

STALHAM FARMERS' CLUB 2025 AGM

A total of 19 members and guest speaker Dr Darren Heavens, of the Earlham Institute on Norwich Research Park, joined the chairman, Jonathan Pye, for supper at Wroxham Barns on Wednesday, February 12, 2025. The two-course meal, which including chicken breast in bacon, was much appreciated.

The club's 183rd annual meeting was held on Wednesday, February 12, at Wroxham Barns. The chairman, Jonathan Pye welcomed more than 30 members and guests, at 7.40pm.

Apologies – Robin Baines, James Deane, Graham Duncanson, Richard Gay, Robert Gray, Sam and Becky Hill, Roy Houlden, Jane and George Ritchie, Guy Willetts.

Minutes of the 182nd annual meeting – The secretary, Michael Pollitt, who highlighted key elements, said that a summary had been on the Society's website for more than a year. Incidentally, the total number of visitors to the site has reached 665,177! Clearly the club's affairs are of some interest to non-members.

It was agreed that the chairman would sign the minutes as a true and accurate summary of the meeting held on February 7, 2024.

Chairman's report - Jonathan Pye would present a further summary of the past year at next month's annual dinner. The change of venue to Salhouse Lodge in March last year had been warmly welcomed by members and that an excellent dinner had been enjoyed by a sell-out attendance. Other highlights included a very successful farm tour, which was actually a walk, by invitation of Tony and Emily Bambridge. Held with the East Norfolk branch of the National Farmers' Union, more than 100 members and guests had heard about the history of Park Farm, Blickling, and been impressed by the pedigree herd of Lincoln Red cattle, the arable operations and Emily's Haflinger stud. In addition, Adam Curtis, then countryside manager with the National Trust (now with the Tree Council) had also been a speaker.

He was delighted that Jason Cantrill had agreed to take on the role of vice-chairman. He thanked the secretary Michael Pollitt for his efforts in organising events and meetings, which had included a rich, varied programme of indoor meetings.

Secretary/ treasurer's report. Michael Pollitt was planning to arrange visits to the Happisburgh Light later this spring following the talk by Geoff Turner last December.

In addition, there had been a very strong response to the offer of Dutch Em Disease resistant trees, which could be provided by Adam Curtis, of the Tree Council. To date, 19 requests from members across East Norfolk had been received. He asked for members to let the secretary know by March 1 so that steps could be taken to order stocks of trees for planting in the 2025/6 season.

In presenting the financial summary to December 31, 2024, he said that the club's finances were in a robust state. The total balances stood at £8,473. A deficit of £328.66 was reported, which had included donations of £1,150 (£650 to Norfolk Walsham YFC to attend the Norfolk YFC's Oak Ball and £500 to Holt Youth Project). The club had spent almost £1,100 hosting the summer farm walk.

In terms of subscriptions, the overwhelming majority of members were now paying the correct annual amount of £20. However, there were about 17 members still paying the old £10 rate but these tended to be non-attenders or senior long-serving members. Arrears had been collected, hence the total of £2,965 in the year. Interest received had risen from £49.45 to £72.99.

In answer to a question by Tim Papworth, who asked why the deposit account total had fallen from £4,941.81 to £4,811.83, it was explained that a £500 donation to Holt Youth Project had been made.

The accounts were accepted, proposed Michael Pollitt, seconded Jonathan Deane.

Honoraria – It was agreed, proposed Christopher Deane, second, Ken Leggett, to pay the annual honorarium to the secretary. This was increased by £100, incidentally, the first since 2010.

Elections –

President, George Gay, proposed by the chairman, Jonathan Pye, seconded Ken Leggett. Agreed. Mr Gay thanked members for the privilege of serving the club and was pleased to have the opportunity to complete his three-year term.

Chairman, Jonathan Pye, proposed George Gay, seconded Christopher Deane. Agreed.

Vice-chairman, Jason Cantrill, proposed Jonathan Pye, seconded Ian Deane. Agreed.

Secretary/ treasurer, Michael Pollitt., proposed Tim Papworth, seconded Simon Daniels. Agreed.

Membership secretary, Jo Willetts, proposed Jonathan Pye, seconded, William Sands. Agreed.

Committee – The chairman invited members to stand for the committee and suggested that six members could be asked to serve, thus enabling two to retire each year over a three-year period. Jonathan Deane did point out that there should be nine members on the committee. The secretary explained that of late the committee, which normally meets once or twice a year, has of late included the president, honorary vice-presidents, former chairman, club officers including chairman, vice-chairman, secretary/ treasurer, membership secretary, web editor (Tim Papworth) and a

representative of North Walsham YFC. In total, the committee already included about 15.

It was agreed that the chairman and vice-chairman would seek volunteers to serve.

Dinner-update – The club’s annual dinner would be held at Salhouse Lodge on Wednesday, March 26. Tickets £35, unchanged from the previous year. The secretary said that places would be on a “first come, first served” basis and that already 60 places had been reserved. Payment in advance was appreciated. The Lady Dannatt, HM Lord-Lieutenant for Norfolk, and retiring president of the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association, has agreed to speak and present prizes and trophies.

Any other business – Jonathan Deane was delighted to propose Fran Baugh as a new member, seconded Kevin Starkings. A brief discussion ensued about the club’s archives/ minute books. The secretary explained that some had already been transcribed and were on the website. It remains a work in progress but once transcribed, it was likely that the archives could be deposited at the Norfolk Record Office. It was explained that the surviving records were somewhat patchy – and for example all records from about 1841 to 1878 had been lost at some stage in the past 150 years.

There being no other business, the formal meeting was closed at 8.01pm. Mr Pye then introduced the guest speaker, Dr Heavens. He had spent the last 35 years working in the field of genomics. As a researcher for a pig breeder, he helped to identify genes responsible for coat colour and litter size, and he has spent the last 18 years working in Norfolk on plants and microbes. For the last five years he has focused on the detection of pathogens in the air.

In a 35-minute summary, he briefed members on the exciting potential of identifying DNA in the air to detect crop and animal diseases. It has largely been possible because of the rapid fall in the cost of DNA analysis. For example, he said that it had cost millions to sequence the human genome in the 1990s, now the same task could be carried out for under £100.

A hand-held device, which cost about £700, could enable researchers to identify with accuracy DNA in the air, which could eventually lead to a form of early warning system for farmers and growers. However, he thought that commercial application of such techniques was likely to focus, initially, on human applications. For example, if types of pollen could be identified, this would be of benefit to hay fever sufferers.

He then fielded questions from members for more than a half an hour before being thanked by Ian Deane. He was presented with a maroon club tie.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm.

