



**Taste
Causeway**

Northern Ireland

**Taste Causeway Collaborative Agreement
including Operating Guidelines,
Membership Criteria
& Code of Practice**

Last updated 31st March 2024

1. BACKGROUND

This Collaborative Agreement sets out the management and governance framework for Taste Causeway Community Interest Company (CIC) which consists of:

- CIC Board of Directors
- Taste Causeway Member Companies

All member companies must adhere to this Collaborative Agreement which sets out the Operating Guidelines, Membership Criteria and Code of Practice. Any changes to this Collaborative Agreement must be agreed by the CIC Board and communicated to all member companies.

Taste Causeway is the brand name for the Causeway Coast and Glens Food and Tourism Collaborative Growth Network. The Taste Causeway Collaborative Growth Network brings together local companies working in the food and drink supply chain to position the sector as a driver of significant economic growth and job creation and a key component of the wider visitor destination offer. The Taste Causeway brand was formally trademarked in 2020. Formal Brand Values and operational Brand guidelines govern the use of the brand as a collaborative, commercial sales and promotional tool.

Our Aim

Our aim is to provide a collaborative network to support and promote local businesses working in the food and drink supply chain. We work collaboratively to position the sector as a driver of significant economic growth and job creation and a key component of the wider visitor destination offer within the Causeway Coast and Glens and Causeway Coastal Route.

Our Mission

Taste Causeway brings together like minded people in our local area, under one recognised Food and Drink brand

- To learn, support and grow together.
- To showcase the finest local food and drink, experiences and hospitality we have to offer.
- To advocate for our quality, our provenance our heritage and our culture.
- To lobby for the best interests of our local food and drink sector.

Our Shared Values

- **Purpose** –Our ambition is to build a brand synonymous with our people, our place and our passion.
- **Community** – Bringing together like-minded people in our corner of the world. Working together and supporting each other. Driving growth and bringing prosperity to our community.
- **Culture** – Experience our way. Sharing our stories and our knowledge of living well and eating well.
- **Local** – Experience local. Our food and drink is a product of our Causeway Coast, our mythical Glens, our special towns, villages and rural landscapes.

- **Sustainable** – We are always responsible - for our land, our produce, our planet and our story.

2. MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Taste Causeway Community Interest Company (CIC) was formally constituted in November 2019. There are currently 5 appointed Directors (two with Shareholder Rights) representing the local food and drink supply chain and 6 Interim Directors appointed from Taste Causeway Food and Tourism Collaborative Growth Network Management Committee following a Strategic Planning day in February 2023.

Taste Causeway is supported by local and national stakeholder organisations.

The network is funded up to March 2024 through the Invest NI Collaborative Growth Programme. The funding supports the work of an Invest NI Facilitator on a part-time basis. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council also provides annual financial support for marketing, business support and events. The Facilitator also applies to other funding sources on behalf of the network, including Tourism NI and DAERA.

The Facilitator is responsible to the board of Directors and is responsible for working with the board to deliver an annual SMART Objective Plan which is approved by Invest NI as part of the funding arrangement. This plan builds on the success of the Phase One and Two of the programme and on the research and evidence base provided in an initial Scoping Study which identified the size, capacity of the food and drink sector, the supply chain, the unique selling proposition, new routes to market and the emerging opportunities around food tourism. There was recognition of the need to commercialise the work of the Network to drive future sales growth. This would require a change in the strategic focus of the group with stronger management, delivery and governance framework and new business models and the development of the required resources, skills and capabilities to drive it forward.

The SMART Objective Plan was approved by an Invest NI Business Case Panel in November 2022 and set out in a formal Letter of Offer (LOO) dated 16th November 2022.

The annual SMART Objective Plan will ensure that the commercial opportunities identified in Phase One and Two are fully realised in a consensus building approach to decision making.

