

Activities report to NSA Board May 2019

This report refers to main activities since the January 2019 meeting.

Activities are presented under a set of common headings

Tech and policy

Brexit

Preparations for a no deal have dominated much of the work relating to Brexit during the winter months. While a reported 50% of Defra staff have been siphoned off to prepare in case of a no deal, the NSA has also spent the last few months warning against a no deal. We have done considerable press work on this subject and have also been in direct contact with MPs to urge them to avoid a no deal. We have seen success with the sheep industry regularly being mentioned by the Sec of State and the farming Minister as a sector that will need protection, and have been singled out in terms of early contingency planning in the event of market problems and price collapses. At the time of producing this report we have now heard that our 3rd country listing with the EU has been approved – this is something we and other organisations have been pushing for for some time and it is very welcome as it means we should not lose access to the EU market. This decision doesn't affect tariffs in the case of a no deal, or indeed potential tariffs once we have finally left the EU, but it is welcome nonetheless. It is as yet undecided what form any support scheme might take but we are making the case primarily for something that looks like the old Variable Premium Scheme where a reference price is set and a top up payment made if necessary. We are working on the principle that if the finished lamb market continues to function adequately then store and breeding stock prices stand a better chance of holding up. We still play a proactive part in the UKLIBG and this continues to be an effective group to share thinking, views and activities. It is also a highly effective way to engage with Defra and DIT teams and regularly in the region of 10 Defra/DIT staff attend our monthly meetings. The group has fed in to a number of consultations verbally and has also been helpful for individual organisations in forming their individual responses. NSA is also a member of the NFU chaired Brexit group for Agriculture, a forum that represents agriculture as a whole and generally operates at the Secretary of State level.

Progress with the draft Agriculture Bill has stalled along with uncertainty over Article 50, NSA has raised a number of issues we want to draw attention to including multi annual budgets, stronger reference to the importance of food production, and inclusion of sheep meat within the Annex referring to production standards. We have also pushed forward with our ideas for future farm support options and have met with Lesley Griffiths (WG Cab Sec), Andrew Slade, and Peter MacDonald of WG, resulting in a joint presentation to our Welsh region ARMM. NSA appears to have influenced WG thinking in advance of their next stage of the consultation process due to be announced at the RWS 2019. In England we have shared our thinking with many Defra departments and as a result have submitted a proposal to their call for 'Test and Trials' relating to ELMS. Our ideas go further than ELMS alone and are based on linking productivity with environmental management through holistic farm planning.

AHDB. The call for views has been put on hold due to the Defra team in question having been diverted to No Deal planning. However, AHDB has already started to prepare to plan for its next strategy beyond 2019. NSA has met with key AHDB staff to start to discuss their approach to a potential no deal and market difficulties for lamb and to discuss strategic approaches in the longer term. We are planning several jointly delivered farmer meetings from June onwards to help sheep farmers prepare for Brexit related changes. In early April Phil joined John Geldard in Cumbria for an evening and following day with Jane King and Will Jackson, CEO and Beef and Lamb Strategy Director for AHDB.

TSE controls

Plans to switch from tooth eruption to a June 30th cut-off date were unexpectedly abandoned in March due to concerns over a no deal, our resulting loss of EU membership, and the fact that the options available to us are only allowable to EU member states. Additionally, Defra are nervous about doing anything that reduces our chances of maintaining access to the EU market. This is despite Ministers signing this off in 2018 and Defra having announced the change. It has also been confirmed that such a change will need a legislative change and a level of consultation. Since this was made clear, working closely with NFU, we have secured supporting statements from multiple retailers sufficient for Defra to confirm they will not need to consult if things were to progress in time for this 2019 season. Defra have confirmed that FSA have the evidence procedures agreed

and if a deal is done and our membership of the EU continues then they will progress with the aim of introducing this season.

Sheep and LFAs

NSA held a seminar/workshop in January to discuss the future of the stratified sheep system. This was well attended and resulted in some clear outcomes that need to be followed up and were reported in the January SF magazine (**more details below**). The other significant issue relating to sheep and LFAs relates to rewilding generally, and includes forestry and tree planting plans. While the Sec of State rejected the application to release Lynx in Kielder Forest the noise around the benefits of rewilding continue and were a strong part of the EAT Lancet report where red meat production was criticised again for negative health impact as well as contribution to global warming. Not LFAs specifically but NSA was highly proactive in the New Year's Veganuary campaign, taking part in numerous radio and TV shows and challenging negative criticisms of red meat production. As a result both the NFU and AHDB have now arranged industry meetings to discuss how we tackle this in the future. The theme of rewilding continued when in April Natural England gave permission/issued a licence for up to 60 White tailed Sea Eagles to be released on the Isle of Wight over the next 5 years commencing in summer 2019.

Sheep and Arable

We are now in the second year of the ISAGE funded 'benefits of sheep in arable' trial, in collaboration with Brown & Co., AHDB, Organic Research Centre (ORC) and Frontier Agriculture Ltd. Last year's unseasonably dry summer meant year one didn't go fully as planned but year two's grazing began 11th April (ewes and lambs) with data collection going well. Early results should be available by August 2019.

SARIC funding for a similar project "Restoring soil quality through re-integration of leys and sheep into arable rotations" is starting a year behind the above trial. NSA has been confirmed as a stakeholder in the project, acting as a consultant/advisor on the consortium. This project is in collaboration with NIAB and the University of Sheffield, alongside AHDB and Cotswold Seeds. Many of the protocols mimic that of the above study, just on a larger scale and the funding body has agreed to fund a third year of the above trial to combat the first year's unseasonal weather causing difficulty with planned data collection. NSA has attended one stakeholder meeting for project planning and visited NIAB to consult on the livestock data collection practices.

The SEEGSLIP project - 'Sustainable economic and environmental grazing systems: learning from innovative practitioners' project is underway. A number of sustainability assessments using the Public Goods tool (same as that used in the ISAGE project) have been completed on PFLA (Pasture For Life Association) farms. A project update can be found at: <https://www.agricology.co.uk/field/blog/how-pfl-innovative-practitioners%E2%80%99-project-going>. NSA are a stake holder in this project, however our involvement and deliverables are still unconfirmed.

