*better connected*” initiative to bring most areas up to *superfast* levels of +24Mb. Concerns remain though that some do not have *good* levels of broadband; let alone *superfast*.

c) Energy efficiency

Through the *Your Energy Sussex* initiative, WSCC is offering finance to businesses wishing to improve energy efficiency on their premises. With a £66 million investment fund from the Coast to Capital LEP available to fund energy saving work, there is scope to finance projects both large and small.

From renewable energy solutions to energy-saving building retrofits, *Your Energy Sussex* will consider supporting a broad range of projects. Potential projects must be backed up by a

robust business case, because the cost of the project will need to be paid back from the energy savings made or the renewable energy generated. The commercial terms on offer will depend on the project and the security that the partner can provide.

4. Chichester District Council (CDC)

WSGA has continued to be fully engaged with CDC over the development of the new Local Plan. Paul Hughes (Douglas Briggs Partnership), Jonathan Zwinkels (Madestein) and I have made detailed written responses to the Planning Inspector, and represented WSGA at the public enquiry meetings.

The final version of the CDC Local Plan is due for publication any day now.

We have also had discussions with CDC concerning a proposed visit to members' nurseries by Councillors, Executives and Senior Officers during September; followed by a conference in November 2015. Invitees to the conference would include key CDC personnel, growers, farmers and other stakeholders. The final format and details are yet to be agreed, but it is envisaged that there will be a number of keynote speakers.

5. Arun District Council (ADC)

WSGA has been very encouraged by the positive support received from ADC for the development of the Horticultural Industry in the area.

ADC has been successful in applying for a £50,000 grant from Defra to carry out a feasibility study into the provision of Food Enterprise Zones.

In principle, West Sussex Growers' Association supports anything that simplifies the planning system and helps to identify suitable land that meets the relevant criteria for horticultural development. On the other hand; members are concerned that we don't end up with the same issues and problems that we have with Horticultural Development Areas (HDAs) in the Chichester District i.e. monopoly of land ownership and the instant increase in perceived land values within designated areas; once lines are drawn on maps.

6. Coast to Capital and Coastal West Sussex Partnership

Coast to Capital (C2C) is the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for our region, made up of five areas, including Coastal West Sussex. WSGA has a permanent seat on the Coastal West Sussex Partnership Board and Graham Bryant and I have represented the Association at a number of C2C meetings during the last year.

The Horticultural Industry is seen as a key growth sector by C2C. Graham and I attended the most recent Forum meeting on 25th March 2015 at Gatwick.

C2C have recently announced grants to the University of Chichester towards a major expansion plan for the Bognor Regis campus and to the Forestry Commission South East for the establishment of local hubs for wood chip fuel.

7. West Sussex Environment & Climate Change Board

I have represented the Association at these Board meetings during the last year. The Board comprises a very wide range of stakeholders and membership gives WSGA the opportunity to influence future thinking in these areas.

A number of initiatives have been launched, including: *"Eating Local, Living Better: Food Strategy and Action Plan"*.

8. Representations

During the last 15 months, Martin Emmett, Ian Riggs and Simon Davenport and other members have reported back to WSGA concerning issues that have arisen on the various Boards and Committees on which they sit. They include the NFU Board for Horticulture, Horticultural Development Company, Defra Ornamental Roundtable, British Protected Ornamentals Association and the Horticultural Trades Association.

Key issues of concern are: raising the profile of the ornamentals sector at Defra and elsewhere, and understanding better the role that the Horticultural Innovation Partnership (HIP) might play for the benefit of the industry.

9. Travellers

There were fewer incidents with *"travellers"* occupying private and public land in the Arun and Chichester areas during 2014, however, we know that we have to be constantly vigilant with this problem.

Following discussions with local police and Councillors, a site at Westhampnett, Chichester is being opened this month and will be the *"travellers' transit site"* to serve the whole of West Sussex.

This provision will allow the police to use their powers under Section 62 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to direct trespassers to a publicly-owned transit site in each county. Failure of travellers to comply with the police's direction or returning to the county within three months would mean that they were committing a criminal offence.

