

# Belfast

## FOCUS ON FOOD CONFERENCE 2023

ICC Belfast, 28 March 2023

The industry conference whipping up Belfast's position as a top food and drink destination.



Belfast  
City Council



TOURISM  
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Department of  
Agriculture, Environment  
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# FOCUS ON FOOD CONFERENCE 2023

## Foreword

I would like to welcome you to the Focus on Food Conference 2023. Belfast's reputation as a culinary destination has grown significantly and the aim of today's event is to explore how we can maximise the opportunities that Food and Drink Tourism presents.

Food, drink and hospitality make a significant contribution to the economy and culture of Belfast. Our food and drink culture shapes the lived experience for many local people, drives economic activity and services and stimulates national and international tourism.

The growing reputation of the city as a vibrant food and drink destination is built upon a range of factors including the quality of its independently owned restaurants and bars, distinctive food experiences and recent innovations, such as street food hubs, pop-up restaurants, micro-breweries and community-focused venues. Belfast is also recognised for the warmth of the welcome offered to visitors, the availability of local produce and for being the gateway to experiencing Northern Ireland's culinary culture.

Despite its many assets, stakeholders believe that securing the city's place as an internationally respected food and drink destination requires further interventions, including a focused marketing campaign, promotion of the business case for sustainability, more food and drink events, the establishment of a business network and support to overcome specific challenges.

The Focus on Food conference provides an opportunity to shape and achieve a collective sense of ownership of tactics to further develop Belfast as a food, drink and hospitality destination.

It will encourage meaningful collaboration between those who contribute to the city's gastronomic reputation including chefs, restaurateurs, producers, policy makers, destination managers, educators and media professionals.

We are delighted to welcome a fantastic line up of guest speakers, who will inspire and help start a new journey. A journey that will map out our priorities over the short, medium and long term of our Make Yourself at Home Tourism Strategy and our Food and Drink Tourism Action Plan. We are also delighted to have a Producer Zone, giving our delegates the opportunity to make new business connections and collaborations.

I would like to thank our partners including Tourism Northern Ireland and the Department for Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs for their support. Today is a major indication of how, when we have a shared vision and work together, a huge amount can be achieved!

Thank you for your support,

*Councillor Michelle Kelly,  
Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast*





# Conference Programme

**09:00 Registration**

**09:35 Introduction to Morning Session**

Councillor Michelle Kelly, Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast  
Anna Pollock, Strategist on regenerative hospitality and tourism.

**10:35 Morning break - Networking and Producer Showcase**

**11:15 Grace Dent**, Author, Broadcaster and Restaurant Critic, The Guardian

**12:15 Wendy Langham, Belfast Stories**

Focus on food and drink as part of Belfast's defining narrative

**12:50 Lunch break - Networking and Producer Showcase**

**14:00 Afternoon Panel Sessions**

**1] Beyond sustainability: our collective responsibility to act.**

In conversation with Conor Spacey (Founder of the Food Space), Skye Gyngell, (Chef Patron of Spring and Heckfield Place), and Giles Gibbons (Co-founder of the Sustainable Restaurant Association)

**2] Nurturing talent: the role of education in shaping Belfast's culinary reputation.**

In conversation with Professor Una McMahon Beattie (Chair, Council for Hospitality Management Education) and Mairead McEntee (Ulster University)

**3] New Voices: Finding success in a competitive world.**

Vinny Hurrell in conversation with Gemma Austin (Chef Patron, A Peculiar Tea), Alex Greene (Head Chef, Deanes) and Chris McClurg (Chef Patron, Paul Ainsworth at Number 6 in Cornwall)

**Looking ahead – next steps for Belfast.**

Donald Sloan in conversation with Michele Shirlow (Chief Executive of Food NI), David Roberts (Director of Strategy, Tourism NI) and representatives from Visit Belfast and Beannchor Group

**15:30 Closing remarks and conference wrap-up**

## Your Host Donald Sloan

@Don\_Hospitality

Donald Sloan is Chair and Founder of the Oxford Cultural Collective, a creative organisation that uses food, drink and hospitality as catalysts for positive social change. Its projects are focused on community and environmental regeneration, promoting the value of diversity and inclusion and enhancing the quality and impact of higher education. The Collective's core team of Patrons includes prominent chefs, food writers, journalists, broadcasters, academics and business leaders.

