

Stalham Farmers Meeting 10/1/18

A record attendance of 60 members and guests at the club's first meeting of 2018 was present at the Norfolk Mead Hotel on Wednesday, January 10.

The chairman, Jonathan Deane, also welcomed North Walsham Young Farmers' Club members and the chairman, Daniel Brown. A total of 17 members had earlier enjoyed supper and a welcome drink as our guests.

Mr Deane was delighted that the club's tradition of hospitality and support for the YFC had continued and hoped that next year, members of Acle YFC might also join the club for this annual joint gathering.

Apologies – The following had been received by the secretary: President, William Donald; vice-chairman, Henry Alston, Louis Baugh, Andrew Sands, David Moar, David Hughes, Andrew Spinks, Tom Hume, Roy Houlden, and William Randell.

Secretary's report – The minutes of the December meeting, which were on the club's website, were noted.

Michael Pollitt also informed members that he had been nominated as a regional finalist in the Volunteer of the Year Award by the Churches Conservation Trust. For the past three years, he has helped fellow volunteers open St John Maddermarket Church, Norwich, which had welcomed a record total of 5,300 visitors since April. The awards by the country's leading church conservation charity, would be made in London on January 26.

He also asked the 2017 trophy winners to bring silverware to the club's annual meeting on Wednesday, February 14 – so that it could be engraved ahead of the annual dinner in March. And details would be sent to all members soon.

Mr Pollitt also asked members to support the club in the annual match against Holt Farmers' Club on Friday, February 23 at Rossi's, North Walsham. A total of 18 ten-pin players and 18 bowlers would be needed – it would start at 4pm for 4.30pm, and would be followed by supper. Again further details would be sent to members.

New members – A husband and wife were welcomed to the club, Julia and Joe Almey, were proposed by James Taylor. And the chairman was delighted that another member of the family had joined the club.

Speaker – Our guest for the evening, Emily Norton, of nearby Frettenham, was introduced. After reading law at Cambridge, she then studied at Harper Adams University College for a MSC in sustainable agriculture. She returned to the family business in 2007, when the family founded Norton's Dairy, producing national award-winning dairy produce on-farm. A finalist in the 2017 Farmers Weekly Awards Mixed

Farmer of the Year category, she received the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association's 2018 Nuffield scholarship

Norton's Dairy, was a winner of the Aylsham Agricultural Show Association's 2017 food and drink supplier category too – and cream from the farm was served to members and guests at the supper beforehand. Her topic: "Turning problems into opportunities on the 21st-century family farm."

She talked briefly about her plans for her Nuffield study scholarship, which included visits to Japan, South Korea and also Hong Kong, which was developing a roof-top food growing economy.

However, the thrust of her presentation outlined ways of responding to the challenges faced by the industry. Having studied law at Cambridge, and then spent two years working in London, she resolved to look further afield to broaden her horizons. Her decision to study, via distant learning, for a master's degree in sustainable agriculture at Harper Adams University College, led to further radical change – and not least for the family's 150ha arable and beef enterprise.

She spoke with great energy and enthusiasm of the opportunities on the doorstep – growing food to feed the nation. But, she argued, farmers had to respond to consumers' concerns about production systems. While for many, food produced as cheaply as possible and without too much regard for production systems was not a priority, the industry needed to respond positively to these challenges.

Her lively style, and sometimes deliberately provocative remarks, was clearly appreciated by all sections of her audience.

Sarah Ellero thanked her on behalf of the club and also of North Walsham YFC. And the chairman, Jonathan Deane, invited her to return to present a summary of her findings at a future meeting – possibly in 2020. He presented her with a copy of Alec Douet's definitive history of Norfolk Agriculture – further study material ahead of her Nuffield travels.