The ASSIST: Achieving Sustainable Agricultural Systems project working in collaboration with Rothamsted looking at the benefits of grazing diverse swards vs basic permanent pasture on LWG, faecal egg counts and days to slaughter, as well as other environmental measurements focused on public goods. NSA are not directly written into this project but at this time we have offered staff research time to assist on data collection, processing, advice where required.

Nicola was invited to discuss the reintegration of livestock into arable farms to feed back into a scoping study funded by DEFRA. Hosted by NIAB and Newcastle University, this intense day brought together researchers, farmers, advisors and industry to discuss: What the biggest challenges are? How these can be overcome? Are there areas to improve upon in existing systems? Where are the knowledge gaps? And finally, what research projects are currently on-going that may answer some of the above? A number of NSA members also took part in more in-depth interviews on their opinions of these questions, organised directly through NSA. Results from this have been sent to DEFRA for approval and should be publicly released in summer.

TBC – NSA to attend Ground Swell 2-day event to promote our sheep in arable report, our integration in livestock in arable focused projects and promote membership into a non-sheep specific audience.

Sheep in arable projects that are 'in waiting':

- EXPERINET: EXPERIMENTal NETWORK for ecosystem and biodiversity research at Rothamsted. Full project details were described in May 2018 board report.

Work with Woodland Trust: Nothing to report

Genetic & knowledge transfer

The DEFRA funded “UK Sheep Genetic Improvement Scoping Study” is officially complete, with the first report being submitted to DEFRA in February. Once the report has been released by DEFRA, summary results will be shared with our members through an article in SF. The aim is to take this scoping study and source further funding for a 3-4 year project, to simulate this scoping study in more detail (2019 onwards).

Technology Transfer.

Research in general – Our livestock researcher (Nicola) is fully integrated into the sheep research sector with applications for our involvement increasing since the position first began in June 2017. Having a specific research role has allowed NSA to increase its presence in more formal research areas, which we aim to further increase in 2019. With ISAGE project coming to an end in Feb 2020, NSA will have more time to commit to other research projects. Nicola has been tasked with promoting our research capabilities to academic institutes (such as Nottingham, Bangor, Reading, RAU, Harper etc.). From initial meetings with a number of Universities, they are very positive about NSA taking on a more proactive role within their research projects. The ideal goal is to be officially written into more research collaboration bids (like ISAGE) which provide funding for the NSA research role. However, for projects that have already acquired funding, being used as a sub-contractor within active projects is another way to produce income to fund the position.

ISAGE is in its final year, with all efforts focusing on completing any outstanding deliverables. Last year we had completed our requirements for the sustainability assessments and this year we have been focusing our efforts on case studies. One being the grazing trial discussed above and another NSA is leading on is the holistic farm management case study. Results for case studies should be available in August 2019 but won't be released officially until February 2020 at the final project meeting. Other case studies include evaluation of the Flock Health Club initiative and our Next Generation Programme.

Preliminary iSAGE data collected by Nicola, was presented at Scotland's Biennial Land Use and the Environment Conference XII entitled “Rewarding the Delivery of Public Goods: How to Achieve this in Practice?” in November last year. The conference focussed on the issue of how future land management schemes can be implemented, measured and rewarded appropriately. Nicola was unable to attend, but Laurence Smith from the Organic Research Centre presented iSAGE data using it to address the question of “How land managers can be encouraged and helped to deliver public goods effectively?” The presentation highlighted the need for a practicable-yet-holistic assessment framework that can capture meaningful indicators across diverse aspects of sustainability in an acceptable time frame. Some of the early iSAGE results suggest that extensive sheep meat production can be more efficient per unit of imported feed than intensive management whilst extensive systems also require significantly less antibiotic use per livestock unit.

As part of the ISAGE project, Nicola was sent on a 9-day intensive course focused on Holistic Farm Management. This was provided FOC from the Savoury Institute due to collaboration on the ISAGE case study. The aim is to compare the Public Goods Tool (from the iSAGE project) with Holistic Farm Management protocols to demonstrate the benefits of practical on farm monitoring alongside computer-based benchmarking. The aim of the training was to increase our understanding of regenerative practices being taught in the UK and internationally. Many of the principles learnt were focused on Ecosystem processes; the mineral cycle, the water cycle, the energy cycle and community dynamics all working together to produce regenerative farming. Many of the protocols looked at using grazing livestock such as sheep, as a tool combined with appropriate recovery (rest) periods to enhance soil health, increase wildlife, reduce bare soil and ultimately ensure adequate grass availability all year round. With Environmental Land Management Schemes looking to reward farmers for production of public goods, adoption of protocols that implement, monitor and promote regenerative land will be useful going forward.

Sheep Health and Welfare:

NSA continues as a member of the Defra livestock core group, SHAWG, RUMA, and SCOPS. We are also taking part in a working group to review the structures of livestock health and welfare groups, in particular a proposal for a new Ruminant Health Group that would be driven by AHDB. We are exploring taking a stronger lead on the delivery of antibiotics use in sheep, delivering this via Fiona Lovatt but as an NSA project. Part of this work would focus on gaining sheep industry usage data, ideally at the point of veterinary prescription. We have also been fully behind the ‘Colostrum is Gold’ campaign as we approached lambing. Regarding sheep welfare and shearing please see Wool section below.

The Wellcome Trust 4-year project aiming to “develop new ways of understanding and intervening in livestock disease and welfare” has officially begun. NSA attended the kick-off meeting in September 2018 to meet all

consortium members/stakeholders, as well share their expert opinion on the project. This project is still in its early stages, but NSA will be acting as the lead industry collaborator for sheep health/welfare section.

For the past 5 months NSA has been assisting Warwick University on gathering information on sheep lameness across the UK. The survey focuses on gathering further data on prevalence/severity/type/even potential causes of sheep lameness in UK flocks. All staff time, expenses and resources used will be fully funded by Warwick University. Results are due at the end of the year.

The *Echinococcus granulosus* (tapeworm) PhD at Liverpool University began in July. Similar to the project above, NSA is assisting the university in contacting farmers to invite them to participate in research, aiming to establish the prevalence of *Echinococcus* parasite in UK farm dogs. This is part of a wider study investigating the presence of this parasite in livestock (using abattoir data), as well as in other species such as zoo animals. We have now completed all deliverables on this project and results are due in Autumn this year. Again, all staff time, expenses and resources used will be fully funded by Liverpool University.

