

Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting  
The Solway Firth, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024, 1pm to 3pm  
In-person at The Selkirk Arms, Kirkcudbright  
Summary of meeting

Attendees:

- Jennifer Chapman, Kirkennan Estate Holiday Cottages
- Sarah Hunter, Grobdale of Girthon
- Beth and Paul Ballamy, Kippford Classic Car Hire
- Dee, Barhill Woods B&B
- Chris Walker, Selkirk Arms Hotel
- Jonathan Barrett, Dumfries and Galloway Council
- John Blaikie, Kirkcudbright Summer Festivities
- Mark Donald, Dumfries Tours
- Adrian Grogan, Hazlefield House
- Iain McDonald, Castle Douglas Golf Club
- Wendy Murray, Caerlaverock Estate
- Eva Milroy, Dumfries and Galloway College
- Alan and Patricia Mellor, Auchengool House
- David Hope-Jones, SSDA
- Sarah Macdonald, SSDA

Lead SSDA business contact in the Solway Firth:

Sarah Macdonald, [sarah@ssdalliance.com](mailto:sarah@ssdalliance.com), 07770 781464

Purpose of meeting:

As part of its Locally Led Destination Development work, every six months, the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA) brings together local tourism businesses and community representatives in each of the 14 areas of the South of Scotland. Full details can be found at:

[www.ssdalliance.com/destination-development/](http://www.ssdalliance.com/destination-development/)

This meeting was arranged to allow local tourism organisations to:

1. Be updated on the development of the South of Scotland **Responsible Tourism Strategy** and be a part of its delivery.
2. **Review progress against ideas and actions** discussed at the last meeting and decide priorities for the coming six months.
3. Be updated on, and involved in, the major new **Seasonality marketing campaign** to help extend the visitor season.
4. Feed into **how the local area should be marketed** – specifically, what content should be on the [‘Scotland Starts Here’ website](#) and what should go into the commissioning brief of a new promotional film about the local area.
5. Access free **‘Scotland Starts Here’** brand collateral and assets.



6. Share and build **new local collaborations** between local businesses.

## Finding key information online between meetings:

As part of the SSDA's commitment to transparency and accountability, attendees were briefed on:

- The consumer-facing (B2C) 'Scotland Starts Here' [website](#) (half a million visitors), [app](#) (25k users) and [social media](#) (70k followers)
- The business-facing (B2B) [SSDA website](#), specifically where to find:
  - o [What the SSDA is doing right now](#): including a live, interactive mind-map showing the c50 different projects which the team of five SSDA staff members are moving forwards, monthly update videos from the CEO, and the 2023-24 Operational Plan.
  - o [Locally Led Destination Development](#): where we post all the minutes from meetings and have the live tracker for the [100 locally-led actions](#) we've been given.
  - o [Responsible Tourism Strategy](#): where you can find the latest draft text.
  - o [20<sup>th</sup> March Annual Conference](#): where you can book your place at this crucial event.

## Responsible Tourism Strategy:

Businesses were briefed on:

### The Consultation and Drafting process:

Throughout 2023, the SSDA has been working in close partnership with VisitScotland, Scottish Borders Council, D&G Council and SOSE, to develop a South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy which sets an ambitious ten-year vision for our visitor economy. The strategy is an integral part of the overarching Regional Economic Strategy and will underpin every relevant agency's work on tourism and hospitality over the coming decade.

We have had an inclusive, transparent and far-reaching consultation process, involving hundreds of businesses, communities and key individuals, with: 14 in-person meetings across the region (receiving over 3,500 data submissions), 13 digital thematic meetings, 20 deep-dive one-to-one meetings, visitor sentiment tracking, an open online consultation, two meetings of the Regional Economic Partnership, and extensive business engagement.