The SMART Objectives are:

- **To increase sales in NI, ROI, UK and export markets**
- **To increase the number and value of business innovation**
- **To increase the number and value of businesses upskilling** - Curate and upload relevant business support and capacity building initiatives delivered by stakeholders within the digital platform, enabling increase in capacity building and upskilling of micro and SME local businesses;
- **To develop the Taste Causeway** brand as a selling tool for both the commercial domestic, external and export markets plus inward visitor market.
- **Training & Upskilling, Business Support & Accreditation** - Curate and upload relevant business support and capacity building initiatives delivered by stakeholders within the digital platform, enabling increase in capacity building and upskilling of micro and SME local businesses;

- **Governance & Sustainability**

A detailed implementation plan covering each of the SMART Objectives is reviewed on a quarterly basis by an Invest NI Review Panel.

The Interim Board is working towards a new strategy and operational plan post March 2024.

3. TASTE CAUSEWAY MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA AND CODE OF PRACTICE

We recognise the importance of developing the Taste Causeway brand and encouraging other food and drink businesses to utilise the brand and engage with the digital platform and other activities.

Membership of Taste Causeway is open to food and drink related businesses (Producers, Hospitality, Retail, Distributors and Wholesalers, Food and Drink experience providers) who meet the Membership Criteria and Code of Practice which is set out in writing below. Businesses can sign up via a short on-line application process on the Taste Causeway website.

Membership Criteria Operating Guidelines and Code of Practice

The Membership Criteria Operating Guidelines and Code of Practice has been developed to ensure the Taste Causeway brand proposition and brand values are protected.

All businesses must commit to:

- Collaborating with other Taste Causeway businesses to achieve common goals through sharing and exchanging information, group training, collective marketing initiatives & participation in joint networking opportunities, within the normal limits of competition.
- Meeting & exceeding customer expectations in terms of provenance, quality, safety, marketing & presentation.
- Upholding and contributing to the Taste Causeway Brand values, Membership Criteria, Operating Guidelines and Code of Practice. Any business deemed to be undermining or devaluing the Taste Causeway brand or acting against the Membership Criteria and Code of Practice will be removed from listings/marketing activity and membership suspended.
- Participation in Taste Causeway events, trade shows, networking and business support activity where applicable. Any third party payments must be received in full before event.
- Utilising Taste Causeway branding and marketing material as set out in the Taste Causeway Brand Guidelines.
- Active participation in Social media using templates provided. Abiding by the Taste Causeway Social Media Strategy in relation to all social media posts using the Taste Causeway social media platform.
- Timely payment of the annual subscription fee. Access to benefits will only commence on receipt of fee.

- All businesses should have appropriate Public Liability and Employers Liability to participate in Taste Causeway events, shows etc. any third-party costs i.e. reduced entrance fees etc must be paid before the event starts.
- All businesses where applicable, must be registered with local Council and have a minimum food rating of 4.

In addition, producers must be primary producers or processors and demonstrate a commitment to:

- Provide evidence that primary production or processing facilities are registered in the CCAGBC area (i.e. business registration and Environmental Health accreditation) and most importantly demonstrate how the product is promoted with relevance to place. Businesses which actively promote the region as part of their marketing message will be awarded higher points.
- Producing quality local food & drink products which comply with all relevant regulatory requirements i.e. food safety and hygiene.
- Sourcing local raw materials and ingredients where possible and to keep full sourcing and traceability records.
- Continually improving & innovating with regards to product quality, marketing & customer service.
- Adherence to ethical practices with regard to labour & employment practices, animal welfare, environmental practices & product labelling declarations as appropriate

In addition, Hospitality businesses must demonstrate a commitment to:

- Achieving a minimum of around 30% locally sourced ingredients on menu listings within a 12 month period (food and drink). Local being defined as a 30 mile radius of the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre. Produce may alter according to season, it is the approximate balance of local vs other that is important to us.
- Actively promoting and name checking locally sourced ingredients on menus and showcasing local food and drink producers through tasting events, social media and website posts
- Hospitality businesses who have achieved the desired balance of locally sourced vs other sources will be entitled to apply to and use the Taste Causeway Hospitality Accreditation mark when promoting their business when the accreditation programme is launched in October 2019.