In September we were approached by University of Surrey with regard to our support for a project focused on 'Modelling genetic selection to improve sustainability and welfare of farm animals'. NSA has provided a letter of support for the gastrointestinal nematode aspect of this project. Funding decisions should be made soon.

2018's annual Sheep Health and Welfare Group (SHAWG) conference took place on Wednesday 21st of November at Drayton Manor Hotel. There was a very successful turn out with almost 200 delegates participating and interaction was high. Nicola attended to help facilitate and promote NSA during the intervals.

NSA has also been invited as a stake holder to the 4-year EU funded SMARTER project, looking at Breeding resilience and efficiency in Sheep and Goats. We were nominated by SRUC to be involved and have since requested to be further integrated into the project than just an advisory role. At this time, the consortium has been made aware of our skillsets. Hopefully this will result in greater involvement and further funding for a larger NSA role.

Effect of cheek teeth on ewe longevity proposal was submitted to the Princes' Countryside Fund in January this year although we were informed in Mid-April that these funders have rejected the proposal. We will be looking at alternative funding options and this would have been the first research proposal with NSA as the main collaborator, in charge of organising a consortium of partners, costings breakdown, proposal idea and deliverables from the project. This would be a scoping project with a constant view to further developing techniques that could be practically used on farm and to scale it up to wider value, potentially make future use of appropriate technology, such as imaging.

ProArctic Sheep - learning from good practice - <http://www.interreg-npa.eu/>. proposal led by Savonia University in Finland, with partners from Iceland, Sweden, Faroe Isles, Northern Ireland looking at ways to encourage best practice for sheep production and marketing in these areas and improve support systems for Sheep Meat enterprises. There are clear links to Scottish crofting and hill farming systems, in areas like the Highlands and Islands, and hope that the learnings from other countries in this Programme area could feed back to Scottish farmers, advisors and policy makers to help with current issues such as lamb finishing and routes to market in these fragile rural economies. This would be a fully funded research project, if successful. We should be informed towards the end of the year as to whether the funding has been successful.

Liverpool University - 'Preventing Lamb Mortality due To Watery Mouth Disease: A Study of the Neonatal Lamb Gut Microbiome in Health and Disease'. Following NSA's support for the initial pilot study on the prevention of watery mouth disease in lambs, and the completion of that study we have been approached to be more actively involved in the above extended watery mouth project. Watery Mouth remains a significant challenge for the UK sheep industry both in terms of its significance in lamb losses, and in relation to reducing reliance on antibiotics in our national sheep flock. NSA is both a project advisor and will have an active (paid) role in knowledge transfer activities such as industry engagement and dissemination of the findings to sheep farmers and others working in the industry. We should be informed towards the end of the year as to whether the funding has been successful.

Liverpool University are also involved in a huge number of sheep focused research projects. After a lengthy discussion with their livestock project team, they are keen to have us involved in future projects where our involvement would be fully funded. Nicola has also approached a number of organisations (Woodland Trust, Provita, Lallemand animal nutrition), academic institutes (Rothamsted, Reading, Nottingham, Bangor) and current project partners (SRUC, Organic Research Centre, EU partners from ISAGE) to further advertise NSA

research capabilities and our increased availability of staff time from March 2019, when the iSAGE project finishes.

Sheep health and welfare projects where NSA has been invited to act as a stakeholder. At this time, funding status is not yet confirmed:

- GIN modelling (resilience) – This project promises to be an important strategy to improve sustainability on farm as well as creating opportunities for resilient sheep production in the future.
- EuroSheep: EuroSheep will seek to build on this work further; the platform is now well established but further opportunity to refine and progress is sought. Where SheepNet focused on ewe productivity, EuroSheep will now look at lamb performance – what ideas are out there to improve lamb growth rates.

Sheep worrying by dogs

NSA is in regular contact with the National Police Chiefs Council on this topic and this has included a recent meeting in Wales with Lesley Griffiths to put forward a bill to the Welsh Government. A bill had already been put forward in Scotland, supported by NSA Scottish Region, and will get time on the floor of the Scottish Parliament chamber in the near future. NSA is also supporting the National Police Chiefs Council suggested amendments to the Livestock Act, to enable tougher sanctions for irresponsible dog owners. The is more on sheep worrying in the communications section of this report, but continuing its work with Sheep Watch, NSA is particularly pleased to have gained inclusion in the 'Pets at Home' magazine. Enquiries continue to come into NSA Head Office from members, and Nicola is now picking these up, alongside her work dealing with all technical enquiries from members. NSA's annual dog worrying campaign, which is mainly on social media, will launch early in Q2 with some new videos to gain peoples' attention.

Wool

NSA, working with other industry bodies, has produced 'Industry Guidelines for Sheep Shearing' in response to PETA's exposé on (albeit rare and infrequent) poor welfare at shearing. Our involvement with CfW continues and the campaign has some inspirational plans for 2019 including promotion of the use of wool in sportswear. We have met with senior staff from British Wool to discuss their plans to improve market conditions for wool and have embarked on a new partnership together that includes a number of joint events and the promotion of NSA in BW publications. In response to media reports about the aims of The National Trust to improve the sustainability of their staff clothing (fleeces) NSA wrote suggesting the use of wool and have since spoken to try to progress some development of hardy wool clothing and to make links with others working in this area.

In June 2018 we were approached by the Royal Agricultural University to discuss our interest in supporting a bid investigating opportunity for novel, sustainable products from farming enterprises as well as supporting farming businesses to grow and develop their product. Unfortunately, the funding bid was successful. At this time, we are waiting for an appropriate funding opportunity to become available to resubmit this bid.

On another note, H Dawson Natural Fibre Technologies, a 131-year-old wool company, have made a very bold statement that by 2025 they will source wool from regenerative agricultural techniques. This links to the iSAGE case study looking at the principles of the Savoury Institute's training for farmers on regenerative farming. Phil has had a meeting with the CEO Jo Dawson and Nicola has met with Ali Atkins, the sustainable brand and product manager, coincidentally whilst at the FOC holistic training course. Foundations of a future relationship have been constructed and future research collaborations could stem from this.

Brexit – R&D related

Red Meat Benchmarking Project (Wales only initiative) is now complete. At this time results have not been released, but with joint efforts from many industry partners, around 1,200 farmers from the target of 2,000 successfully completed the benchmarking activity. An industry report will be available soon.