In keeping with our commitment to transparency, we have published online the input received through these consultations, including:

- The formal record from all 14 in-person meetings ([Galashiels](#), [Loch Ken](#), [Dumfries](#), [Kelso](#), [Moffat](#), [Annan](#), [Duns](#), [Eyemouth](#), [Selkirk](#), [Sanquhar](#), [Hawick](#), [Peebles](#), [Newton Stewart](#), [Stranraer](#))
- [WordClouds showing how all 14 areas see the South of Scotland](#)
- [AI-generated collation of all data received, across all consultation modalities.](#)

Following the above web-links, you can see what businesses and communities said in each of the consultation meetings, how this tracks through to the AI-generated aggregation of data from all meetings, and how this in turn has informed the strategy.

All points that came up multiple times in the consultation are featured in the AI-generated summary document and all have carried through to the latest draft of the Strategy. **We are therefore confident that we have listened to and acted on, what we have heard from businesses and communities.**

### What is in the Strategy:

Businesses, enterprises and communities told us through the consultation that a successful strategy needs to be: clear, achievable, results oriented, accountable, measurable, ambitious and easily communicated.

The strategy therefore sets out four very clear strands of work, each of which has a handful of key areas of work.

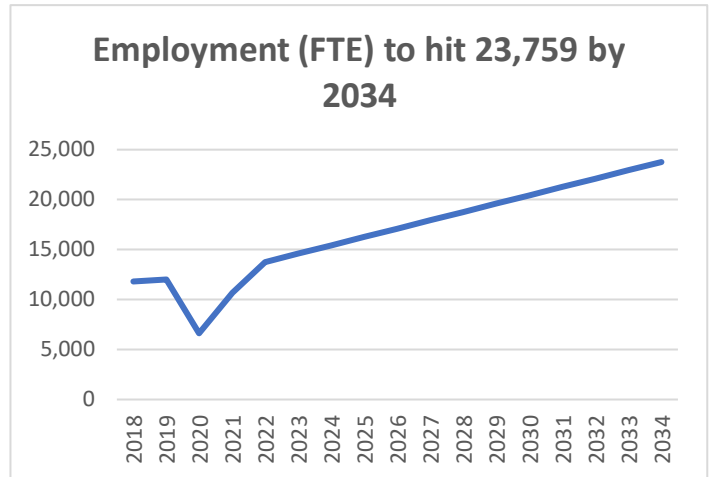
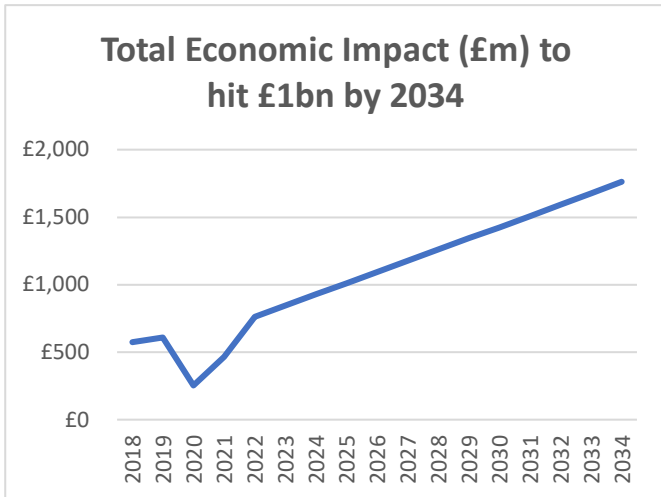
- 1) We will **Inspire visitors** to come to the South of Scotland by: developing our destination position and profile and bringing our overarching 'Scotland Starts Here' brand alive; transforming the South of Scotland into a year-round destination; inspiring the travel trade as to the potential of the region; better leveraging our designations; and working with game-changing ambition to attract high-spending international visitors.
- 2) We will **Develop the visitor experience with a focus on quality** by: actively supporting businesses and enterprises to increase the quality of their offering; establishing Growth and Development Hubs in areas like cycling, literary tourism, dark skies, agritourism and equestrianism, which we know can have a catalytic impact; offering clear, consistent, and centrally located visitor information to make it an easy destination to visit, encouraging people to stay longer and spend more; increasing, and better connecting, our programme of events across the region, with a strategic spread throughout the year; ensuring we have the right accommodation, in the right place, at the right price-point; ensuring we have the underlying infrastructure for tourism to succeed; and attracting scalable, sustainable inward investment.
- 3) We will **Support business to succeed** by: building new destination-wide collaborations, with peer learning and mutual support; actively listening to, representing and acting on the views of communities and local business; building a skilled, valued, motivated local workforce; and better use of data to help businesses and enterprises make successful decisions based on local market insights.
- 4) We will **Act responsibly for long-term collective benefit** by: supporting businesses on their journey to achieving Net Zero; embracing community-led tourism; ensuring the South of Scotland is an accessible, inclusive and diverse destination; building visitor management systems into all new growth; protecting the environment while maximising the local economic benefit of all those who visit us, no matter how they choose to arrive or move around the region. This will mitigate potential risks and community concerns and help protect and enhance our natural capital which is our greatest asset and our overriding responsibility to future generations.

