

STALHAM FARMERS' CLUB, 174th annual meeting

Norfolk Mead, Coltishall

Wednesday, February 17, 2016

A total of 21 members and guests enjoyed a two-course supper, which had been delayed partly because "road closed" signs on Wroxham Road and diversions resulted in significant delays in arriving at the hotel.

Annual meeting

The chairman, Luke Paterson, who had delayed the start of the meeting until 7.40pm, then welcomed members and guests. The speaker, Prof Kevin Hiscock, and the NFU's regional director, Robert Sheasby, were among the 33-strong company. There were also three CPD points, which could be claimed, under the BASIS scheme.

1 Minutes of the 173rd meeting. These had been published on the club's website for almost a year. It was agreed that they represented an accurate record of proceedings. There were no matters arising

2 Apologies – The following had been notified to the secretary: Rob Norman, Graham Duncanson, Paul Corfield, Nick Hood, Paul Corfield, Christopher Deane, David Faulkner, Jim Holt, James Taylor, Thomas Love and Alan Beck.

3 Chairman's report. Luke Paterson said that the move to the Norfolk Mead had helped to boost attendance and especially at the suppers. The food had been deservedly popular and well-received with typically more than 20 members and guests supporting the chairman. He said that forging closer links with both North Walsham and also the Acle Young Farmers' Club had seen one of the highest attendances at a recent meeting with 83 members and guests present in January.

He had a great year as chairman and it had also proved very enjoyable too. Mr Paterson thanked the secretary, Michael Pollitt, and presented him with some flowers! It was actually a very good bottle of red wine.

4 Secretary/ treasurer's report – It had been a successful year with a good programme of activities including garden visits, a ghost walk in Norwich and well-attended meetings through the winter season. Other highlights included the visit to Hall Farm, Wickmere, by invitation of A Hurn & partners, jointly with the East Norfolk NFU where visitors enjoyed a hog roast supper provided by the chairman, Luke Paterson.

The support of the East Norfolk NFU branch secretaries, Christopher Deane, David Faulkner and James Taylor was greatly appreciated in providing drinks at the farm walk, insuring the club's trophies and assisting in mailing the club's annual programme.

Membership increased by eight and steps are being taken to collect the balance of subscriptions, which were increased by £10 to £20pa from July 1 last year – the first increase since 1999. A

total of 69 members were paying the full amount by the annual meeting – so work in progress. Sadly, a number of members died during the year including Dr Ronnie Gibbs, arguably the “Father of the Club,” and Cecil Callow, another great competitor, and Gavin Paterson.

At the winter season’s opening meeting, the chairman accepted an engraved wooden gavel given in memory of the late David Ritchie, president of the club between 2010 and 2014, by his widow, Marion. It was presented by Nigel Wright on her behalf.

In financial terms, the year had been a success. A surplus of £582.84 was made in the year to December 31 against a deficit of £2,226.86 in 2014. The dinner had made about £500 and spending on meetings was much lower. The club’s bank deposit of £2,800 earned £1.36 in interest – down from £1.89 the previous year! The club had a stock of more than 125 silk ties – the reason for 2014’s deficit.

The club’s website attracted more than 21,000 visits to a total since the January 2014 launch of 35,003, as noted earlier today. Thanks to our webmaster Tim Papworth.

The club made donations of more than £900 in the year including £500 to the RABI Cumbria flood appeal and £300 to the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association for the Spring Fling. A fuller summary of the accounts has also been published on the club’s website.

The 2015 accounts, which had been prepared by the treasurer’s wife, CJ Pollitt, were accepted.

5 A proposal to pay the £500 honorarium to the secretary/ treasurer Michael Pollitt for 2016 was agreed. Proposed Ken Leggett, second John Lockhart.

6 Election of club officers – President, William Donald. Proposed Jonathan Deane, seconded Ken Leggett. In accepting the post, Mr Donald said that he hoped to take an even more active role in club activities this year but the prolonged delay in a hip operation had caused him considerable pain and discomfort.

Honorary life vice-presidents, Roger Beck and Frank Read. Proposed John Lockhart, seconded John Purling. Agreed.

Honorary vice-presidents – Hugh Crane, William Donald, Ken Leggett MBE, Michael Pollitt, Nigel Wright. Proposed Robin Baines, seconded, Peter Gardiner. Agreed.

Chairman – Jonathan Deane was proposed by Nigel Wright and seconded by John Lockhart. Mr Wright said that Mr Deane was a great supporter of the club, who would help to lead the club’s 175th anniversary celebrations with his typical enthusiasm.

Vice-chairman – Mr Deane was pleased to announce that Henry Alston had agreed to stand and took pleasure in proposing him. This was seconded by the retiring chairman, Luke Paterson, and agreed.

Committee – Mr Pollitt proposed that the committee be reduced from current 22 members to about half the size. It would include the president, chairman, vice-chairman, secretary/treasurer, membership and IT secretary, webmaster, and ex-chairman, and an initial four members – Sally Lomax, Alison Ritchie, Robert Norman and John Purling. This was seconded by John Grier. This was agreed.

Secretary/ Treasurer Michael Pollitt was proposed by Peter Gardiner and seconded by John Purling.

Membership/ UIT secretary, Jason Cantrill. This was proposed by Neil Jordan and seconded by Ken Leggett, and agreed.

After brief any other business including a show of hands supporting a day trip to Breckland, including a tour of the Stanford training area, the meeting was closed at 8.03pm.

The guest speaker, Prof Hiscock, of the University of East Anglia, gave a fascinating and detailed presentation on the long-term research project on the edge of the River Blackwater catchment, covering mainly the Salle estate and the adjoining Heydon estate. Since April 2011, the UEA's team from the School of Environmental Sciences had been conducting detailed monitoring of water flows and water quality at a number of sites. These half-hourly readings have since provided invaluable firm evidence that a strategy of establishing cover crops have led to a sustained improvement in water quality and compliance with the EU's water framework directive. Even in the wet winter months of 2015, where cover crops and reduced cultivations had been in place, the 11.3mg/litre water quality had not been breached.

Prof Hiscock's team had worked very closely with Sir John White's team, led by estate manager Poul Hovesen, to evaluate the nutrient losses and water flows.

By using various cover crop/ cultivation regimes, practical solutions had been involved and these findings had been fed back to Defra policy officials. As a result, official cover crop options have been modified in the light of this practical experience.

Prof Hiscock said that Defra funding, for the initial three-year project, had been most unusually extended for a second period. However, this work would be ending next year unless further backing could be found from other sources.

A lively discussion session lasting more than half an hour followed as Prof Hiscock fielded some though-provoking questions.

He was thanked by Luke Paterson and was presented with a club silk tie. The meeting was closed at 9.25pm.