NSA was invited to participate in a Welsh Government hosted conference, discussing how Wales plans to 'Achieve low carbon pathway 2020'. Much of the discussion came from policy makers. Stemming from this, NSA is thinking about producing a leaflet highlighting the carbon benefits of sheep and sheep farming. This could be very useful in supporting payment for public goods, discussed in the Ag bill.

In January this year, NSA hosted an invite only meeting at Malvern focused on the importance of the stratified UK sheep industry. The aim was to discuss the opportunities and the challenges for our stratified sheep system, and to identify actions that we should be proactive with. As well as NSA staff and office holders, attendees from a range of breed societies, farming organisations and vets attended the discussion, which

drew out five main points for consideration. These were 1) Concern over disease and parasites, particularly resistance issues, is resulting in more farmers choosing to run closed flocks. 2) There is a lack of understanding of the value of upland breed traits within the cross bred ewe, and concern that some of these traits such as hardiness and mothering ability may be becoming weakened. 3) Selling cross bred breeding sheep is a highly important part of hill farming economics – hill farming would struggle to survive without access to breeding stock markets. 4) While stratified breeding and hill farming may be traditional practices there is a lot that can be done to make use of technology and innovation – tradition and innovation can complement each other. 5) The environment and public goods agenda will be a very important part of the economics of hill farming, but it is important that the sheep farming that delivers this is commercial and productive – commercial sheep farming can deliver conservation objectives, but few farmers want to be conservation graziers. An article was produced in Feb/Mar edition of SF. We also produced a leaflet for the meeting to demonstrate to the public the value of the system, as well as the challenges and vulnerability of some stratifications going forward. This is not yet widely available but will prove useful when further actions are taken on this.

NSA education

NSA has been approached by several research students for advice on current sheep related projects. These include:

- University of Edinburgh: Farm related resilience and supply chain project & Delphi Study (looking at welfare during livestock transport)
- University of Oxford: Research into tree planting on UK farmland
- Harper Adams: UK sheep farming and the industry's response to Brexit - Assessing how sheep farmers are preparing for Brexit
- University of Cambridge: Research project on farmers' livelihoods
- RAU: Sheep farmers in the South West and the interaction with veterinarians, and strategies to improve

NSA has submitted a collaboration with International Agricultural Research Institute, the Organic Research Centre, HUMMUS, ACTVYA and TDKKYMB (mainly sheep and goat associations in Turkey). This project promises to be an important strategy to provide up to date information and good practice examples of organic breeding across UK, EU and non-EU countries. With links to other ongoing projects, such as Heritage Breeds, SheepNet, iSAGE, RamCompare and SMARTER, this project should also benefit from cross project results. This is a fully funded project with all NSA time, travel and expenses covered by the project. Confirmation of funding success is due at the end of the year.

NSA was invited to speak at the annual Farm Animal Veterinary Society (FAVS) Congress (February) to enlighten the next generation of farm vets about “the future of the sheep industry”. Our livestock researcher, Nicola Noble gave the group an overview of NSA's role, followed by our current situation with regard to Brexit and ways they, as our up and coming advisors can help support sheep farmers.

Employer engagement: We continue to get requests from agricultural colleges for NSA staff to attend career open days or provide specific presentations to agricultural students on the roles of NSA / information on the stratified sheep system. The importance of membership promotion to the younger generation and engaging with up and coming farmers is crucial to NSA.

Trade & marketing

In addition to our general informing of decision makers of the scale and nature of the sheep meat market, and our influencing of levy bodies' activities, our Heritage Breeds initiative end of project report is now being written up by Bob Kennard and should be complete by the end of April. This work included, in Spring 2019, a YouGov survey of consumers which has given some encouraging results particularly relating to younger people and attitudes to meat products. Discussions are ongoing with levy bodies about the most suitable business structure to carry this work forward, with our view that AHDB should be central to the delivery. The draft end of project report is available on request.

Electronic identification, movement recording, and alternatives to 6 days standstill

The TDUG group is meeting less frequently but for longer, more planning based meetings that are starting to focus on system design, delivery options, and how to better use the information already provided. The evaluation of the tenders for the base system has been completed and should be announced towards the end of April. This system will be purchased by Govt who have now committed to covering the costs without recourse to levy funds/AHDB. The delivery option is planned to be a limited company between Defra and AHDB but with a Board made up to include industry input. Delivery is planned to be via AHDB. It looks highly

unlikely that any of the devolved nations will use this new system although there is a strong commitment to integrate systems as far as possible.

Farm Assurance

Adam Watson is the RTA B&L Board member for NSA and Bryan Griffiths and Phil Stocker continue on the RTA Tech Advisory Committee. This committee has not met for at least 18 months but a meeting is scheduled for 2nd May. RTA has announced a system of unannounced inspections to give greater robustness to the assurance scheme. It is rolling this out to pigs before other sectors. RTA has also announced its intention to establish a range of levels of assurance scheme (organic/high welfare/high environment), and a 'whistleblower helpline' to allow complaints to be logged and followed up as felt necessary. All this is aimed to strengthen the integrity of the scheme. RTA have recently completed research which shows that RTA standards are some of the highest globally, with beef and lamb standards in particular exceeding those in other schemes. Standards scored well in all areas with the exception of environmental enhancement. There is currently a review going on relating to transport, lairage and collection centre/markets – we are told this is to check on any changes in regulatory requirements.

Sheep Farmer magazine

The Dec/Jan magazine was the final one to be produced under the Ladies in Print contract, with an initial 12-month contract awarded to Kinroy Design from January. The magazine has a slightly refreshed appearance, with anecdotal feedback being very positive. Initial signs from the first two editions are positive financially, with the design cost being significantly lower and printing on some edition sizes/numbers being a little lower. Kinroy Design is also now providing design services to NSA on a retainer basis, which is a new cost for NSA but is already paying dividends in better consistency of design in everything NSA does in print and online. Kinroy Design has been used for several NSA sheep event guides in the past, and is continuing this work, resulting in fantastic consistency in branding for the events that do their event guides in conjunction with NSA Head Office. Advertising continues to be steady for Sheep Farmer, but is proving a hard sell for event guides.

Recent press coverage

Through Q4 and Q1, the stories with the highest response from press organisations have been Brexit, sheep sustainability (including 'Veganuary') and rewilding. Other issues with a high response rate have included the carcass splitting decision and dog worrying.

