

# **Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting**

**Thursday 12 January 2017, 3:30 pm, UFU HQ**

**Chair:** Keith Crawford

**Present:** Elaine Chapman, Robin Cherry (NISPPG), Victor Chestnutt (UFU), Ian Duff, Barbara Erwin, Patricia Erwin, Ivor Ferguson (UFU), David Laidlaw (RUAS), Hamilton Loney, Patrick Lundy (Ulster Beekeepers Association), Roy Lyttle, Adrian Magowan, Robin McKee, Paul Mooney, John Shannon, Robert Sibbett (NISPPG), Patrick Taggart, Doug Thomson, Angus Wilson (NISPPG), Claire Woods (CAFRE)

## **1. Apologies**

Neil Cummings, Graham Hewitt, Sam MacNeice

## **2. Balmoral Show**

Representatives of the Northern Ireland Stakeholder Potato Promotion Group (NISPPG), CAFRE, Ulster Beekeepers Association and UFU joined the Forum for this item.

David Laidlaw described the opportunity to exhibit at Balmoral Show.

The exhibit would be in the Garden Village, which is on the right after entering through the main entrance. Pagodas (5mx5m) are available at a cost of £600 + VAT (electricity and water are extra) for the duration of the show which will run from 10 May until 13 May. Opening hours will be 09.30-18.30 (Wed, Fri and Sat) and 09.30-20.00 (Thur) and up to 100,000 visitors are expected. David needs confirmation of intention to exhibit by the end of January.

There was interest in exhibiting at Balmoral Show but also concern about whether organisations would be able to make the requisite commitment. Up to 20 people may be needed.

The possibility of creating a joint exhibit, between NISPPG, the Horticulture Forum and Jilly Dougan, was discussed. Also discussed were a "couch potato" seating area and participation in the Schools' Trail. Seed packets were mentioned as a possible give-away as were life-size cardboard cut outs of growers.

**Horticulture Forum to let David Laidlaw know by 31 January whether or not they wish to exhibit at Balmoral Show.**

## **3. Brexit priorities**

In preparation for the planned reception to be held in the Long Gallery, Stormont, it was agreed that the Forum should agree its key Brexit priorities. The UFU's priorities and the report by Doug formed the basis of the discussion. The following four priorities were agreed:

- Best possible access to European markets (especially Republic of Ireland) and to continue/secure additional trade agreements outside the EU.
- Financial support for the horticulture industry that at least equals the level of support enjoyed by the horticulture industry in Republic of Ireland. (The Scheme of Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector provides around €5M per year in Republic of Ireland. There is no equivalent scheme in Northern Ireland. The FBIS-Capital Scheme in Northern Ireland, which was open for applications in autumn/winter 2016/7, was in two tiers: tier 1 was constrained by a list of eligible items designed to meet the needs of mainstream agriculture (not horticulture), while tier 2 was open only to projects costing in excess of £30,000.)
- Maintaining access to seasonal and full-time labour.
- Minimising disruption to existing trade relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. (Possible changes to VAT arrangements are one area of concern. Currently, when plants are exported south of the border, VAT does not need to be paid (EC sale). Post-Brexit, VAT may need to be paid before plants cross the border. This could create cash flow problems, particularly in the case of sales to customers who are slow to pay.)

**Patrick to circulate priorities to Forum members.**