

# MINUTES OF THE HORTICULTURE FORUM MEETING

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2013, Seagoe Hotel, Portadown

**Chair:** Robin McKee

**Present:** John Beggs, Tim Hunniford, Thomas Gilpin, Patricia Erwin, Doug Thomson, William Montgomery, Kieran Hughes, Roy Lyttle, Eric Long, Shane Donnelly, Barclay Bell, Keith Crawford, Ian Duff

**Apologies:** Sam MacNeice, Elaine Shaw

The venue for this meeting had to be changed at the last minute. The Meetings Room in the Rugby Club had not been opened by Rugby Club staff. The Rugby Club has since been informed. A room was booked and used in the Seagoe Hotel.

## 1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

## 2. Effective lobbying and promotion – Rodney Magowan

Rodney Magowan was invited to provide some guidance to Horticulture Forum members on how to effectively lobby government and how to promote the role and work of the Horticulture Forum. Rodney owns his own PR business and has a wide experience working in agriculture related public relations. He has worked with local businesses such as Agri Search, Countryside Services and MSD Agvet. His website address is [www.rodneymagowan.co.uk](http://www.rodneymagowan.co.uk).

Rodney highlighted the main issues that need to be considered when lobbying decision makers and influencing government. These include:

- (i) Agree what the message is;
- (ii) Keep the message simple and easy to understand;
- (iii) Be clear about what you want;
- (iv) Everyone in the organisation has got to give the same message;
- (v) Decide who/what you want/need to influence;
- (vi) Decide who in the organisation is to deliver the message to government;
- (vii) Always tell the truth;
- (viii) Always be **Persistent** and **Polite** (He used the example of the Presbyterian Mutual Society);
- (ix) Use your strengths – highlight issues of importance to government including job creation, clean and green environment, health, safe food production;
- (x) Don't assume the general public will understand;

- (xi) Write to local representatives, newspaper editors;
- (xii) Talk to the right people including agriculture spokespeople - target them and brief them but keep the message short and simple, give it to them from their angle;
- (xiii) Don't moan!
- (xiv) Write and issue press releases - remember publicity influences decision makers. Keep press releases between 250 and 450 words. Short articles are more likely to be used by editors. Include good photos. Remember that print media is fading - think about the internet, Facebook and Twitter as well as radio and TV;
- (xv) Promote the novelty factor – not a lot of people know what goes on in horticulture;
- (xvi) Talk to senior civil servants who have the ear of ministers;
- (xvii) Some issues may require you to think beyond the local Assembly to Westminster and the House of Lords;
- (xviii) Invite MLAs to an orchard in May – provide a photo opportunity for them;
- (xix) Identify key MLAs, MEPs who are likely to be of benefit and invite equivalents from all parties;
- (xx) Publicise the fact that you have met with MEPs, MLAs – try TV;
- (xxi) Be passionate about horticulture – believe you can do it!!!

### 3. Structure and funding of the Horticulture Forum – Ian Duff

**Remit** - The remit of the Horticulture Forum was discussed including the need to:

- Lobby all government departments;
- Liaise with HDC;
- Promote industry and its contribution to the Northern Ireland economy;
- Promote the Horticulture Forum *Review and Strategic priorities for the Development of the Horticulture Industry in Northern Ireland* and monitor its progress;
- Promote career opportunities in horticulture;
- Steer the course for the horticulture industry.

Members present agreed with the updated Terms of Reference as produced by Ian Duff. Ian stressed that DARD's role can only stretch to provide secretarial support and accommodation for meetings and Horticulture Forum members themselves, need to establish how they could go forward in a constructive way.

**Membership** - Organisations to be represented on the Horticulture Forum were agreed as:

- Association of Landscape Contractors (ALCI)
- UFU Vegetable Committee

- Ulster Farmers Union (UFU)
- NI Fruit Growers Association (NIFGA)
- Growers NI
- Fruit Industry Federation (FIF)
- Horticulture Trades Association (HTA)
- Northway Mushrooms – representing the wider mushroom industry
- Northern Ireland Flower and Foliage Association (NIFFA)

It was agreed that each organisation should nominate 1 or 2 representatives, every 2 years to participate in the forum. The same representatives could be re-elected to the forum for a further 2 years. Also the chair and vice chair should be rotated every 2 years between commercial and amenity horticulture.

It was also agreed that there should be opportunity to co opt other industry representatives who would constructively add to the discussion including up to 3 commercial business representatives and a UFU representative (Patricia Erwin).

Over the summer sectoral organisations are to be asked to nominate Horticulture Forum representatives. **Elaine Chapman to contact sectoral organisations to ask them to provide nominations by late summer.** Nominations are for a maximum of 2 years duration with a maximum number of 2 representatives from each organisation.