10. Water

Meetings have continued to be held with Paul Hammett (NFU), the Environment Agency, Portsmouth Water and Southern Water to address issues around the abstraction and management of water and water trading.

Visits to WSGA members nurseries were made by Paul Hammett (NFU), Carole Paris (HTA) and Gabrielle Edwards (Defra) and two of her colleagues to discuss water issues.

11. Bank of England – Chris Piper

A briefing meeting was held with Chris Piper (Agent of the Bank of England) on 28th July 2014.

12. University of Chichester

The University of Chichester has won a grant of £8m from the Growth Fund through Coast to Capital (C2C) to fund a new Engineering & Technology Centre at the Bognor Regis Campus. Some of the post graduate courses being developed will be attractive to managers currently working in the local Agricultural and Horticultural Industries.

13. Horticultural Development Company (HDC)

Gary Taylor has taken over from Neil Bragg as the new chairman of the HDC and will be visiting WSGA on 21st May 2015.

Later this year, the HDC will change its name to Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board – Horticulture.

14. Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission has received a grant of £600k towards the cost of establishing wood chip hubs in the SE of England.

We have had three meetings with Alison Field (Regional Director of Forestry Commission), including visits to members nurseries, to discuss how this might benefit WSGA members.

15. Food Enterprise Zones

In addition to the success of Arun DC obtaining a £50k grant from Defra to carry out a feasibility study into the provision of Food Enterprise Zones; the South Downs National Park authority has also been successful in its application.

16. The Groceries Code Adjudicator

The decision to give [*The Groceries Code Adjudicator*](#) the power to fine retailers and their direct suppliers for unfair trading practices is a positive step toward ensuring malpractice is eradicated from this part of the supply chain. These powers include the ability to fine up to a permitted maximum of 1% turnover.

However, the NFU has warned that more needs to be done to protect those farmers and growers not covered within the remit of the Grocery Code. These individuals are not direct suppliers to retailers and, therefore, still not protected from unfair trading practices from intermediaries.

17. Website

The WSGA website is currently being redeveloped to provide an improved resource for members and stakeholders. www.wsga.co.uk

18. Autumn Dinner

About 60 members and guests attended the 87th Autumn Dinner held at Crouchers Hotel, Birdham Road on Friday 28th November 2014.

Graham Bryant (WSGA Chairman) and our guest speaker, Raoul Curtis-Machin (Head of Horticulture – Horticultural Trades Association), both gave excellent speeches and a very

successful evening was enjoyed by members and guests. Over £300 was raised via the sweepstake for The Aldingbourne Trust.

19. Upcoming Events & Meetings – 2015

- 11th March – Alison Field – Forestry Commission – Visit to WSGA
- 12th March – CWSP – Partnership meeting in Littlehampton
- 18th March – Portsmouth Water – Partnership meeting in Havant
- 19th March – WSCC – Your Energy meeting in Chichester
- 24th March – Alison Field – Forestry Commission – Meeting in Farnham
- 25th March – Coast to Capital – Forum Meeting at Gatwick
- 13th April – WSGA – AGM – Aldingbourne
- 15th April – Presentation to Selsey Town Council – Selsey
- 16th April – WS Climate change Board – The Dome – University of Chichester
- 23rd April – Horticultural Trades Association – Visit to WSGA
- 7th May – Environment Agency – Worthing
- 13th May – LEAF – Eric Wall and Tangmere Nurseries
- 14th May – Rural West Sussex Partnership meeting – Billingshurst
- 21st May – Horticultural Development Company – Visit to WSGA
- 1st June – Manhood Peninsula Partnership meeting – Visit to WSGA
- 1st June – WSGA – Executive meeting – Aldingbourne
- 18th June – Coastal West Sussex Partnership – Worthing
- 18th June – Portsmouth Water – Havant

20. Thank You

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Graham Bryant (Chairman), Paul Bennett (Vice Chairman), Colin Frampton (President), David Fox (Secretary), the Executive Committee and the Members for their excellent support over the last 15 months.

John Hall – 13th April 2015

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