- Brexit press releases have been regular and consistent through Q4 and Q1, reemphasising the risks of politician's decisions as they come. NSA received a high pick up following its call for MPs to support the prime ministers deal in order to avoid a no deal Brexit and pick up has remained steady through this time in agricultural press. NSA's Brexit concern has also had a healthy level of pick up from national and international press with English Committee Chairman Kevin Harrison appearing in Portuguese and Canadian press and NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths appearing in American press, as well as two features in the Times. NSA is regularly picked up in the Farmers Guardian and Farmers Weekly as well as other agricultural press, and NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker is a regular contributor to Farmers Guardian's Brexit-hub. This has also included NSA's calls for financial support in the event of a no-deal, which was shared across farming, national and regional newspapers.
- During Veganuary NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker appeared twice on national television, once on ITV's Good Morning Britain and once on BBC's Victoria Derbyshire programme. This was followed by national newspaper pickups including the Daily Mail and Express. NSA also spoke to a number of regional news channels and radio stations, including NSA Next Generation Ambassador Rollo Dutsch featuring on BBC Midlands Today. This was also spurred on by PETA work to 'expose' shearing as a cruel practice. NSA countered this and, following the decision by online retailer Boohoo, NSA received a lot of pick up from national press for speaking out in favour of wool. This included the Daily Mail, Daily Express, Sun, the I, the Australian and the Times.
- Rewilding received its fair share of attention. Towards the end of Q4, Secretary of State Michael Gove released his decision to reject the application to release lynx in the Kielder Forest. NSA responded immediately with a press release which received a strong pickup amongst agricultural and national press. NSA work on opposing the release of the sea eagle received a strong level of pick up in both national and farming press.
- TSE carcass splitting received a lot of attention in farming press in Q4 and Q1. In Q4 NSA led the way in sharing the Government's decision to implement a change from tothing to a calendar date. This was widely celebrated in agricultural press with NSA taking prime position as a leader in this decision. The same was true also in Q1 when NSA was the first to inform industry of Defra's decision not to implement this change in the 2019 season, contradicting the earlier decision and announcement.

- Dog worrying stories are a constant throughout the year, however as lambing time approached in Q1 the NSA comms team dealt with a large number of press enquiries from regional media.
- NSA had a healthy pick up in regional and farming press regarding the announcement of Lesley Stubbings as its 2018 George Hedley Memorial Award winner. Towards the end of Q1 this was followed by a strong pick up in agricultural press for the launch of NSA's Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the Next Generation

Website

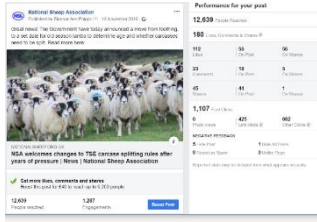
- Website traffic for Q4 was a peak for the year. Each month the website was visited an average of 21,872 times. November saw the website visited the most - 25,603 times (by 19,793 visitors). Of this, 81% were visiting the website for the first time. This peak could be to do with the launch of the increasingly popular NSA Lambing List online, or the headline news of the changes to carcass splitting legislation.
- Q1 has seen a steady volume of traffic using the NSA website. An average of 28,383 people visited the website each month during January, February and March, a marked increase on 2018 when the website was only visited an average of 21,588 times. The number of users visiting the website for the first time is consistent through the first quarter of 2019 with an average of just over 80% of visitors being new to the NSA website. March 2019 has seen the highest number of visits to the NSA website ever! An impressive 24,782 visitors accessed the website a total of 31,007 times. This large number of visits could be attributed to popularity of the NSA Lambing List once again, or due to a general high amount of press and social media activity by the NSA communications team directing people towards the NSA website.
- Interestingly, visits to the NSA website via a mobile device fell for the first time in the last two months of 2018 to below 50%, this fall is now beginning to increase once again in Q1 of 2019 with visits from a mobile device returning to the usual level of approximately 60% in March 2019. This drop was likely due to website visitors being at home more during the shorter days at this time of year.

Social media

- Support and/or interest for NSA pages on Facebook and Twitter has continued to increase through Q4 and Q1, reaching a high of 10,692 likes on Facebook and 10,881 followers on Twitter at the end of March 2019. This compares with 8,774 likes on Facebook and 9,567 followers on Twitter at the end of the first quarter of 2018.
- During Q1 NSA activity on Facebook and Twitter has again been high. This has resulted in NSA posts reaching just over 427,000 people on social media during the last quarter of 2018 and for this time period. The highest reaching posts were more light hearted, featuring comical cartoons and reference to the festive period. This shows the importance of not using social media solely as a sales tool. The higher the reach of even a more light hearted social media post, the more often 'followers' will see the key messages NSA needs to deliver, increasing the effectiveness of our social media work.
- Activity so far in 2019 has often focused on policy updates and work surrounding Brexit. From January to March 2019 almost 534,000 people have seen a social media post from NSA. The increase from the last quarter of 2018 shows yet another push both with press and media work, including work in January on 'Veganuary' and, later in Q1, an increase in activity promoting NSA events and the NSA Next Generation Samuel Wharry travel bursary.

Facebook highlights Q4 2018	Facebook highlights Q1 2019
<p>Christmas jumper reached 73,029 people</p> 	<p>Sheep worrying case study reached 46,351 people</p> 
<p>Response to climate change report – 22,982 people</p> 	<p>Veganuary reached 23,046 people</p> 

Response to change in carcase splitting rules reached 12,639 people



Carcase splitting reversal – Reaching 12,119 people



NSA Next Generation

In Q4 the fourth and fifth NSA Next Generation Ambassador delivery sessions. The fourth session included visits to British Wool and a wool processing plant at Bradford and to Dunbia, Preston, for a live-to-dead day. The fifth was based in Hexham and included the annual NSA Next Generation day. There was opportunity for ambassadors to reflect on their experiences so far and set themselves some further targets. It is also a good opportunity for head office staff to remind and encourage them to get more involved with their NSA regions. The Hexham Next Generation day was well attended once again with approaching 100 young sheep farmers taking part in the workshops and talks from industry experts. Attendees could choose from the following workshops: Responsible medicine use for your flock; accessing grant funding; maximising returns on your wool; understand mastitis in sheep; the power of social media; business planning; and the sheep industry post Brexit. NSA office holders and ambassadors from the current year and previous years also spoke to attendees. Joanne Briggs announced to the group about the exciting travel bursary that would be launched which saw a good amount of initial interest for the award. The Next Generation event is not usually used as a recruitment push but a pleasing amount of new members did choose to sign up to become an NSA member following the event, this is an indication of their enjoyment and success of it.