In addition, Retail businesses must demonstrate a commitment to:

- Retailing at least 6 local producers collectively in one dedicated retail space.
- Working collaboratively with taste Causeway facilitator on the production of associated Taste Causeway Point of Sale material.
- Actively promoting the availability of local Taste Causeway products via social media and traditional marketing channels.
- Working with producers on in-store tastings, talks etc where feasible.

In addition, Food & Drink Attractions/Experience Providers must demonstrate a commitment to:

- Provide bookable food and drink related attractions and experiences which are attractive to our identified target markets
- Collaborate with local food & drink producers/hospitality businesses and work with the facilitators to develop new attractions and experiences which are attractive to our identified target markets.

Brand Guidelines

The Taste Causeway Brand Values and Brand Guidelines communicate the essence of the brand and set out strict regulations around its use. The Brand Guidelines PDF is issued to approved businesses.

Application Process

Applications are assessed by the relevant sectoral Membership Working Group. The final decision rests with the Management Committee. Only signed up and approved businesses will be given permission to use the Taste Causeway brand. The Committee reserves the right to withdraw permission if the Code of Practice is not upheld.

4. MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Our membership benefits package is focused on the two distinct areas of our work:

- Business to Business (B2B) Collaboration and Business Support.
- Business to Consumer (B2C) Driving Sales and Business Growth.

B2B Collaboration and Business Support

1. Access to Members' Digital Portal, Sector Forums and Working Groups.
2. Free attendance at annual Taste Causeway Trade exhibition and Conference.
3. Access to consolidated online live database for all information on food and drink related business support, training, commercial opportunities.
4. Buddy Mentoring Service for new businesses with Taste Causeway board member or more established businesses.
5. Opportunities for coverage in monthly B2B e-marketing circulated to all members and stakeholder organisations.
6. Free inclusion in Slow Food Causeway accredited destination status (subject to Slow Food criteria and approval).
7. Tourism related businesses will be represented by Taste Causeway at Meet the Buyer, trade shows and Tour Operator fam trips.
8. Taste Causeway is represented on the CCAG Economic Advisory Group to represent the food and drink sector.
9. Taste Causeway is represented on the Hospitality Ulster main board, HU Hospitality Skills Taskforce and CCAG Labour Market Partnership to lobby for support for hospitality jobs/skills.
10. Offers, Discounts and Collaborative Buying opportunities including purchase of raw materials, digital support, packaging, advertising etc.

Business to Consumer (B2C) Driving Sales and Business Growth

1. **Business listing on Taste Causeway consumer website and online sales platform**

This includes short business profile, up to 5 images and links to business website and social media platforms. An online template is provided to regularly update your listing. Businesses can be listed in up to 4 categories, Producer, Hospitality, Taste Experience or Retail provided they trade under the same company legal entity. This link will be used in all marketing/social media as call to action and direct selling/booking link.

2. Presence of Taste Causeway online sales platform

The online sales platform is within the Taste Causeway website and is fulfilled by a third party with various delivery options available.

3. Inclusion in Taste Causeway Communications and consumer engagement activity

This includes inclusion in all promotional activity relevant to your sector. activity detailed in the annual Communications and Promotional calendar.

- Access to the Taste Causeway social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and NEW LinkedIn pages) to disseminate company information
- Inclusion in Blogs and bi-monthly Consumer facing email marketing campaigns.
- Inclusion in marketing and promotional partnerships with Visit Causeway and Tourism NI such as Giant Taste Campaign.
- Inclusion in Press releases, PR opportunities and media fam trips

Online support and templates provided on the Member's Digital Platform.

4. Usage of the Taste Causeway brand and marketing collateral

Members are entitled to use Taste Causeway Logo on all marketing and digital material subject to brand guidelines. Available for easy download on the Members Digital Platform.

