

Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting

Monday 23 October 2017, 7.30 pm, Portadown Rugby Club

Chair: Keith Crawford

Present: Barbara Erwin, Laura Garnett (Perennial), Hamilton Loney, Roy Lyttle, Paul Mooney, Patrick Taggart, Doug Thomson

1. Apologies

Barclay Bell, Patricia Erwin, Adrian Magowan, Danny McCartney, Robin McKee, John Shannon

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2017 were agreed.

3. Perennial (Laura Garnett)

Keith welcomed Laura to the meeting and invited her to talk about the work of Perennial.

Laura explained that Perennial is the UK's only charity dedicated to helping people working in or retired from horticulture and their families. Her role is to raise funds and awareness of the charity so that its four highly-trained case workers and five debt advisers can be kept on the road. When Perennial takes on new cases it undertakes to provide help for as long as is necessary. In 2016 Perennial helped 1124 individuals or families, helping them to access £1.5m in direct financial help. Perennial receives no government funding but relies entirely on donations. Client numbers are growing at approximately 5% per year. The majority of clients are not retired and are 50-60 years old. Major issues that Perennial helps with include financial difficulties, mental and physical health and alcoholism. The charity currently has only five clients in Northern Ireland, perhaps reflecting a lack of awareness of its existence within the local industry.

Laura asked members to help raise awareness of Perennial's work within their organisations. More information is available from www.perennial.org.uk. The possibility of the Forum hosting a garden party, where guests pay an entry fee that goes to Perennial, was mooted and received support from members present.

All members to raise awareness of Perennial within their own organisations and others within the industry with whom they are in contact.

Paul to arrange for CAFRE horticulture students to be made aware of Perennial.

All members to consider possible locations for a garden party.

4. Reception for MLAs/customers

Patrick reported that the NI Regional Food Programme team had been informed that the Forum may not hold a reception. Under the terms of the letter of offer, the reception, were it to be held, would need to take place between now and 31 March 2018, a period when little produce would be available. It was accepted that the value of the reception was greatly diminished while the Assembly was suspended. The team acknowledged that many of the people who would have been invited to the reception had been invited to the apple juice reception at Balmoral Show in May.

5. Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme claim

Patrick explained that Ian Duff was progressing the claim. The claim must be submitted by 30 June 2018.

6. Balmoral Show 2018

Members present agreed that the Forum should participate again in Balmoral Show in 2018. Paul explained that there had already been one meeting of the Balmoral Horticulture Group, of which Claire Woods is a member. It was agreed to arrange a meeting between the Forum, RUAS and Claire Woods, preferably in November, to progress things. Laura suggested that perhaps Perennial could also exhibit at Balmoral, possibly helping the Forum with some publicity via social media.

Patrick to ascertain who has replaced David Laidlaw as the key RUAS contact and arrange a Forum/RUAS/Claire Woods meeting.

7. Facebook

Members present agreed that Facebook could be gainfully used to raise awareness of significant industry events throughout the year (e.g. Armagh Bramley harvest). Also, competitions could be run to create and sustain interest. Laura suggested that Perennial's digital communications team may be able to offer some advice. Patrick explained that he would not be in a position to manage the Forum's Facebook page.

Patrick to speak to Sandra Witherspoon, who manages CAFRE's Facebook page, for advice.

8. AGM

The AGM is due to take place in January 2018. In preparation, nominations will be needed, preferably two each from: ALCI; FIF; Growers NI; HTA; NIFFA; NISFGA; Northway; and UFU. Ideally, appointees will engage enthusiastically both with the Forum and the organisations they represent. It was agreed that it would be beneficial to have some new younger members. Consideration should also be given to nomination of co-opted members (members not representing the aforementioned organisations but who are valued because of their experience of the industry) and invitees (to date mainly DAERA staff). Barbara is due to assume the office of Chair and a new Vice Chair will be needed. Elaine has expressed a desire to relinquish the office of Treasurer (due to work pressures) so a new Treasurer will also be needed.

All members to consult with their organisation and forward to Patrick: two nominations from their organisation; suggestions for co-opted members and; nominations/volunteers for the offices of Vice Chair and Treasurer.

9. AOB

Hamilton asked for a box of the “Why the horticulture industry matters in Northern Ireland” leaflet for use at the forthcoming Richhill Apple Harvest Fayre.

Patrick to send leaflets to Hamilton.

Doug told the Forum about Tyfu Cymru, the Welsh equivalent of the Horticulture Forum. Tyfu Cymru appears to be a Lantra-led. More information is available on Facebook. Paul reminded members of the existence of ROI’s Horticulture Forum.

Patrick to try to find more information on ROI’s Horticulture Forum and explore whether there might be any value in a joint meeting.

Paul mentioned that DAERA is currently carrying out a review of AFBI. Details are available here: <https://www.afbini.gov.uk/news/daera-review-and-why-your-views-are-important>.

Members’ organisations to respond to the consultation.

Doug mentioned that DAERA Plant Health are planning to hold an event on *Xylella fastidiosa*.

Patrick to find out details and pass on to Forum members.

Paul reported that CAFRE hopes to progress a competition to recruit replacements for recently departed horticultural staff.

Members to spread the word and to keep an eye out for advertisements.

10. Date of next meeting

To be confirmed.