

Minutes of the Horticulture Forum Meeting

Monday 22 January 2018, 7:30 pm, Portadown Rugby Club

Chair: Keith Crawford

Present: Keith Crawford, Peter Donnelly, Ian Duff, Barbara Erwin, Kieran Hughes, Hamilton Loney, Roy Lyttle, Mark Maher, Paul Mooney, John Shannon, Elaine Shaw, Patrick Taggart, Doug Thomson

Apologies: Tim Hunniford, Adrian Magowan, Danny McCartney, Lyn Sherriff

1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

2. DAERA support

Keith read out a letter, dated 18 January 2018, from Louise Millsopp (Head of DAERA Agri-Food Support Branch), which explained that, due to staff and financial resources, Agri-Food Support Branch would no longer be able to provide secretarial support and payment for meeting facilities to the Forum. This letter followed a telephone call from Louise Millsopp to Keith.

Keith and Barbara also met with Sam Kennedy and Paul Mooney on 19 January, when DAERA's withdrawal from the Forum was further discussed.

Paul confirmed that CAFRE Greenmount's offer of free meeting facilities still stands. Elaine also offered meeting facilities at Northway.

In view of the facts that the Ulster Arable Society is provided with a secretary by CAFRE and that the Republic of Ireland's Horticulture Industry Forum enjoys strong support from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, members agreed that the decision to withdraw DAERA support should be appealed.

It was agreed to ask UFU whether they might be able to provide secretarial support in the short term.

Ian observed that the NI Regional Food Programme management fee might help to pay for a secretary.

It was agreed that the Forum should seek a meeting with the DAERA Permanent Secretary (currently Noel Lavery but due to be replaced imminently by Denis McMahon) and Head of Food and Farming Group (Norman Fulton). The need for support to achieve the ambitious plans set out in the *Review and Strategic Priorities for the Development of the Horticulture Industry in Northern Ireland (2012)* and in the *Action Plan* (updated in 2016) and the significant contributions

that horticulture makes to Northern Ireland's society and economy should be the key themes.

It was also agreed that the support of the NI Affairs Committee should be sought, along with that of other NI MPs.

Patrick explained that the imminent relocation of his current post to Ballykelly had perhaps served as a catalyst to DAERA's decision. While he had greatly enjoyed his involvement with the Forum he had felt that remaining in his current post was not a realistic option.

Patrick to send copies of the leaflet, *Why the horticulture industry matters in Northern Ireland* to Barbara.

Barbara to arrange meeting with DAERA Permanent Secretary and Head of Food and Farming Group.

Barbara to write to NI Affairs Committee and other NI MPs.

3. Balmoral Show 2018

Members welcomed the news that RUAS would not be charging the Forum for participation in the Show.

It was agreed that it would be preferable for the marquee, the mobile kitchen and the Ulster in Bloom stand to be close together and all on the same side of the path.

It was agreed that a plant sales area would not be required.

Ian explained that the Mighty Spud would need only a small area within the marquee, approximately 4m frontage, with the emphasis being placed on using the Mighty Spud costume.

As well as the Mighty Spud, the marquee (which is to be twice the size of last year's – 24m x 9m as opposed to 12m x 9m) will also be shared with Jilly Dougan's *Sow, Grow, Munch*. Although Jilly's emphasis is on encouraging GIY, rather than the Forum's emphasis on commercial horticulture, the Forum recognised possible benefits of sharing the marquee. For example, Jilly's participation will almost certainly result in increased footfall, particularly from younger visitors to the Show.

Hamilton confirmed that tables (8) would be available again from Tandragee Golf Club but urged that precautions should be taken against water damage.

Members decided against holding an apple juice reception at the Show. Although last year's reception went well, it was felt that the effort expended was not well repaid in terms of attendance by industry representatives, MLAs and other VIPs.

Paul to ask Claire Woods to ask Jenny McNeill to arrange for the marquee, the mobile kitchen and the Ulster in Bloom stand to be closer together.

Barbara to arrange meeting with Jenny McNeill, Jilly Dougan, Mark Maher, Claire Woods and Ian to agree apportioning of space within the marquee. (This must take place in time for Ian to submit a NIRFP application on behalf of the Forum by the deadline of 14 February.)

