Original Irish Hotel chiefs gather at Beech Hill

Tourism growth and the sector's importance to the economy topped the agenda when the Original Irish Hotels group met at the Beech Hill Country House Hotel this week.

Keynote speaker, Howard Hastings, from Hastings Hotels, told Monday's conference that tourism in Northern Ireland is thriving. He described it as a "key sector" in local economic growth and job creation.

Mr Hastings, whose company operates seven hotels in Northern Ireland, also highlighted "concerns" across the sector regarding the implications of Brexit.

Mary Fitzgerald, Chairperson of Original Irish Hotels, was accompanied to the event by more than 40 hoteliers from across Ireland. Internationally-renowned Derry composer Frank Gallagher - who has worked with the likes of Shirley Bassey, Sir James Galway, Ronan Keating and Andre Rieu - provided music during the evening.

Conor Donnelly, Operations Director at Beech Hill - which was recently acquired by The House Collection group - said the hotel was "honoured" to host one of the group's prestigious bi-annual meetings.

"We are delighted to be a part of the Original Irish Hotels group and were honoured to host this conference at Beech Hill.

"The visitors were treated to a wonderful tour of Derry by Martin McCrossan City Tours and craft beer tasting at the Walled City Brewery before enjoying dinner at Beech Hill. Our chefs served up a memorable five-course tasting menu of local dishes containing fruit and vegetables grown in our very own walled garden.

"Frank Gallagher, fresh from supporting Jools Holland, provided fabulous music to round of the special evening."

During his keynote speech, Mr Hastings paid tribute to former Beech Hill owner Patsy O'Kane for her great service to tourism and hospitality. Ms O'Kane retired as the general manager of the Beech Hill in September.

The Original Irish Hotels group includes a selection of more than 60 traditional and boutique hotels, castles, manor and country houses across the island of Ireland.