

Spotlight on horticulture: growing with reliability and flow

The West Sussex Growers' Association (WSGA) is the specialist branch of the National Farmers' Union for one of the largest industries in West Sussex – horticulture. WSGA was established in 1927 and comprises 60 active business members. Adding £1 billion to the local economy each year and employing 10,000 people in the area of Chichester and Bognor, it forms an essential part of one of the UK's major industries.

With ideal conditions for horticulture and the highest winter light levels in the UK, West Sussex is the perfect spot for this industry to flourish.

From Falmouth to Fife, the members of the WSGA distribute throughout the UK, generating over 1,000 HGV movements per day in the area¹. The region's economy depends heavily on this industry, so a free-flowing connectivity across its strategic road network is a crucial aspect to ensuring that goods arrive in marketable condition.

As the only major east-west route south of the M25, the A27 is a vital part of the region's network. But currently, the A27 bottleneck at Arundel forms part of a business obstacle sitting right on the doorstep of an industry that should be blooming.

WSGA member John Hall explains the unique challenge faced by the horticulture industry of distributing their produce and plants nationally:

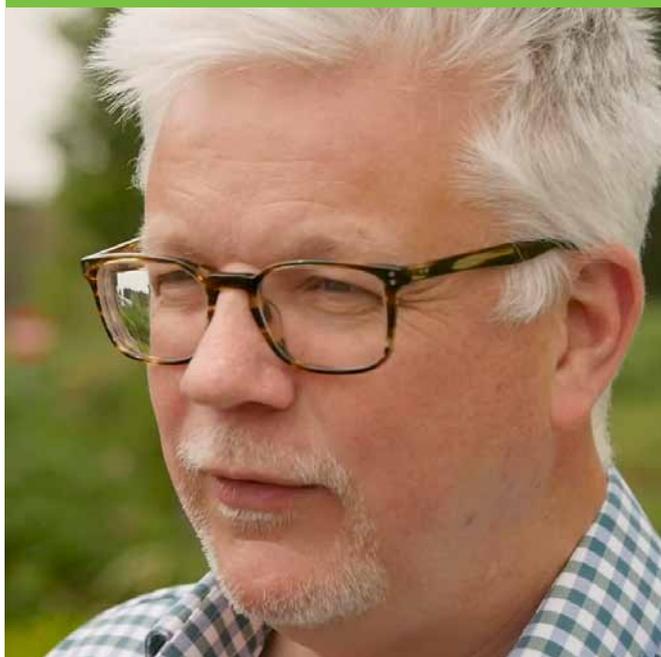
"All of our growers supply nationally, and we have to remember that they all produce perishable goods. When our drivers get held up this is very serious, as we're often on timed deliveries. We've had many occasions when lorries have been sent back because of delays and this is devastating to our business."



John Hall, WSGA member

WSGA Chairman and Fargo Managing Director, Richard Hopkins, adds:

“We are heavily dependent on the road network in the area, both from an employment and business growth point of view. Improvements are needed throughout the country’s strategic road network and in order for our day-to-day business to function, we need to be able to rely on the A27.”



Richard Hopkins, WSGA Chairman and Fargo Managing Director

According to research carried out by the association, congestion and unpredictability along the route translates to a £1 loss for every minute of delay. With 1,192 HGV movements getting stuck daily in average 20-minute delays², the A27 currently causes daily hold-ups to the tune of approximately £8million per year loss for WSGA’s members in the South East region alone.

¹West Sussex Growers’ Association Transport Assessment, April 2016

²This figure belongs to WSGA’s research and is their assessment.

The message from the industry is clear. The demand for British fresh produce has never been greater, with many of WSGA’s horticultural businesses growing at more than 10% per year. But to bring in more investment and job opportunities in this growing market, horticultural businesses in West Sussex need improved transport infrastructure.

Any improvements Highways England makes in this area will have to balance a great number of requirements. With both the South Downs National Park and local flood plains to consider, this project needs to strike a delicate balance between providing long-term accessibility for the region, improving safety, protecting the natural environment, better connecting communities and delivering a cost-effective road that represents value for money.

“The uniqueness and diversity of West Sussex needs to be taken into account when developing the scheme,” explains **Jason Hones**, Highways England’s Programme Lead for the South East.

“Highways England is committed to finding the right solution for A27, and the A27 Arundel Bypass is part of this. Later in the year, we will present a number of options at consultation to seek opinions on which route works best for the area on the highest number of fronts.

“The only way we can accurately strike the right balance between all the different scheme requirements is to hear from as many people in the local area as possible. Everyone has different views and priorities and it’s crucial for us to hear them in order to ensure the A27 Arundel Bypass improvement scheme delivers the best fit for the local area. We want to support communities and businesses like the WSGA’s members in reaching their full potential, both today and in the future.”

Find out more about the A27 Arundel Bypass improvement scheme at:
<https://highwaysengland.co.uk/projects/a27-arundel-improvement/>