4. Annual General Meeting

Keith handed over to Ian Duff to chair the AGM.

a. Chair's report

Keith gave an overview of the Forum's activities during the two years of his chairmanship.

It was a busy and eventful period for the Forum. Much work was put into planning a reception for MLAs, but that came to nought following the collapse of the Assembly and Executive. The Forum's first exhibition at Balmoral Show 2017 was more successful. The leaflet, *Why the horticulture industry matters in Northern Ireland*, which was produced for the ill-fated reception, was used at Balmoral Show.

The Forum had benefited from the NI Park Managers' Forum joining and had also received interesting and useful input from a range of individuals and organisations, including: Jilly Dougan (*Sow, Grow, Munch*); Melina Quinn (*All Ireland Pollinator Plan*); Fiona Walker (Invest NI); and Laura Garnett (Perennial).

Keith thanked: Ian Duff for his help in chairing AGMs, revising the Action Plan and submitting a NI Regional Food Programme application and claim on behalf of the Forum; Barbara for her support as Vice Chair; Patrick for his secretarial and administrative support; and Forum members for their support during his period of poor health.

He urged members to continue to work together and support Barbara in her new role as Chair.

b. Treasurer's report

Elaine presented the following provisional figures:

- Income £4,725

- Expenditure £3,203
- NIRFP £1,000
- Incoming fees £1,800
- Balance £4,322.

c. Operational guidance

It was agreed not to change current operational guidance. Annual fees for member organisations remain £200. Reference to DAERA paying for secretarial support and for meeting room hire is to be retained, pending the appeal of DAERA's decision to withdraw.

d. Election

As immediate past Chair, Keith was retained as a Standing Member.

Organisations will be represented as follows (agreed unanimously):

Organisation	Representatives
Association of Landscape Contractors of Ireland	Keith Crawford Lyn Sherriff
GrowersNI	Doug Thomson
The Horticultural Trades Association	Neil Cummings John Shannon
NI Flowers and Foliage Association	Barclay Bell Barbara Erwin
NI Park Managers' Forum	Danny McCartney Jonathan Ellis
NI Soft Fruit Growers Association	Peter Donnelly Mark Conway
Northway Mushrooms	Frank Donnelly Elaine Shaw
Ulster Farmers' Union	Hamilton Loney Adrian Magowan

The Fruit Industry Federation, previously a member organisation, has dissolved.

The following co-opted members were agreed unanimously:

Member	Sector
Shane Donnelly	Cut flowers and vegetables
Kieran Hughes	Mushrooms
Tim Hunniford	Top fruit
Robin McKee	Vegetables
UFU (individual TBC)	Fruit and vegetables

Office bearers were elected as follows:

Office	Member	Proposer	Secunder
Chair	Barbara Erwin	Keith Crawford	Doug Thomson
Vice Chair	Hamilton Loney	Barbara Erwin	John Shannon
Secretary	TBC		
Treasurer	Elaine Shaw	Hamilton Loney	Peter Donnelly

The following invitees were unanimously agreed:

Invitee	Organisation
Ian Duff	Ultimo Consulting
Paul Mooney	CAFRE

Ian concluded by wishing the Forum well and handed over to Barbara.

5. AOB

VAT

Patrick reported that he had received an email from Frank Donnelly, highlighting regulatory divergence between NI (and the rest of the UK) and ROI. Mushroom growers in ROI are eligible for a VAT rebate; their counterparts in UK are not. Elaine explained that this inequality also applied in soft fruit and top fruit sectors. Doug added that there is no VAT on fertilisers in ROI. This topic may be returned to in a future meeting.

Interpretation of “local”

Doug announced that he had come across an interesting Bord Bia report on how consumers interpret the claim of “local”. He will circulate it to members.

The single agri-food marketing organisation

Ian asked what had happened in response to the Agri-food Strategy Board’s recommendation for the establishment of a single agri-food marketing organisation.

Barbara to raise this in the anticipated meeting with DAERA Permanent Secretary and Head of Food and Farming Group.

6. Date of next meeting

7.30pm, 19 February 2018 at Greenmount, CAFRE.