

## **BRIGHT START TO THE 2025 SEASON**

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

A total of 17 members including the chairman, Jon Pye, and guest speaker, Adam Curtis, senior officer with the Tree Council, enjoyed a beef casserole supper at Wroxham Barns. Members of North Walsham Young Farmers' Club had been invited as guests to supper but unfortunately none attended.

The chairman welcomed 25 members and guests to the first meeting of 2025. He also congratulated Jane Ritchie, who had been elected president of the Aylsham Agricultural Show Association, at Monday's annual meeting.

The president-elect for 2026, Susie Emmett, may also be known to many members because almost 10 years ago, she gave a talk to members. Susie, who lives at Oxborough with husband and farmer Nick, was also a World Service broadcaster. She had by then travelled to more than 77 countries for her work.

1. Apologies: These have been received from Christopher Deane, Nick Deane, James Deane, Ian Willetts, Tim Papworth, Neal Sands, Greg Smith, Graham Duncanson, Ted Witton, John Grier, Anne Kent, and Nick Coller.

2. Minutes of the last meeting: These had posted on the club's website for a month and were proposed, without dissent, as an accurate record by the president, George Gay, seconded Ken Leggett.

3. New members: Jo Willetts proposed Jamie Mack, who farms at Reepham and Tunstall; seconded by George Gay. He was formally welcomed as a member by the chairman Jon Pye.

4. Secretary's update: A brief reported highlighted that there have been 655,570 visitors to the website since it had been launched. Quite remarkable interest in the club's activities, he suggested. He also asked that members respond directly to the secretary with bookings for supper/ dinners etc or apologies rather than the sender of the circular members' emails. Finally, any last-minute grain samples should be delivered to Chris Borrett at Adams & Howling without delay.

5. Annual dinner: - Salhouse Lodge, Wednesday, March 26. Ticket prices to be advised.

6. The chairman introduced the guest speaker: - Adam Curtis, who had joined the Tree Council just five weeks ago as senior officer, community planting projects. Members recalled that he had been one of the guides on the summer's farm walk to Tony & Emily Bambridge's Park Farm, Blickling, in his former role as countryside manager for the National Trust's Blickling estate. He was a former ranger for 17 years at Richmond Park, which has about 130,000 trees and herds of 630 red and fallow deer which have roamed since 1637 and attracts some 7 million visitors each year. About two years ago, he moved to Norfolk to work for the National Trust until October last year. He is a member of the 23-strong team at the charity, the Tree Council, which was established in 1974 – the year after the great "plant a tree" drive. It has grown steadily from seven staff five years ago as turnover has risen from about half a million to £3m today. It has four key pillars – scientific research, community including national tree wardens and promoting National Tree Week; education (pioneering the orchards in schools project) and partnerships.

He said that the tree warden scheme was thriving in south Norfolk unlike the north of the county. Essential the role of the charity was to promote "trees not woodlands," to encourage best planting practice and use quality grown nursery stocks. In 1990, it launched the volunteer tree warden scheme and then more recently in 2020, orchards in schools – which has led to some 3,000 projects across the country, mainly funded by Network Rail. Research has been carried out into types of tree guards and results seem to indicate that the biodegradable models were probably the most cost-effective. However, Mr Curtis emphasised that planting the right tree in the right place was key and then not neglecting it in its early growth stages. Although the Council's budget was limited, it was able to offer some grant aid and planting incentives, which could benefit communities. But efforts were concentrated on smaller-scale planting aims and not creation of large, scale woodland or forestry. It worked closely with another much bigger charity, the Woodland Trust, which has about 500 staff, and was able to undertake much more ambitious scale

projects. The Council had also been closely involved with Defra's £4.8m five-year pilot scheme, Trees outside Woodland, which covered six local authorities including Norfolk, Kent, Cornwall and Shropshire county councils. It aimed to identify ways to encourage planting trees in a range of areas and was expected to publish a final report in coming months.

He was enthusiastic about an initiative to boost the number of elm trees, especially in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. Some European or white elm have been identified in Suffolk, which have survived for almost 200 years. There are some 57 sub-species of English (Field) elm and nine different strains, some of which may not be susceptible to the dreaded bark beetle, which carries the disease. As an example, he had been involved in a scheme to plant 100 Dutch Elm disease resistance trees on the National Trust's estates at Blickling and at Felbrigg. In total, 50 resistant Dutch elm have been planted on each estate, thanks to the Tree Council. He said that Norfolk and Suffolk still have many elms, which are particularly valued by the hairstreak butterfly. The tendency for elm to sucker and then re-grow before being killed by the disease may have helped maintain this surprisingly high population regional density of these butterflies. His proposal to encourage small-scale planting of Dutch elm was received very positively by members. Mr Curtis asked whether farmers might be prepared to plant a minimum of three to five elms, which could be provided gratis. He would handle all the grant application paperwork and in exchange farmers/landowners would have to describe the planting location using What3Words and agree to allow potential access for inspection of the trees at some stage in the future. A bulk delivery of trees could be arranged, and the farmers would collect their allocation and arrange planting in the 2025/6 season. And if at least 20 Stalham members agreed to support the project, it would also help the wider environment and potentially the hairstreak butterfly too. If some wanted to plant more elms in hedgerows, which was probably the best location, then additional trees may be available, he added. In 15 years, the new stands of elm would make a formidable statement to mark the club's 200th anniversary of its formation on December 15, 1841.

After answering numerous questions from an attentive audience, which also included the chair of North Walsham YFC, Danny Bunting, he was thanked by the chairman.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm.

Next meeting - Sampling the air to spot diseases - Scientist Darren Heavens, of the Earlham Institute, will explain the background and the work of his PhD students in this project. Given threats of blue tongue to livestock and crop diseases like blight and virus yellows, could this tool help farmers?