Q1 began with the NSA Central Region heat of the Next Generation Shepherds competition at the NSA Central Region Early Gathering. The competition had a good number of entrants which combined with teams competing in a school competition with a young shepherd from Chatsworth estate winning the heat to represent the region at Malvern Sheep Event in 2020. The long-awaited NSA and Merchants of the Staple of England travel bursary was launched at the end of Q1. The bursary, named the Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the Next Generation will give two young sheep farmers aged 34 under £2,750 each to support a trip to explore the application of science in sheep production. The award has been publicised in farming press and via social media so we look forward to receiving applications. The closing date is 22nd April. As there is no Ambassador programme for 2019, Q1 has involved much planning for a series of five two-day Next Generation sessions across the UK. These will take place in July (Northern Ireland), August (Wales and Cotswolds) and September (Peak District and Scotland).

Breed Societies / Breed Society Forum

All affiliated breed societies were written to in January 2019, with an invoice for their annual affiliation and the opportunity to review representatives they have on NSA regional committees. NSA regions were notified of these representatives ahead of their ARMSs. Some societies have been slow to pay their annual invoice, but there is no indication at this stage that any are choosing not to renew. NSA event organisation will be notified if anyone doesn't renew, so they cannot access discounted trade stand space at sheep events without having paid their affiliation fee. The NSA Breed Society Forum is on Thursday 2nd May in NSA Eastern Region. The morning session will be a series of industry updates (NSA policy, Signet, British Wool and NSA activities) and the afternoon session will be a continuation of the discussion and activity from the stratified sheep meeting held at NSA Head Office in January. Given the often low engagement from societies for the forum, NSA is promoting the event as open to members with an interest in pedigree breeding, as well as individual societies.

George Hedley Memorial Award

The winner of the 2018 George Hedley Memorial Award was announced as Lesley Stubbings. The award is to be made at the Sheep Breeders Roundtable in November.

Internal and HQ

Policies, organisation, management & staff

Chris Adamson has been appointed as Activities & Campaigns Officer and is due to start in mid-April. His role will replace the previous membership recruitment officer role although recruitment remains as the key

objective of this post. He will be working closely with regional managers and secretaries to organise activities and campaigns to retain and build NSA membership further.

Following George Milne's appraisal in December, George decided to resign his position as Scottish Region Development Officer. Despite being offered a contract to carry out some policy work on a self-employed basis George decided to step back entirely. A meeting has been held with the 3 new Scots region office holders and a way forward has been agreed with plans to appoint a regional co-ordinator role that will also allow the office holders to carry out some policy work. Until this role is appointed the office holders will take a lead on policy meetings and HQ are supporting in any way we can. This role is being advertised for.

Lorna Davies stood down from her role as Marches region secretary – this role is being advertised for. Bob Blanden retired at the SE region ARMM. Sarah Blake has been appointed into a role that will focus initially at least on supporting the region and the committee, and not take on the organisation of events.

Nicola Noble informed us that she is expecting and will go on maternity leave during the latter half of July. We are currently looking for maternity cover as well as discussing with an experienced researcher to potentially provide some consultancy.

We are also looking for someone to help out with our book-keeping activities on a flexible basis. This role will assist Karen and is in response to increased accounts work generally, regional accounts work as well as a reduced input from Jim Page. We are advertising now for someone possibly on a self-employed basis or a zero hours contract.

The new staffing structure with Jo as Operations Director and more clarity/distinction between Katie and Ellie is working very well and is allowing a better focus on policy work and organisational management.

Governance

Jonny Farmer has been appointed as a Trustee to replace John Blaney representing Northern Ireland and Bryan Griffiths was re-elected as Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

The Annual Report and Financial Statements process is underway with a timetable of actions and milestones agreed with Old Mill. Copies of this timetable are available on request.

Although not strictly Governance it is worthy of note that Jen Craig and Thomas Carrick, two NSA Next Generation Ambassadors, are now both Chairs of the Scottish region and the Northern region respectively. This is in addition to one other new regional Chair for 2019 (David Howlett of the Central region).

Data Protection

Nicola continues to work on NSA GDPR compliance. At this time, all documents are up to date and are regularly updated as changes occur. All current staff at head office are fully trained on the changes and new compliance with regards to GDPR. Any new employees have this training as part of their induction. Regional managers have been offered training at head office which most have attended after RMMs and have been sent various links where possible. All useful documents and information on GDPR have been shared with all staff, including RMs to ensure NSA compliance across the regions. Data processing forms have been signed and returned from all regions as well as our third parties. As and when further changes occur, Nicola will endeavour to ensure that all staff are made aware of these changes. Regions should now be aware that they can call head office for GDPR queries.

Sheep Centre Site

Bats Loft – Nothing to report.

Firs Farmhouse – Nothing to report.

The Barn – Work to improve the interior and double glaze the windows is completed.

NSA building at the RWS – The drawings and specifications were all completed prior to the invitation to tender being circulated in January. We received 4 tender responses by the closing date and are still in communication with one other potential tenderer. There was an extremely wide range of quotes and these will be discussed at the forthcoming FGP and the Board meeting of the 1st May. Regarding the lease discussions these have started and we have secured an additional £2k from Drysdales relating to the bar. However there is currently a difference of opinion on ticket allocation for bar staff workers. After submission with the intention of saving money on waste water regulations the planning application has been withdrawn and the fee reimbursed when we learnt that we were outside the scope of any exemptions. This allows us to go

through a more reasoned procedure and only apply for planning permission once we are confident we should go ahead.

Accounts and audit

Xero is now up and running at head office. South West Region, South West Ram Sales, Marches, Central, Northern Ireland and South East Regions are also now being maintained in Xero. It is planned that the remaining regions will start using Xero for the 2020 financial year. Due to the extra work being undertaken in Head Office the implementation of payroll processing has been delayed. However, it is hoped to take on a part-time Bookkeeper in the coming weeks to help and so hopefully payroll processing can be implemented for the third quarter.

NSA Sheep Even: Date for 2020 28th July. The first meeting was held on April 24th.