Prior to founding the Oxford Cultural Collective, Donald Sloan was Head of the Oxford School of Hospitality Management at Oxford Brookes University, a position he held from 2003 to 2017.

Throughout his tenure the school received many plaudits, including being ranked in the top three hospitality schools the world in 2016 at the Worldwide Hospitality Awards.

Donald is Chair of the Jane Grigson Trust, a Fellow of the Royal Society for Arts, a Fellow of the Institute of Hospitality and an Honorary Fellow of the Council for Hospitality Management Education. He holds a Master of Business Administration in Higher Education Management from University College London.



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**Anna Pollock**  
@PembridgeAnna

Anna Pollock is a renowned strategist and passionate advocate for operating hospitality and tourism in harmony with nature.

Regularly described as being 'ahead of the times' and recognised by industry as a visionary thinker, Anna has anticipated and shaped progressive responses to significant changes in tourism – most recently the deep shift in human values underpinning the emergence of more responsible, discerning travellers.

Most recently, Anna has become an advocate for Regenerative Hospitality. More farms are transitioning from extractive to regenerative practices, which revive biodiversity, improve the vitality of soil, reduce CO2 emissions and, crucially, create the conditions that enable a flourishing ecosystem of micro-businesses. Anna's proposition is that by supporting this process of transition, our hospitality sector will accelerate much needed change to our established, yet unsustainable food system. In November 2022 she was appointed a Patron of the Oxford Cultural Collective.



**Grace Dent**  
@gracedent

Grace Dent is restaurant critic, food writer and broadcaster, who is one of the most admired figures on the British food scene.

Since 2018 she has been the restaurant critic for the Guardian, before which she held the same role for the Evening Standard. She is the presenter of the popular podcast, *Comfort Eating*, and author of the award-winning food memoir, *Hungry*.

She is known for her regular appearance on television, including as a critic on BBC1's *Masterchef*, *Masterchef: The Professionals* and *Celebrity Masterchef*.

Her recent travelogue series with Ainsley Harriott; *C5' World's Most Expensive Buffet*; and *The World Cook* on Amazon Prime.

In 2022 she was named Food Writer of the Year at the prestigious Fortnum & Mason Food Awards. She has also written eleven novels for teenagers.



**Conor Spacey**  
@Spaceychef

Conor has been involved in the food industry for over 30 years working in multiple roles in Ireland and the UK. Most recently, he established FoodSpace, a bespoke contract catering business which has grown in the last five years to over 20 locations across Ireland.

Over the last fifteen years he has taken a deep dive into sustainability and our broken food system. Conor is known for his questioning approach - never satisfied that the hospitality sector is doing enough to change the food system and protect our natural environment.

Most recently Conor's work has collaborated on the launch of the *Chefs Manifesto*. He is one of the co-authors who, informed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, aims to put chefs at the centre to fixing the global food system. This initiative now involves over 700 chefs across 90 countries, working in partnership with many NGO's to make change happen.

Conor has received many accolades for his work in sustainability and is regularly invited to speak at events around the world. You can also catch him on Virgin Media's *Six O'Clock Show*, promoting zero waste meals. Conor's first book *Wasted* is out this July 2023.



**Skye Gyngell**  
@skyegyngell @Spring\_LDN

Originally from Australia, Skye Gyngell is now one of Britain's most respected and acclaimed chefs. After initially training in Sydney and then Paris, Skye moved to London to work at The French House and with a number of high-profile private clients before taking on the role of head chef at Petersham Nurseries.

Spring opened in London in 2014 as Skye Gyngell's first solo venture. In January 2017, she introduced the 'Scratch Menu', designed to deliver delicious, nutritious meals by using

ingredients that are often overlooked. At the start of 2018 Skye announced plans for the restaurant to be single-use plastic free by 2019.

Skye was the Independent on Sunday's food writer for five years and has also published four books: *A Year in My Kitchen* (2006), *My Favourite Ingredients* (2008) and *How I Cook* (2010), and *Spring* (2015) all to great acclaim. Skye has also been appointed as culinary director for luxury Hampshire hotel, Heckfield Place, which opened in 2018.



# speakers



**Giles Gibbons**

@GilesGibbons

Giles founded Good Business over 25 years ago based on a core principle: if you want to change the world, do it through business; if you want to transform your business, change the world.