5. Slow Food Causeway

Inclusion in Slow Food Causeway accredited destination marketing and promotional activity and permission to use the Slow Food Causeway logo (subject to Slow Food criteria and approval).

6. Taste Causeway Window sticker or plaque

All members will be given a free window sticker to promote their involvement in Taste Causeway and alignment with shared values of quality, provenance etc.

7. Sponsorship and Partnership Agreement opportunities

There will be a few opportunities each year for member or support companies to avail of additional sponsorship or Partnership Agreement opportunities. Each proposal will be assessed by the board individually to ensure brand fit and alignment.

Membership Fees

Business Membership

- 0-3 employees £85
- 4-19 employees £145
- Over 20 employees £195

Supporter Membership

- Up to £499,999 £100 +VAT
- £500,000 – £1M £200 +VAT
- Over £1M £300 +VAT

Terms and Conditions

1. The membership fee will entitle paid up/approved companies to access the list of benefits and use the trademarked Taste Causeway logo.
2. Only paid-up members of Taste Causeway can apply to use the accredited Slow Food Causeway logo, provided they meet the additional criteria set out by Slow Food UK
3. Bi-annual instalment plans are available, please ask for more details.
4. Membership is for a period of 12 months. Renewal invoices for existing members are sent out on 1st April each year and are automatically renewed on this date for successive 12-month period.
5. New members are invoiced on a pro rata basis up to the next 1st April renewal date.
6. Membership can be cancelled by either party by giving written notice to the other not less than 1 month before the Renewal Date.
7. This membership package and annual membership fees will be reviewed at the AGM on 20th September 2023 for the period 1st April 2024 -31st March 2025.

APPENDIX ONE

Taste Causeway CIC

Board Members

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Leona Kane | Brighter Gold Rapeseed Oil |
| 2. Rodger Doherty. | Lacada Brewery |
| 3. Graham Watts. | Causeway Coffee |
| 4. Nikki Picken. | The Bushmills Inn |
| 5. Mark Rodgers | Dalriada Kingdom Tours |
| 6. Sean McLaughlin | Fullerton Arms |
| 7. Geri Martin | The Chocolate Manor |
| 8. Claire O’Kane | Mussenden Sea Salt |
| 9. Michael Caughey | Bushmills Distillery |
| 10. Paula McIntyre | |
| 11. Rita McCaughey | Enterprise Causeway |
| 12. ThanaThammavongsa | Whoosh |

The formal legal company roles of Board Chair and Company Secretary are held by Geri Martin and Rodger Doherty.

CCAG Food & Tourism Collaborative Growth Network (Taste Causeway)

Key Stakeholders

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Vincent Lusby/Linda Jamison | Invest NI |
| 2. Rita McCaughey | Causeway Enterprise Agency/Creative Hub |
| 3. Niall Mc Gurk | CCAG BC (Economic Development) |
| 4. Vicky Stevenson | CCAG BC (Tourism) |
| 5. Gary Quate | Tourism NI |
| 6. Karen Marran | Foodovation North West Regional College |
| 7. Marie Donaghy | Northern Regional College |

APPENDIX TWO

MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Two Directors are appointed as legal Office Bearers, CIC Chair and Company Secretary. The Directors are collectively responsible for fulfilling the legal, statutory and financial obligations of the CIC, overseeing the strategic direction and future sustainability of the CIC and are custodians of the Taste Causeway Brand Trade Mark and Slow Food Accreditation.

Appointment and Termination of Board Members

The current Interim Board is in place until the next AGM scheduled for September 2023.

All Interim Board Members are bound by the Membership Criteria and Collaborative Agreement.

- An Interim Board Member may terminate its status of Member and this CA at any time by notifying the Collaborative Network Chair in writing with 1 months' notice.
- The Interim Board may terminate this CA and the status of an Interim Board Member under the approval of a majority vote of all Interim Boards with 1 months' notice.
- In the event of exceptional circumstances such as Conflict of Interest the Chair and the Facilitators have the authority to agree an appropriate solution with the member and report to the Board at the next board meeting.
- It is here expressly stated that the decision of termination may be taken and implemented without resorting to any legal action.