NSA Regions

Report from Helen Roberts, Cymru/Wales region

The ARMM In February saw all officers remain in place. Brexit, gearing business for an uncertain future and a proactive approach to animal health were among the topics discussed. Chairman Tim Ward said the Annual Regional Members Meeting at the Royal Welsh Showground had been lively and enthusiastic, despite the prevailing negativity. He said: "It's been a very positive meeting and everybody is looking forward to the future, whatever it might bring and I think it all bodes well for the NSA that we get the support we do."

Brexit still dominates the news as I write this and I have attended many meetings where different scenarios of the outcome have been discussed. One thing is for sure the agriculture will change whatever the outcome. Welsh Government will be consulting further following the responses to the Brexit and Our Land consultation and we will begin to see the way forward with new schemes that will replace the BPS in time, as I think we will need a little stability going forward and not rush into any change. At the end of April a tender document should be available for an RDP bid with regard to the five million that Welsh Government has offered for eradication of Sheep scab. NSA Cymru along with everyone else is disappointed at the carcass splitting delay and we will keep pushing on this. NSA Cymru has been involved with Sheep Carcass Classification Stakeholder Engagement Meeting and further consultation will be due on this.

We recently held a committee meeting on the 16th April and discussed the Royal Welsh Building, Next Generation event and of course NSA Welsh Sheep which is coming along well with 167 exhibitors, a comprehensive line up of seminars which have been organised in conjunction with the Major Sponsor HCC, workshops, competitions, demos, sheep dog trial and an impressive farm tour which will take in the techno grazing area. Sponsorship has not been easy to obtain this time and I am just hoping the new venture of holding this event at a college will help boost the gate and funds. NSA Welsh Sheep 21st May, Glynllifon College.

Wales and Border Ram Sale report from Jane Smith

Northern Ireland Region – report from Edward Adamson

NSA Scottish Region Activity Report for Wednesday 1st May 2019 Board Meeting

February

- New Scottish Region Chairman Jen Craig was at the launch of Emma Harper MSP's Members bill on livestock attacks at the Scottish Parliament. The Bill is intended to tighten up legislation in Scotland to give the police more powers to deal with dogs and their owners, where they attack and cause harm and damage to livestock.
- NSA Scottish Region's Jen Craig, new treasurer Mary Dunlop, and Vice-chairman Maimie Paterson met with Mairi Gougeon, Scottish Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, and Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy, where they discussed predation and future support.
- Jen Craig also had the chance to speak directly to Fergus Ewing and put NSA Scottish Region's concerns directly to him. This opportunity came during a debate with Secretary of State for Defra Michael Gove and Fergus Ewing, which Jen attended with the Region's immediate past Chairman, John Fyall.
- NSA Scottish Region representatives joined the AM Phillip/Honda stand selling raffle tickets for the regions Honda ATV prize giveaway and discussing issues with sheep farmers at the Spring Show at

Thainstone Aberdeenshire. John Fyall and Michelle Stephen, a sheep farmer from Udney manned the stand.

Tuesday 5th March - The new NSA Scottish Region Office Holders led their first committee meeting at Caledonian Marts in Stirling. Agenda items covered the new working structures for Scotland, budgets and financial planning for 2019 activities, Highland Sheep on Wednesday 12th June at Sibmister, near Thurso, NSA presence at the Royal Highland Show, as well as discussing the wide range of policy topics affecting sheep farming in Scotland and reports from NSA UK level work.

Thursday 7th March – Maimie Paterson participated in a DEFRA-led teleconference where it was revealed that the plans to change the regulations on hogg mousing were being put on hold, the reason being that it might delay to 3rd country status negotiations.

Monday 11th March

- Jen Craig was a panel member at the Blackface Sheep Breeders Association AGM. Jen and fellow panellists, Mairi Gougeon, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, and Kate Rowell, QMS Chairman, answered questions regarding farmers concerns about the future of farm support post Brexit, LFASS payments and predation by sea eagles and ravens.
- Mary Dunlop participated in a Scottish Government Stakeholder Teleconference with Fergus Ewing on Resilience of the food supply chain in Scotland.
- John Fyall attended a Scottish Government ARD stakeholders meeting in Edinburgh where lots of things were discussed including ARD, mapping and that the LFASS loan scheme has not been taken up by all and with payments going out in the next month. SG hope members will have received their letters and if they do not have info they can contact their local RPID Area Office or email nationalLFASSScheme@gov.scot.

Tuesday 12th March – Euan Emslie visited potential host farm near Dundee for NSA Scotsheep 2020.

Friday 15th March - Euan Emslie met with new RHASS trade stand, livestock and Royal Highland Educational Trust staff to discuss NSA involvement at Royal Highland Show.

Tuesday 19th March

- John Fyall represented and gave evidence on behalf of NSA and the Scottish sheep industry at the UK GOV - Scottish Affairs Committee- Future of Scottish Agriculture post-Brexit meeting in Westminster.
- Euan Emslie visited potential host farm near Dunbar for NSA Scotsheep 2020.

Wednesday 20th March

- NSA Scottish Region office bearers met with NSA Chair, Chief Executive, Treasurer and Operations Director to discuss new working structure as a result of George Milne resigning.
- Euan Emslie met Alan Laidlaw, RHASS CEO re NSA activities, future collaboration and sponsorship at Royal Highland Show at Ingliston.

Thursday 21st March – Jen Craig & Mary Dunlop attended a Moredun Reception.

Friday 22nd March

- NSA Scottish Region Royal Highland Show Sub-committee met at Stirling to discuss this year's planning/activities/budget.
- Jen Craig attended a Scottish Government LFASS stakeholders meeting.

Tuesday 26th March

- John Fyall attended an interim Cattle and Sheep Standards Review meeting with QMS and industry stakeholder members of the Standards Setting Committee. Items on the agenda of note to members included sustainability, antibiotic usage, best practice at shearing time, the presentation of stock before slaughter and a presentation of a device for tailing and castrating lambs.
- Euan Emslie met with Robert & Hazel McNee, Over Finlary, Tealing, Dundee re the hosting of NSA Scotsheep 2020 on June 3rd and contract with them was signed.

Thursday 11th April – Jen Craig and Maimie Paterson, along with representatives of NFUS, attended a meeting with Fergus Ewing to discuss compensation for the predicted lamb price drop in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Jen says: “The decision to postpone Brexit yet again does nothing to lift the uncertainty that hangs over the industry and we still have to continue to prepare for a worst-case no-deal scenario, which was the reason for today’s talks with the Cabinet Secretary. A compensatory headage payment and a variable premium scheme were two of the options discussed and although neither is perfect, it’s a case of trying to make the best of a bad job. The need for the UK government to find ways of facilitating lamb exports was highlighted as a priority, and increased funding for lamb promotion and marketing was also suggested. If the politicians can just do their job and find a Brexit compromise that the majority can support, there will be no need for a compensation scheme.”