He advises global corporates, brands, start-ups, and foundations on sustainability strategies, purpose and behaviour change.

He's worked with organisations as diverse as The Coca-Cola Company, Aviva, Rathbones, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Aesop and The Wellcome Trust. He also chairs the Sustainable Restaurant Association, the restaurant world's Michelin stars for sustainability; NetZeroNow, a certification to enable SMEs to go net zero; and the Paraorchestra, an elite disabled orchestra.



**Professor Una McMahon-Beattie**

@UnaMMB

Una McMahon-Beattie is Head of AACSB Accreditation and Professor in Hospitality Management at Ulster University. She was the former Head of Department for Hospitality and Tourism Management and, during her time as Head, led the establishment of the Academy: The Centre of Food, Drink and Culture on the Belfast campus.

Currently Una is Chair of the Council for Hospitality Management Education which represents the interests of universities and colleges offering higher education programmes in hospitality and re-lated fields, globally. Its stated purpose is to contribute to the professional development and status of hospitality management education through the sharing of best practices in research, scholarship and pedagogy. In addition, Una has published extensively in leading journals and is author/co-editor of nine books including The Future of Food Tourism: Foodies, Experiences, Exclusivity, Visions and Political Capital.



**Mairead McEntee**

@mairead\_mcentee

Mairead McEntee is Associate Head of the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Ulster University. As well as her teaching, learning and research roles, Mairead has specific responsibility for the strategic development of the Academy: Centre for Food, Drink and Culture, management of the Department's continuing professional development programmes and coordinating the widening access activities for the Department.

Mairead's research considers how sustainable tourism, in its widest sense, can be achieved by city destinations, such as Belfast, through harnessing the potential of food and cultural tourism.

Prior to entering academia, Mairead was an Associate Director in the Corporate Finance department of one of the UK's largest accountancy houses, specialising in the hospitality and tourism sector.



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**Chris McClurg**  
@ChrisMcClurgNo6

Chris McClurg has worked alongside Paul Ainsworth at No6 in Padstow for over a decade. Drawn to the kitchen from a young age, he spent three years under the tutelage of Jack O'Shea at Jack's iconic London butchery. Rising through the ranks to become Senior Sous Chef in 2014, Chris was named Observer Food Monthly's Young Chef of the Year for 2018, before becoming No6's Chef de Cuisine at the beginning of 2019. Chris was appointed Chef Patron in 2022 and continues to work closely with Paul on the development and growth of No6.

Chris spent his formative years as a chef in Belfast, working for Brian McCann at Shu. A series of stages at prestigious restaurants followed, serving as a perfect launch pad for his future career. During this period he worked at Lindsay House, for Richard Corrigan; Northcote Manor; The Fat Duck; Valrhona l'Ecole du Chocolat; and Chateau Vignelaure.



**Gemma Austin**  
@chef\_gemma\_austin

Gemma had originally planned to become a nurse, but after a back injury it wasn't to be. She then began a software programming course, thinking she'd found her passion, but was once again disappointed.

Her next venture was to start her own pop-up called A Peculiar Tea, with themed six-course tasting menus where the guest got a totally holistic hospitality experience through the food and surroundings.

Gemma went back to study a degree in Culinary Arts Management at Ulster University and graduated in 2019 with a First Class. Shortly after, the Great British Menu producers got in touch and Gemma appeared on the BBC show in 2020 and 2021. She's competing again in 2023, recently winning the Northern Ireland heat of the competition.

In December 2021, Gemma opened her restaurant, A Peculiar Tea in Belfast, sticking to her original plan, with a six-course, themed tasting menu. She is Chair of the new Belfast Food and Drink Network.



**Alex Green**  
@AlexGreene2723  
@Deanes\_Eipic

Alex was born and bred in Dundrum, Northern Ireland. He grew up on a farm where he drew culinary inspiration from his granny who used to cook for family workers on the farm.

Alex started his career at the Bucks Head in Dundrum and moved on to Deanes in Belfast, where he was working when they first received the Michelin star under Derek Creagh. He moved to work with Gordon Ramsay at Claridge's (1\*), followed by a stage at Petrus in London (1\*), he had a spell down under at Saffron in New Zealand before moving closer to home and the Cliff House Hotel in Waterford (1\*) before becoming head chef at the Michelin starred Deane's EIPIIC in Belfast.