### Feedback and edits from Draft 1:

The consistent feedback from draft 1 was that businesses liked the four strands and 22 areas of work but felt it needed to have the ambition dialled up.

Following this feedback we set the hugely ambitious targets to:

- **increase our visitor economy by £1 billion**, to £1.76bn by 2034.
- **support a further 6,000 jobs**, to 20,000 FTE posts by 2034.



We will achieve this radical growth by:

- a) extending the season and developing the South of Scotland as a year-round 'rural escape' destination for the 14m people within 2-4 hours travel time;
- b) becoming a 'go to' rather than a 'go through' destination; and
- c) increasing international visitor numbers, who spend significantly more and stay longer than domestic visitors.

#### Feedback and edits from Draft 2:

A full v2.3 draft text was then published online at the start of January 2024 and we invited feedback through an online survey, public meetings and other engagements. All Councillors in both Scottish Borders Council and D&G Council were briefed on the draft and able to give their feedback.

Overwhelming, respondents liked: the ambition, vision, responsible, collaboration, positive, extending the season, focus on quality, inclusivity, transparency and accountability.

205 suggestions were received and every one was discussed by the partners, to inform the final version. For example, following feedback we:

- reduced the jobs growth target from 10k to 6.3k.
- added more on community-led tourism, with wording from SCOTO
- added more on natural capital and made this more prominent
- Gave detail/clarity on target markets/segments
- added reference to well-being targets and NSET

These edits notwithstanding, there was very strong support for the draft text, with:

- **84%** of respondents felt there has been an **inclusive, transparent and fair consultation** in the development of this strategy
- **93%** of respondents who inputted to the consultation and have an opinion, **feel their views are represented** in some form in the draft
- **79%** of respondents with an opinion feel we have the **right level of ambition in the draft strategy** (16%: less ambitious; 5%: more ambitious)
- **95%** of respondents with an opinion **see themselves being involved in the delivery of the strategy** somehow
- **97%** of respondents with an opinion **see themselves benefitting from the strategy**

#### Next steps:

With the edits from the final phase of consultation, the final text is being agreed and signed off by the Councils, SOSE, SSDA and Visit Scotland. The graphic design is under development (see below draft examples).



The SSDA is using these 14 Locally Led Destination Development meetings to brief businesses, enterprises and communities across the South of Scotland at a local level.

An Implementation Plan is currently being developed. This will be a rolling-three year document, so at any time you can see exactly what will be done by each organisation, when and how, in the next three years to advance the strategic outcomes. It will be publicly reported on annually.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024 the Deputy First Minister, other Ministers and the Chair and CEO of all relevant public agencies will be briefed on, and formally buy-into, the strategy.

The Strategy will be formally launched at the [20<sup>th</sup> March SSDA conference](#) and **all tourism businesses in the South of Scotland are encouraged to be there**, as there will be key conversations which will determine implementation.