**PRO** - The need for all representatives to feed information on key industry issues to and from the Horticulture Forum was stressed. The need for a PRO was also emphasised, with the possibility of election at the meeting in September. Horticulture Forum members agreed with Ian Duff's suggestions for the progression of the forum.

**Web site** - Ian informed members that a web page could be developed for the Horticulture Forum as part of the Supply Chain Development Programme (SCDP). This could link with members' organisations, sponsors and relevant horticulture related web sites such as the 'Grow' education initiative. Companies offering commercial support could have acknowledgements on the web page and members' e mail contacts could be listed. However, funding will be needed to maintain the site.

Members agreed to progress production of a web page under the SCDP and also to investigate a presence on Twitter and Facebook. Composition of a subcommittee to be finalised at the next meeting. Ian reminded members that the SCDP is currently on an extension. He suggested that he would try to get a further extension to the end of 2013.

**Funding** - Funding for the Horticulture Forum was discussed and a contribution of £125/organisation was agreed with the UFU to support the vegetable and top fruit committees by providing £50 for each committee.

#### **4. Process for monitoring progress with implementation of the Horticulture Forum Strategy**

The need to effectively monitor progress with objectives/actions identified in the *Review and Strategic Priorities for the Development of the Horticulture Industry in Northern Ireland* document was discussed. The need for accurate horticulture related statistics was stressed and the role of the Horticulture Forum in helping to capture relevant industry information was considered. Each sector differs in statistical information required. It was agreed to contact seed and plant suppliers in the first instance to find out what information they could provide. **Elaine Chapman to draft a letter for Robin to send to the vegetable seed and plant suppliers.**

It was agreed that the Agri Food Strategy Board (AFSB) report recommendations for horticulture should be used as markers for the development of the horticulture industry. The *Going for Growth* recommendations are to be categorised into short, medium and long term priorities and added to each agenda. John Thompson to be invited to report progress to the Horticulture Forum. **Elaine Chapman to draft letter to of invitation to John Thompson for Robin McKee.** In the future it may be advantageous to invite Tony O'Neill, chair of the AFSB to meet with the Horticulture Forum.

**Elaine Chapman to condense the recommendations within the AFSB report for monitoring use at the next meeting. Ian Duff to review Horticulture Forum report for 'gaps'.**

#### **5. Supply Chain Development Programme Review**

A review of the Supply Chain Development Programme is being undertaken by DARD to help inform the proposals for the new Rural Development Plan 2014 - 2020. Elaine Chapman collated very positive feedback from the forum and submitted this to the relevant DARD staff.

#### **6. Easter Sunday Trading**

Under current legislation garden centres are not allowed to open on Easter Sunday. Also they are limited to opening for a maximum of 6 hours on other Sundays during the year. The HTA are calling for a review of this legislation given the importance of Sunday trading to garden centres who can often lift 25% of the week's takings on a Sunday. HTA have cited the restriction in Sunday trading as a barrier to economic growth in a paper submitted 10 Downing Street. **Elaine Chapman to find out what is happening with this consultation.**

## **7. Ombudsman visit to NI**

The new UK Groceries Code Adjudicator, Christine Tacon, is now in post. Horticulture Forum members expressed an interest in meeting with her to highlight NI horticulture related supply chain issues. The UFU have extended an invitation to Christine Tacon to come to NI. Horticulture Forum will link with UFU in making contact with Christine. No dates have been agreed as yet

## **8. Horticulture Matters report**

**Elaine Chapman to get additional copies of the Horticulture Matters report and forward** to John Speers, Peter Toner, Michelle O'Neill, Noel Lavery and the Assembly Committee together with a covering letter from the Horticulture Forum highlighting the importance of the report and the key points. The report is also to be sent to Paul Frew, Sandra Overend, Diane Dodds, Jim Nicholson and Martina Anderson.

## **9. Rural Development Plan 2014 - 2020 Consultation**

Members were asked to read and fully consider the new Rural Development Plan consultation document available on the DARD website, prior to collation of a Horticulture Forum response at the next meeting.

## **10. AOB**

*Plant pathology* – many AFBI plant pathologists are approaching retirement. Concerns were raised about the impact of this potential lack of knowledge on local horticulture. The Horticulture Forum is to review and consider what action should be taken in response to this.

*Apprenticeships* – Elaine Chapman to get copies of the LANTRA apprenticeships report from David Seffen prior to the next meeting.

## **11. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is to be held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2013 in Portadown Rugby Club at 7:30pm.