Alex is inspired by classic cooking with a modern twist. He is also passionate about the provenance of his ingredients and typically sources 90% of his restaurant's ingredients from local suppliers.



**David Roberts**  
@NITouristBoard

David is Director of Strategic Development at Tourism NI. He is responsible for a broad portfolio of activity including Industry and Experience Development, Regions, and City and Growth Deals. Food and drink tourism forms a key part of this portfolio, with a new Visitor

Experience Development Plan for this priority segment currently being prepared.

David also oversees Tourism NI's work on sustainability. Most recently, a set of 'Leaner and Greener' masterclasses have been delivered for the industry. Plans are also in development for a comprehensive framework of accreditation which will operate across the island of Ireland. Supporting the industry's sustainability journey in the years ahead will be an integral part of the new NI tourism strategy being developed by the Department for the Economy.



**Vinny Hurrell**  
@vinnybelfast

Vinny Hurrell has worked as a radio and TV producer and presenter in Northern Ireland for over 13 years.

His career has seen him work across multiple genres including news and current affairs, entertainment, lifestyle, chat shows, property programming and true crime.



# speakers



**Wendy Langham**

@WendyLangham

Wendy Langham joined Belfast City Council in January 2020 and leads on the Belfast Stories project, a transformational tourism led regeneration project designed to capture the unique spirit of Belfast. Belfast Stories will be a unique visitor destination in the heart of the city centre that will serve as a catalyst for economic, social, and cultural regeneration of the city and wider region.

Experienced in and passionate about city place making, she was brought up in Northern Ireland, studied in Manchester, and has worked in the private, public and not for profit sectors in both London and Belfast. She led on the development of the Connswater Community Greenway along with a range of successful projects across tourism, education, community development and physical regeneration.



**Michele Shirlow**

@MicheleShirlow

Michele is the Chief Executive of FoodNI, a membership organisation dedicated to enhancing the reputation of Northern Ireland's food and drink, representing over 450 member companies (including 200 Taste of Ulster Restaurants) and acting as a strategic driver to support the industry to achieve greatness.

Michele was central to delivery in 2016 of the first ever Year of Food and Drink, which increased positive visitor attitudes towards Northern Ireland food and drink by 23% and resulted in Northern Ireland winning the International Travel and Tourism Awards – Best Food Destination 2018/19. She is now spearheading the Taste the Greatness strategy to establish Northern Ireland as a leading food region in the UK by 2021.



**Petra Woosley**

@PetraWolsey

Raised in Holywood, County Down, Petra was educated at Ulster University, achieving a BA Honours degree in Fine and Applied Arts. She is often invited back to UU as a guest lecturer in the business hospitality school.

Petra started work with The Beannchor Group in Ta Tu Bar and Grill. This was once a flagship venue for Belfast when it opened 23 years ago. Her role gradually evolved from operational to marketing and grew with the subsequent purchases made by the group. She now manages a marketing team of nine people.

Petra sits on the board of Visit Belfast and is the Patron of Crossroads Care NI.

She and her husband Bill have a 12 year-old daughter Caoilinn. Petra is a passionate motorcyclist, cyclist and skier.



**Rachael McGuickin**

@VisitBelfast

Rachael has over fifteen years' sales and marketing experience working in senior international roles across tourism, economic development and higher education. She leads a multi-award winning team at Visit Belfast where she is currently Director of Business Development, Sustainability and Transformation.

As a member of Visit Belfast's executive leadership team, she is responsible for promoting Belfast internationally as a leading business events, cruise, and group tour

destination to help deliver inclusive and sustainable growth for the city region.

Rachael is responsible for leading out on Belfast's 'sustainable tourism' programme as one of the 30 transformational change projects within city's resilience strategy and climate plan. As a result, Belfast has gone from second last in the Global Destination Sustainability Index to a Top 10 destination in the world across 73 global cities.