In the event of a termination, a new company will be appointed to the role with a similar background i.e. a producer will be replaced by a producer. Interim Board members can propose a company and this must be agreed by a majority of the board members as part of the normal decision making process at board meetings.

Board Member Operating Guidelines

Structure and Role

- A designated Owner/Senior Manager will be appointed from each member company.
- The relationship between members under this Collaborative Agreement is that of independent companies and each member maintains exclusive control over its own operation.
- Board Members are encouraged to refer to their membership of the Taste Causeway Network at every appropriate opportunity.
- Board Members will attend 75% of Network Meetings, initially planned at 8 per year, to deliver the SMART Objectives Plan, to review progress against plan, and to approve recommendations brought before them by the Facilitator.
- Board Members will also participate in interim, online meetings called to consider new opportunities arising between Board Meetings.
- Agreement will be based upon one vote per Board Member.
- A decision will be carried on a majority of 1 vote.
- If the designated company representative cannot attend a meeting a deputy may attend in their place and will be entitled to vote.

- Board Members can form working groups/project teams to develop projects to achieve the objectives of the Taste Causeway Network as deemed necessary by the Board.

Communication

A bi-monthly Board Meeting will be held based on a pre-arranged schedule of board meetings. A list of meetings will be prepared and circulated. These meetings will be chaired by the Chair and facilitated by the Facilitator. A quorum of 6 members will be required to take decisions. A Meeting Note of agreed actions and relevant information will be circulated by the facilitator within 3 working days of the meeting.

Board members are expected to advise other members of the network of opportunities that would benefit the network as a whole.

All commercial information associated with the project is private to the Board members and shall not be shared with any outside parties, without prior approval. Board Members will respect all company IP and non-disclosure requirements.

Any additional funding applications will be subject to separate protocol and governance procedures.

Decision Making

Operational & Strategic – In the event of a decision that effects the majority of the Board and subsequent members, this should be tabled at the next available Board meeting, by way of a clear proposal from a Board member which must be seconded by another Board member. This will be voted on by all Board members in attendance, provided there is a quorum of 6, with a simple majority vote. The decision will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting and will carry unless re-visited by the board and subject to the same decision-making procedure.

Emergency - In emergencies a decision can be made without a physical meeting. The facilitator will seek approval from the Chair and email the Board with a recommendation. This will be voted on by all members via group email, provided there is a quorum of 6.

Board Membership Protocol

The following actions may make Board Members liable to be warned/cautioned that they are not pulling their weight:

- Regularly missing meetings without prior apologies
- Not fulfilling the commitments set out in the Letter of Adherence
- Failing to use the web-site regularly to keep themselves up-to-speed on things
- Providing little input in meetings or don't bother replying to documents and discussions
- Not taking their commitments seriously or being unreliable around completing their actions

If members can't meet the LOA (Adherence) due to change in business circumstances or there is a conflict of interest which undermines the intellectual property of the network the Chair and

Facilitator have the authority to request that the business must immediately step down. Otherwise it is brought to the next board meeting for discussion and decision.

APPENDIX THREE

MEMBERSHIP OPERATING GUIDELINES AND CODE OF PRACTICE

These Operating Guidelines and Code of Practice are a non-legally, binding mutual agreement between all the members of the Causeway Coast and Glens Food & Tourism (Taste Causeway) Collaborative Growth Network which define the minimum set of acceptable behaviours and processes to be followed by all existing and future members of the network. They will be added to and changed as required.

