



Embargoed until Thursday 20th May 2021

EAST LOTHIAN FOOD & DRINK CONSIDERS GROUND-BREAKING SECOND TERM

Ballot papers are being issued today (20th May) to all eligible food and drink businesses in East Lothian to decide (by 1st July) to renew their ground-breaking Business Improvement District for a further five year term, as the sector faces the challenge of recovery following the pandemic lockdowns.

First created following a positive vote in 2016, East Lothian Food & Drink Business Improvement District in partnership with East Lothian Council and Queen Margaret University, has worked to promote East Lothian food and drink businesses. By creating a unifying voice and marketing East Lothian as a quality provider of outstanding produce, the sector has benefited from a range of initiatives from direct selling to attendance at events and the creation of a digital marketing platform.

Now, eligible businesses now have the opportunity to vote on a second term and to continue to work together and to drive the rebuilding of the food and drink sector in East Lothian following the impacts of recent lockdowns, stay at home orders and physical distancing.

East Lothian offers some of the finest food in Scotland from award-winning organic fruit and vegetables, to choice cuts of beef and game. Home to one of Scotland's finest malt whisky distilleries, the region also produces first class gin, beer and cider. As well as rich farmland, the county's forty miles of coastline provides a plentiful supply of freshly landed fish and seafood and has seen success with less traditional produce including spices, oils, ice-cream and chocolate. In addition, East Lothian has a great array of visitor experiences in food and drink, building and enhancing the reputation of Scotland's Food & Drink County.

BIDs in Scotland have traditionally been focused on urban high streets, encompassing a number of different businesses. The East Lothian Food & Drink BID pioneered a new type of BID involving a single sector with a wider geographical area and remains the only food and drink sector BID in Scotland.

East Lothian Provost, Councillor John McMillan, said:

"The initial five years of East Lothian's Food & Drink BID has seen many highlights and Scotland's Food & Drink County is fast becoming a highly visible brand. From member feedback, we know that working in this collaborative way is bringing real benefits. There's no doubt that the past year has seen many difficulties but it has also seen more innovative ways of working and our businesses working together to get their products to consumers. Demand for high quality food and drink has not waned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would urge all eligible local businesses to vote to continue this fantastic collaboration for another five years. As restrictions will ease as 2021 progresses, we will see far more benefits of working together and promoting East Lothian food & drink to a much wider marketplace. In the aftermath of Brexit too,

supportive working and sharing of knowledge and expertise has never been more important. The levy businesses pay is not a tax but a direct investment that stays in East Lothian. I hope to be able to raise a glass of something local to celebrate another five years of Scotland's Food and Drink County!"

East Lothian Council has committed to continued financial support of the BID if the vote to continue for a further five years is successful. It will also continue to provide expertise through membership of the board and the support of the Economic Development team.

Chris Luca, chair of East Lothian Food & Drink said:

"As a local food and drink producer, the East Lothian Food & Drink BID has provided us with a great opportunity to work together and make the changes we as a sector want. We now have the opportunity to renew this and allow us to focus on developing the opportunities food tourism presents to East Lothian food and drink businesses. I believe voting YES will release the huge potential to grow and develop our food and drink sector both within and beyond the county."

Notes to Editors:

1. Ballot papers for The East Lothian Food and Drink BID ballot will be issued by post to eligible food and drink producers in the county on Thursday 20TH May 2021. Votes must be returned by 5pm on Thursday 1st July.
2. Eligible businesses, voluntary members and supporters will receive a copy of the business plan which is also available on the East Lothian Food & Drink website at www.scotlandsfooddrinkcounty.com/aboutus
3. There are currently 32 eligible food and drink producers located within the East Lothian Food & Drink BID area. All East Lothian food & drink businesses, however, will be able to pay a voluntary levy and receive the full membership benefits.
4. Should the East Lothian Food & Drink BID receive sufficient support, food and drink businesses operating from non-domestic rated properties that are producing, processing, manufacturing or adding value to food and drink products in East Lothian will be asked, as a member, to pay a sliding scale levy of between £385 to £750, based on the rateable value of their premises.
5. The BID framework is based on businesses with a shared interest and a common ambition coming together to generate funds and decide how it should be spent locally. It has been used elsewhere to enhance town centres, tourism and business parks with successful examples bringing a range of improvements such as better promotion and marketing, community events, projects and loyalty schemes, all of which can drive sales and attract more investment.
6. East Lothian Council's 'East Lothian Food & Drink' initiative and brand, which was launched in 2000, provides support to the sector through a programme of events, promotion and business support.
7. Chris Luca, Steering Committee Chair of the East Lothian Food & Drink BID and John McMillian, East Lothian are available for interview.

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