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# Producer Zone

Producer	Website	Producer	Website
Basalt Distillery	<a href="http://www.basalt-distillery.com">www.basalt-distillery.com</a>	L'Artisan Foods Ltd	<a href="http://www.lartisanfoods.com">www.lartisanfoods.com</a>
Betty's Ice-Cream	<a href="http://www.bettysicecream.co.uk">www.bettysicecream.co.uk</a>	Lo & Slo	<a href="http://www.lo-slo.co.uk">www.lo-slo.co.uk</a>
Blackfire Food	<a href="http://www.blackfirefood.com">www.blackfirefood.com</a>	Long Meadow Cider	<a href="http://www.longmeadowcider.com">www.longmeadowcider.com</a>
Cavanagh Free Range Eggs Ltd	<a href="http://www.awardwinningeggs.com">www.awardwinningeggs.com</a>	Mac Ivors Cider Co.	<a href="http://www.macivors.com">www.macivors.com</a>
Coney Island Coffee	<a href="http://www.coneyislandcoffee.co.uk">www.coneyislandcoffee.co.uk</a>	McCrackens Brewery	<a href="http://www.mccrackensrealale.com">www.mccrackensrealale.com</a>
Craic Foods Ltd	<a href="http://www.craicfoods.com">www.craicfoods.com</a>	Microgreenway	<a href="http://www.microgreenway.co.uk">www.microgreenway.co.uk</a>
Dunluce Distillery Ltd	<a href="http://www.dunlucedistillery.com">www.dunlucedistillery.com</a>	Morelli Ice Cream Ltd	<a href="http://www.morellisices.com">www.morellisices.com</a>
Favorit Foods	<a href="http://www.favouritfood.com">www.favouritfood.com</a>	Natural Umber	<a href="http://www.naturalumber.com">www.naturalumber.com</a>
Geterbrewed Ltd	<a href="http://www.geterbrewed.com">www.geterbrewed.com</a>	Olive Tree Bakes	<a href="http://www.olivetreebakes.com">www.olivetreebakes.com</a>
Gilfresh Produce	<a href="http://ww.gilfreshproduce.com">ww.gilfreshproduce.com</a>	PEPPUP Limited	<a href="http://www.peppupsauce.co.uk">www.peppupsauce.co.uk</a>
Granny V's Kitchen	<a href="http://www.grannyvskitchen.co.uk">www.grannyvskitchen.co.uk</a>	Rhiannon's Cakes and Bakes	<a href="http://www.rhiannonscakesandbakes.co.uk">www.rhiannonscakesandbakes.co.uk</a>
Green Fingers Family Limited	<a href="http://www.greenfingersfamily.co.uk">www.greenfingersfamily.co.uk</a>	Spadetown Brewery	<a href="http://www.spade.town">www.spade.town</a>
Heaney Brewery	<a href="http://www.heaney.ie">www.heaney.ie</a>	The Craft-Tea Brew Co	<a href="http://www.craftteabrew.co">www.craftteabrew.co</a>
Hearty Growers	<a href="http://www.heartygrowers.com">www.heartygrowers.com</a>	Titanic Distillers	<a href="http://www.titanicdistillers.com">www.titanicdistillers.com</a>
Hinch Distillery	<a href="http://www.hinchdistillery.com">www.hinchdistillery.com</a>	Troughtons Premium Drinks	<a href="http://www.troughtonspremium.com">www.troughtonspremium.com</a>
Hotties Chocolate	<a href="http://www.hottieschocolate.com">www.hottieschocolate.com</a>	Wild Atlantic Distillery Ltd	<a href="http://www.wildatlanticdistillery.ie">www.wildatlanticdistillery.ie</a>
Irish Black Butter Ltd	<a href="http://www.irishblackbutter.com">www.irishblackbutter.com</a>	Woodlab Distillery Ltd.	<a href="http://www.woodlabdistillery.com">www.woodlabdistillery.com</a>
Jackson Roze	<a href="http://www.jacksonroze.com">www.jacksonroze.com</a>		
Kennedy Bacon Ltd	<a href="http://www.kennedybacon.co.uk">www.kennedybacon.co.uk</a>		
Kestrel Foods Ltd	<a href="http://www.forestfeast.com">www.forestfeast.com</a>		
Kin & Kind (Hellbent)	<a href="http://www.wearehellbent.co.uk">www.wearehellbent.co.uk</a>		

## Belfast Food & Drink Tourism Network

The newly established Belfast Food and Drink Tourism Network is an opportunity for you to be part of Belfast's Food Tourism journey. It's central to supporting local food and drink producers and providers by providing a unique platform to work collaboratively to drive businesses and Belfast forward. To find out how to get involved, email [culture@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:culture@belfastcity.gov.uk)



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