Press Release
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**North West sweeps boards with feast of Food and Drink Awards**

The Mayor Alderman Hilary McClintock has congratulated Derry City and Strabane District Council, the Foodovation Centre at North West Regional College (NWRC) and Cycle Sperrins-Far and Wild after the North West swept the boards at the NI Food and Drink Awards last night with the region also winning the overall title of ‘Destination Delicious.’

It was a feast of celebration for all three North West finalists who scored a hat-trick of prestigious category awards topped off with the announcement of a special award for Derry as Northern Ireland’s key food tourism and hospitality destination at the gala banquet held in the Culloden Estate & Spa.

Derry City and Strabane District Council’s popular LegenDerry Food Festival won Best NI Food Event at the black tie evening held to celebrate a stellar year showcasing the best of our food and drink and the people and passion that go into rearing, making, cooking and serving it.

Council’s role as lead partner for Tourism NI’s 12-month themed Year of Food and Drink 2016 programme underpinned by its ‘LegenDerry and Local’ message, was further recognised by the judging panel in awarding the highly prized ‘Destination Delicious’.

Mayor of Derry and Strabane, Alderman Hilary McClintock, who attended the awards with representatives from Council and Visit Derry, said she was immensely proud of the North West’s achievements in winning three of the eight category awards and the overall award at the glittering ceremony which was attended by around 300 representatives from the food and tourism industries.

Mayor McClintock continued: “I am thrilled that the judges have awarded us the title of ‘Destination Delicious’ as I know how much hard work and dedication has gone in by all involved in setting out our stall as a foodie destination and, I am confident that the legacy of our investment in the Year of Food and Drink will ensure that these sectors grow from strength to strength.

“I would like to pay tribute to all involved in achieving this success and acknowledge the dedication and commitment of Council’s Tourism Development Manager, Mary Blake, and her team over the past year in particular. The LegenDerry Food Festival attracted more than 36,000 visitors to the city last year and we now look forward to hosting this year’s event which will take place in Guildhall Square and the Guildhall from March 17-19 as part of the St Patrick’s Day Spring Carnival programme.”

The Mayor also congratulated the new state-of-the-art Foodovation Centre at NWRC which won the ‘Growing for the Future’ award collected by manager, Chef Brian McDermott and, Cycle-Sperrins/Far and Wild whose award for ‘Best NI Tours and Trails’ was jointly accepted by director Lawrence McBride and Kevin Hickey of Tamnagh Foods.

NWRC Foodovation Centre Manager Brian McDermott said it was an honour to accept the ‘Growing for the Future’ award. He added: “This award is recognition of the hard work by the team at North West Regional College to develop a state-of-the-art business centre of excellence for food. We are particularly delighted to have won the ‘Growing for the Future Award’ because our ethos is to encourage and nurture small to medium sized food businesses, as well as provide artisan and industry specialists with the technical advice to ensure their route to market is successful and sustainable. Our Foodovation Centre is an extension of the College’s commitment to invest its resources to support the food and hospitality sector.

“I would like to thank all our clients, stakeholders and funders, such as Department for the Economy, Connected NI and Invest NI, who have helped make the centre so successful.”

Congratulating the North West winners, Terence Brannigan, Tourism NI Chairman, said: “The Year of Food and Drink surpassed all targets and that is due to the great partnership approach to the initiative showcased in Derry City and Strabane District Council entries for the Belfast Telegraph Food and Drink awards. The collaboration between the Council, tourism, agri-food and hospitality sectors has enhanced the visitor perception of the North West and will continue to drive national and international visitors to this must see destination.”

Michele Shirlow, Chief Executive of Food NI, added her congratulations “to the home of LegenDerry, who over the past six years have grown their reputation as a foodie destination.” She continued: “From unpretentious beginnings the region has worked together as a team to promote local produce, home grown chefs and food events. From the largest manufacturing businesses to warm and friendly restaurants, the region grasped the concept of Year of Food and Drink to help put this area on the map and build our reputation as an international food and drink destination.”

Odhran Dunne, General Manager of Visit Derry said he was also delighted with the North West’s success and looked forward to working with Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to further develop the region’s reputation as an international visitor destination.

The NI Food and Drink Awards judging panel included food critic Charles Campion and food author Georgina Campbell - writer of the definitive guides to eating out and hospitality in Ireland - Belfast Telegraph restaurant critic Joris Minne and Professor Una McMahon-Beattie, head of the department of hospitality and tourism management at Ulster University.

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**Further information is available from Derry City and Strabane District Council’s Marketing and Communications department, Tel. 02871 376583.**