



**Minutes of the meeting of 19 February 2018 in the Manor Suite,
Greenmount Campus (CAFRE) at 7.30pm**

Chair: Barbara Erwin

Present: Keith Crawford, Peter Donnelly, Ian Duff, Phil Fox, Kieran Hughes, Hamilton Lonely, Roy Little, Robin McKee, Paul Mooney, John Shannon, Elaine Shaw, Doug Thompson

Apologies: Barclay Bell, Mark Maher, Adrian Magowan, Patricia Erwin

1. Minutes of the last meeting

The amendment was made to the list of co-opted members. Roy Little's name was added. Patricia's name was removed from attendees.

2. Chairman's Business

Barbara reported on her telephone discussion with Stiofan Nutty, Co-ordinator of the Horticulture Industry Forum ROI – see below. He had indicated an interest in keeping in touch and visiting the NI Horticulture Forum, combined with visits to growers in NI.

ACTION: Barbara agreed to make contact with Stiofan and arrange a visit at the earliest opportunity.

Response to letters to the NI Affairs Committee:

All members of the NI Affairs Committee were circulated with a letter setting out the lack of support for Horticulture in NI, together with the Forum's Horticulture Matters leaflet. To date a response has been received from Ian Paisley, who wrote to Norman Fulton requesting consideration of support for the Forum. In addition, all other NI MPs had been sent letters and the leaflet.

ACTION: Barbara to write to Ian Paisley MP updating him on the meeting.

Report of meeting with Norman Fulton- Head of Food and Farming Group

Barbara and Hamilton attended this meeting with Norman. Paul Mooney was also present at Norman's request.

Barbara and Hamilton highlighted the main issues they wished to discuss: the invisibility of Horticulture in DAERA's Key Deliverables despite, the economic importance of the Horticulture industry for example in comparison to the

Fishing industry (support for this is one of the key deliverables. e To make matter worse there had been a sudden withdrawal of support for the Forum with no forewarning. No offer of any kind of secretarial support was given during the meeting. Norman stated that no other group received this kind of support. We suggested that the Ulster Arable Society and YFC do.

The lack of representation on the Stakeholder Brexit Group of anyone from Horticulture was also discussed and the apparent disconnect between the Forum and DAERA was highlighted to him. Getting on consultation lists and who should be the forums key DAERA contacts in view of the changes in the civil service were also mentioned.

The issue of support for development of the sector was discussed for example the grant system in comparison to ROI and the limitations of the latest Tier 1 and 2 grants. The difficulty people wishing to start to build a horticulture business was emphasised. Norman suggested the LEADER programme may be more applicable in this situation.

Norman has essentially asked the forum to clarify for DAERA its direction, vision and purpose. He agreed that visits to growers/producers would be valuable to help him better understand the industry and Barbara agreed to help set these up.

ACTION: Barbara to write to Norman and on the basis of the size and value of the sector formally request a place at the Brexit stakeholder's group; In addition she would ask for potential dates for visits to growers and request the Forum is put on DAERA consultation lists. Barbara would also reiterate that the forum needed support to function effectively to the benefit of DAERA, the industry and the NI Economy and that in due course when internal discussions had concluded she would return with specific "asks" of DAERA on the basis of the Forums defined goals and a new spirit of partnership and co-operation.

3. Secretarial support

Barbara agreed to take notes and circulate them for the meeting of the 19th February. However this was not sustainable in the long term. Various options were discussed.

Barbara had written to Barclay Bell as President of the UFU requesting interim support but the matter was to be presented to the Board meeting the following week.

Ian Duff mention that the NI Institute of Agricultural Science paid someone for Secretarial support and agreed to investigate this further.

Claire Woods has agreed to see if a mature Greenmount student would be interested.

A suitable payment rate will need to be established.

ACTION: Ian to investigate secretarial support and rates of pay. Claire to ask students.

4. Balmoral Show

Members had received documentation by email and felt happy they could build on last year's success. Success, it was felt, was achieved by a team effort and members were reminded that we will not have Patrick Taggart to help with the set up. It was felt no further leaflets needed to be printed as there were some in stock. At the end of the show plant materials will be sold off to raise money for Perennial. It is important that all materials should be priced beforehand.

- Hamilton established who would need tables which he hoped to borrow again from the golf club.
- Peter agreed to take responsibility for the main press release and risk assessment. (Paul suggested others should consider writing subsector articles about attending at Balmoral 2018 highlighting their contribution to the economy and the benefits that they bring to society)
- Ian agreed to initiate/source demonstrators for the mobile kitchen and get more leaflets printed.
- Ian confirmed that he had completed the application to the Regional Food Programme and highlighted the requirements including the need to keep notes of the growers who exhibit in the marquee and produce a final report and evaluation at the end. We also need to estimate on a sound basis the numbers of people visiting the marquee, engage with 2000 school children and produce 3 press articles.

5. Future of the Horticulture Forum NI

A lively and robust discussion took place about the role of the Forum: What does it want to achieve? It is about promotion and / or lobbying or both; the importance of connecting with politicians and civil servants at the right level; finances to support Forum activities and develop / improve; participant time pressure and the voluntary nature of attending and contributing. The need for change and the need to raise the profile of the Forum was fully agreed by all. The forum also needs to communicate clear messages and to ensure better connections/cooperation between the actual NI Forum and member organisations. It was agreed that members would need to become more engaged if the Forum was to succeed.

The ROI model of interconnected and comprehensive support was commended as something that had worked in ROI and could work in NI

It was felt that in the first instance it would be useful to have a visit from Stiofan Nutty and hopefully learn from his experience. This could be followed by possibly engaging a consultant or co-ordinator. Only then should financing and the way the Forum operates be decided. New ways of working might include a

smaller Executive and larger Board, possibly increasing membership rates based with a view to raising revenue.

ACTION: Barbara to contact Stiofan to arrange a visit ASAP .

6. AOB

Paul informed members of the British Floristry Chelsea Inspiration Day on Wednesday 21 February and Sports Turf Matters Event on 8th March.

7. Date of next meeting

This is to be decided depending on when Stiofan Nutty can attend.

POST SCRIPT

Barbara received a letter from Paul Girvan on 20 February. [It](#) says 'I would welcome the opportunity to meet with yourself and any other members of the Forum to discuss how the issues raised in the publication and in your letter can be taken forward'.

ACTION: Immediate action will be taken by the Forum Chair to contact Paul ~~Girvan's office~~[Girvan's office](#) and arrange a meeting.