

Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting

Monday 16 May 2016, 7:30 pm, Portadown Rugby Club

Chair: Keith Crawford

Present: Barbara Erwin, Patricia Erwin, Hamilton Loney, Robin McKee, George Mathers (standing in for Eric Long), Paul Mooney, Melina Quinn (NIEA), John Shannon, Elaine Shaw, Patrick Taggart,

1. Apologies

Peter Donnelly, Tim Hunniford, Eric Long, Roy Lyttle, Lyn Sherriff, Doug Thomson

2. All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020, Melina Quinn

Melina outlined the All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020.

Pollinators are important for: economy and wealth; health and wellbeing; and wildlife and landscape. Bees are the most important pollinators in Ireland. There are 98 bee species in Ireland: 1 honeybee; 20 bumblebees; and 77 solitary bees.

Irish pollinators are in decline because of: habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation; general declines in wildflowers within the landscape; pests and diseases; pesticides; and climate change.

The all Ireland plan seeks to protect our pollinators by working with a large number of organisations in pursuit of five objectives:

- making Ireland pollinator friendly;
- raising awareness of pollinators and how to protect them;
- managed pollinators – supporting beekeepers and growers;
- expanding our knowledge on pollinators and pollination service; and
- collecting evidence to track change and measure success.

More information is available from: www.biodiversityireland.ie/pollinator-plan.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted.

The matter of Northern Ireland Local Government Association possibly providing representation on the Forum is still in progress.

The UFU plans to hold a Brexit debate on 7 June. Patricia Erwin was hopeful of an invitation being extended to Forum members.

Patricia Erwin to confirm whether Forum members will be invited to the debate.

George Mathers explained that about 2,970 people have registered with Business Development Groups, which are expected to start meeting in June. If significant members drop out, there may be a second tranche for applications, but this is unlikely before September 2016. In the event of a Brexit vote, groups are likely to continue to meet in the medium term.

It was agreed that Martin McKendry should be invited to meet the Forum briefly at the next meeting, which will be held on the morning of 28 June at CAFRE, Greenmount. Possible key messages to communicate to him include:

- horticulture's contribution to NI in terms of economy, environment, food security, health and wellbeing and tourism;
- the industry's needs for education and training, including a horticultural degree (and the shortcomings of the Business Development Group);
- the need to encourage more young people into the industry; and
- support for the formation of producer organisations.

Keith Crawford to issue invitation and to consider key messages.

4. Update of Action Plan

It had been hoped that Ian Duff would facilitate the updating of the Action Plan but, unfortunately, he was unavailable. There was, nevertheless, some discussion of priorities for the new Action Plan.

There was agreement that the Action Plan should focus on four key issues:

- assistance with the development of producer organisations (for fruit and vegetable sectors);
- the need for better market intelligence data, to identify import substitution and export opportunities;
- the need for better relationships within industry; and
- the need for better education, training and technology transfer (e.g. in areas like staff management).

Patrick Taggart to speak to Louise Millsopp to ensure that the new Dunhumby Market Intelligence project results in data that help industry identify import substitution and export opportunities.

5. Event at Parliament Buildings/Communication Strategy

The draft "Why horticulture matters in Northern Ireland" leaflet was discussed.

Several possible improvements were suggested:

- Rather than having a quotation from a local VIP explaining what horticulture, or their garden, means to them, a definition of horticulture, or a depiction of a world, or Northern Ireland, without horticulture might be more effective.
- It may be worthwhile adding some figures to the “Environment” section.
- In the “Health and wellbeing” section, the second bullet point needs editing and the fourth bullet point is redundant.
- The National Trust may be able to provide figures for the “Tourism” section.
- Consideration should be given to making the “Sustainable prices” and “Control of labour costs” more positive.

It was suggested that the leaflet may have more impact if it is shorter. A more comprehensive document could be emailed to MLAs who express an interest. Supplementary leaflets, telling “good news stories” of individual sectors may also be a good idea.

Careful consideration must be given to any exhibition at Parliament Buildings due to security arrangements and other potential difficulties.

It was acknowledged that choosing the right MLA sponsor and the right time will be critical.

Elaine Shaw to pass contact details of our southern counterparts to Patrick Taggart so he can find out about their promotional activities.

Keith Crawford to circulate aims and objectives of event at Parliament Buildings in advance of meeting on 28 June.

Event at Parliament Buildings to be main agenda item on 28 June.

6. AOB

The National Land Based College has launched. More details are available here: <http://www.hortweek.com/national-land-based-college-sets-agenda/careers-and-workplace/article/1392642>.

Patrick Taggart to invite Victor Chestnutt, new UFU Deputy President, to future meetings.

7. Dates of future meetings

28 June at ~10am at Greenmount Campus (CAFRE Horticulture Awards Day) and 19 September and 21 November, both at 7.30pm. Details to be confirmed.