Tuesday 16th & Wednesday 17th April – Euan Emslie meetings with sponsors, etc and final planning for NSA Highlandsheep 2019.

Future Known Meetings

Monday 13th May – NSA Highlandsheep 2019 press preview day and organising committee meeting at Sibmister, Thurso.

Friday 17th May – Meeting with Michael Gove at Stirling Agricultural Centre to highlight the concerns of the hill sheep farming community in the West.

Significant external meetings and contacts not covered above – attended by Phil unless otherwise stated

9th Oct – Ellie spoke at Bottisham Shepherds club dinner

10th Oct – Joanne attended SHAWG meeting

11th Oct – Katie attended Grand Designs Live to view public facing work by British Wool – Birmingham NEC

15th Oct – Ellie on press trip to Madrid, Spain, including a visit to a sheep dairy

18th Oct – Katie represented NSA at British Farming Awards

22nd Oct – Katie spoke at Moredun event on the NSA Next Generation programme

30th Oct – Ellie and Phil attended an Agricultural Bill lobby in Parliament

9th November – attended a 2 day St Georges House consultation on the pressures facing, and the need for, low throughput and independent abattoirs.

09th Nov – Katie attended Tesco Future Farmer event

12th Nov – TDUG meeting

12th Nov – Black Mountains Land Use Partnership

13th Nov Meeting in Malvern with AHDB, HCC and QMS (by phone) to discuss Heritage Breeds scheme

14th Nov – NSA English Committee

15th Nov – Ellie attended Three Counties Farming Conference

16th Nov – Meeting with John Dracup as strategy director of the Royal Smithfield Club

16th Nov – SRUC consultation over phone re Resilience of Upland Farming

19th Nov – UKLIBG meeting

19th Nov – Meeting with Will Jackson newly appointed Beef and lamb strategy Director

20th Nov – Visit to ABP Yetminster – general and to see VIA in operation

21st Nov – Speaking at SHAWG conference

22nd Nov - NSA FGP

28th Nov – Meet with Duncan Short Towergate Insurance

29th Nov – WCF meeting and AGM

29th Nov – Joanne attended RUMA meeting

30th Nov – Defra Productivity Roundtable

4th Dec – Pre audit meeting with Old Mill

4th Dec – Meeting with NAAC/ NFU/ BW re shearing guidance

4th Dec – Ellie and Joanne met with Tom Kinroy to discuss first Sheep Farmer with Kinroy Design

5th Dec – UK P&T

6th Dec – Meeting with Lesley Griffith WG Cab Sec

6th Dec – Ellie and Bryan attended NFU no deal conference.

10th Dec – Phil, Ellie, George Milne, Edward Adamson and John Lloyd at devolved policy discussion with Robin Manning and other Defra officials.

10th Dec – TDUG meeting

11th Dec – New Ruminant Health Group planning meeting

11th Dec – Phil, Joanne, Helen and Nicola met with British Wool

13th Dec – Meet with SE region Officers

14th Dec – UKLIBG meeting

17th Dec – New Ruminant Health group planning

18th and 19th Dec – TDUG/ LIP policy meeting with HMRC Treasury staff

7th Jan – Good Morning Britain interview re Veganuary

7th Jan – Sheep Antibiotic Task force meeting

7th Jan – Joanne met with Moredun about renewing the contract going forward

8th Jan – Meet with Roland Bonney re Methane emissions and global warming

9th Jan – NSA Board meeting

10th Jan – NSA Stratified Sheep seminar

15th Jan – Farming Brexit Roundtable

18th Jan – UKLIBG meeting

21st Jan – TDUG – sheep disease control policy meeting with Christine Middlemiss CVO

22nd Jan – Victoria Derbyshire Show – re Veganuary

24th Jan – CR Early gathering at Bakewell

28th Jan - WCF Built Wells

29th Jan - Royal Smithfield Launch event
 1st Feb – Defra Sustainable Intensification Platform workshop
 4th Feb – Defra No deal contingency planning meeting
 4th Feb NFU red Meat Ambassador workshop
 5th Feb – Katie attended Farm Safety Partnership meeting
 6th Feb NSA English Committee
 6th Feb – Joanne attended SCOPS meeting
 7th Feb BMLUP funding workshop
 8th Feb – Defra Animal Health Pathway meeting at Melton Mowbray
 11th Feb – BMLUP
 12th Feb – Neil Watts meeting MV diagnostics
 12th Feb – Discussion with WG and NRW re dip disposal in Wales.
 13th Feb Scottish region ARMM
 14th Feb – EU exit stakeholder meeting with George Eustice
 18th Feb – LAA annual dinner
 19th and 20th Feb – NFU conference
 20th Feb - NSA Cymru ARMM
 21st Feb BBC Farming Today interview
 22nd Feb BMLUP SMS Project Board
 26th Feb – NSA UKP&T
 27th Feb – SHAWG meeting
 28th Feb – Red Tractor event House of Lords
 28th Feb – RUMA meeting and Board
 28th Feb – Meeting with Jonathan Leake Env correspondent at The Times
 1st March – BBC Hereford and Worcester interview re veganism and livestock production
 4th March – Premium Sheep and Goat Health Scheme meeting
 5th March Scots region committee meeting
 6th March – Food and Drink Sector Council meeting re productivity
 6th March – Ellie attended Defra Brexit and agriculture webinar.
 7th March – Ellie attended Defra Brexit and veterinary imports webinar.
 11th and 12th March – 2 day TDUG meeting on system design
 13th March – Ellie attended Kennel Club and Welsh Government dog worrying discussion.
 15th March – UKLIBG meeting
 19th March – meeting with Peter McDonald Dep Director WG
 19th March BMLUP Project Board and partnership meetings
 27th March – Campaign for Wool Council meeting
 28th March – UK Farming Brexit Roundtable
 1st April – RSA Food and Farming and Countryside Commission workshop on EAT Lancet and global sustainability
 2nd and 3rd April – Away meetings with Jane King and Will Jackson , AHDB