Structure and Role

- A designated Owner/Senior Manager will be appointed from each member company.
- The relationship between members under this Collaborative Agreement is that of independent companies and each member maintains exclusive control over its own operation.
- Members are encouraged to refer to their membership of the Taste Causeway Network at every appropriate opportunity
- Members will be required to participate in and support Network Events, training and promotional activities
- Members will also participate in network meetings and online forums called to consider new opportunities.
- If the designated company representative cannot attend a meeting a deputy may attend in their place
- Members can form working groups/project teams to develop projects to achieve the objectives of the Taste Causeway Network as deemed necessary by the Board.

Communicating and sharing information

We will be totally transparent and inclusive in how we communicate information on the project and potential opportunities. This will be done via group email, What's App or via the Member's Digital Platform to the contact details supplied by each member company. It is the responsibility of the company to advise the facilitator of any changes to these details.

Members are expected to advise other members of opportunities that would benefit the network as a whole.

All commercial information associated with the project is private to members and shall not be shared with any outside parties, without prior approval. Members will respect all company IP and non-disclosure requirements.

Confidentiality Policy

Taste Causeway CIC promotes collaboration among members. During the course of your membership you may become aware of commercial projects of Taste Causeway CIC and its member companies. Members must not promote or release any commercially sensitive information relating to Taste Causeway or its members without the express permission of the project owner.

Competition Policy

Taste Causeway CIC respects the fact that there may be competition among its members. No company will be denied membership for the sole reason of being a competitor of another member. However, should member organisations deliberately diversify or enter new products to market as a result of information gained through Taste Causeway or a member company, this action may result in membership being revoked.

Governance and Protocol

Conflicts of Interest

Any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, particularly those around commercial opportunities or funding bids, must be advised in writing by email at the earliest opportunity to the Facilitator, who will share with the Board Chair, including details of the companies intended action as it might affect the group. This will be subject to the normal Board decision-making procedures and will be included on the agenda of board meetings.

Membership Protocol

The following actions may make members liable to be warned/cautioned that they are not collaborating:

- Non-participation in collaborative business support, networking or marketing activities
- Failing to use the web-site and social media platforms regularly

The following actions may result in the termination of membership of Taste Causeway CIC:

- No longer meeting the essential membership criteria for the respective sector
- Bringing the Taste Causeway Brand into disrepute
- Breaching Taste Causeway CIC confidentiality policy
- Deliberately misrepresenting their capabilities/capacities to other members
- Breaching Taste Causeway CIC competition policy
- Deliberately acting against the best interests and Brand Values of the network
- Conflict of interest with other groups / businesses that are detrimental to the values of the Taste Causeway Brand Values

In the first instance, a breach of membership protocol will be addressed by the Facilitator by way of a meeting with the company concerned.

Two or more repeated problems will result in formal written letter outlining the breach in protocol issued jointly by the Facilitator and Board Chair. The company concerned will be invited to a meeting of a Member Panel consisting of the Facilitator plus Board Chair and the relevant Membership Sub Group if applicable.

The view of this panel, will be binding and final. If the panel cannot reach a majority view then the company can put their case to an external arbitrator/facilitator at a resolution meeting. The opinion of the external arbitrator/facilitator will be binding and final. The cost of an external arbitrator/facilitator will be at the cost of the compliant.

Issue Resolution Process (between members)

Issues and conflicts between two or more members should be surfaced and resolved quickly and informally as this can be a major distraction to the network. The following is the agreed process:

- **Step 1** – Both two parties should speak directly privately to try and resolve, this should address 90% of the problems if they can't then
- **Step 2** – One/Both parties should put their grievance in writing to the facilitator with a written response given within ten working days. We expect Step 1 and Step 2 to address 99% of problems. If it is still not resolved way then.....
- **Step 3** – One/Both parties should put their case to a Member Panel consisting of the Facilitator plus Board Chair and relevant membership Sub Group. The view of this panel, will be binding and final. If they cannot reach a majority view then
- **Step 4** – One/Both parties should put their case to an external arbitrator/facilitator at a resolution meeting. The opinion of the external arbitrator/facilitator will be binding and final. The cost of an external arbitrator/facilitator will be at the cost of the compliant.