



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – LONDON BRANCH 2024

Welcome to the CLA London Branch AGM 2024.

The last 12 months have been challenging for many farmers and rural businesses, with rising costs and a tough economic climate, but the year has also shown the continuing resilience of our sector.

The CLA has been active in pressing Government to recognise the importance of the rural economy and its dynamic qualities. The success of our approach was underlined by its “Unleashing Rural Opportunity” policy paper, which adopted many of the proposals put forward by the CLA’s Rural Powerhouse campaign. For example, changes in permitted development rights that introduce much needed flexibility for rural businesses, and definitive deadlines for digital connectivity procurement constitute two major wins for the CLA.

It has been another busy year for England’s agricultural transition as the industry moved into the implementation phase of the new farming policy. While it is positive that such a wide range of initiatives are being funded, getting to grips with the multiple schemes on offer and determining which options could be of interest to each business is not straightforward. Please do get in touch with the CLA team if you need advice or support.

With a general election on the horizon, this is a crucial time for farming and the rural economy. The CLA has produced a series of ‘missions’ documents outlining our key policy recommendations and is busy engaging with politicians and candidates of all parties, in order to influence their policy development and help shape the narrative about how the countryside is governed.

Turning to the activities of London Branch, recent speakers have included Edward Parsons, land agent at the Sandringham Estate. Edward posed the question "What does the countryside do for you?" and discussed how the industry is often misunderstood and under-valued, and should be doing more to highlight the many things it delivers.

I also managed to press gang my sister-in-law into speaking! Sarah Dunning is chair of the Westmorland Family, owners of the motorway service areas Tebay, Gloucester and Cairn Lodge Services. Sarah spoke of how the family has developed a different model of motorway services which celebrate locality through producers, colleagues, community and the environment.

Both of these evenings were fully booked, which puts us in good health as we plan events over the coming 12 months. My thanks go to those on the committee who have continued to support the branch, and I encourage anyone with any ideas and suggestions on speakers, topics and venues to come forward. Your support in helping recruit new members is also welcome. We have co-opted two new additions to the branch; Chloe Gill and Tessa Berridge, who have helped add a younger dimension to the group and have been feeding in ideas of new speakers.

I would also like to thank all our hosts and partners, without whose generous support we would be unable to run these events, as well as the CLA teams who organise the programme so effectively.

Gavin Lane