#### Local input from the Solway Firth:

There was then an open discussion about the strategy at which the following key points came up:

- SSH promotion should be taking advantage of the free promotion brought in, such as the recently successful Hairy Bikers programme.
- Still some confusion around SSDA v SSH. What is relevant the visitor, what to the local?
- Would like to see the infrastructure develop for the charging of electric vehicles. The power provision for the fast chargers, not just the chargers themselves.
- Development of sustainable tourism. Need to make the best use of existing resources.
- VAT threshold has an impact on small businesses.
- How should we be attracting those potential visitors not on social media?
- Should develop system where businesses can log interest in providing prize contributions.

#### Local Priorities / Actions to take forwards:

While much of the SSDA's work is focused on 'pan-south' benefits to tourism, we are keen to also dedicate some capacity to responding to local priorities in the 14 different areas within the South of Scotland. Therefore, at the last meeting we asked all 14 areas if there were local priorities (beyond the strategy, seasonality work and local promotion already discussed) they would like the SSDA to support in the coming six months in each of these series of in-person meetings.

Across the 14 areas, a total of 100 local ideas/priorities were identified. It was made clear from the outset that the SSDA couldn't promise to deliver all the ideas suggested (this is just one of [50 projects](#) being undertaken by the 5 SSDA staff members).

The SSDA has put these [100 actions uploaded online](#) and keeps this updated with information about what has been done to deliver on these.

David H-J gave an update on the progress made specifically against the priorities identified in the Solway Firth area since the last meeting:

Location	Action	Status	Lead	Progress	Next step
Solway Firth	Enabling collaboration and networking locally	Ongoing	Gowan	SSDA annual conference is a great networking opportunity, early bird tickets are now on sale for the event on the 20th March	Next meetings are in February
Solway Firth	Publicising what's on in region	Ongoing	Sarah	The new events submission form is live which means businesses and events can feed in directly with no delay. Now live in the SSH events page	We will continue to promote the event registering systems and work with Events stakeholders and raising as part of the events planning process
Solway Firth	Showcasing best practice	Ongoing	Gowan	We have delivered a series of Winter Webinars showcasing best practice	SSDA website is being overhauled so we can showcase businesses even more.
Solway Firth	Promote the SOS's natural capital (from Jan '24), find direct links to the "visitor economy"	Not Started	Gowan	An initial meeting with SOSE to understand areas of collaboration to enhance this further	Natural capital is an important part of the draft Responsible Tourism Strategy and is part of the SSDA conference with a panel discussion.
Solway Firth	Advert on TV – use video footage	Ongoing	Gowan	The Thistle awards have been featured and we continue to explore opportunities to expand our marketing reach within our budget	We are just about to run an advertorial and digital displays campaign with VisitScotland, having talked to other regional DMOS (Aberdeen, Cairngorms) this has better reach and lower cost than TV, we will evaluate after completion
Solway Firth	Consider target audiences (campervans and older couples)	Ongoing	David	The forthcoming Responsible Tourism Strategy looks specifically at target audience and will include a specific section on campervans	Businesses can feed into the draft of the strategy in Dec and Jan

New local priorities identified in the meeting included:

- Need to use the hashtag more- keen to understand benefits of useful hashtags, would like to receive more training around hash tag and social media use. What are the trending hashtags?



- Refresh of the Robert the Bruce signs (at the moment illegible), considering the 750<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2024.
- Signposting to available funding, particularly for cycling infrastructure.
- Promotion and collaboration for international and national events taking place.
- Would like to see more social media coverage around activity and less around accommodation.

### Seasonality Campaign update:



From past consultations we heard from partners and businesses that there was a need to address seasonality with a fresh new approach and work in collaboration.

Seasonality is now part of the SSH/SSDA strategic plan and in Winter 2023 a fresh new campaign was launched with a new design approach. Its main goal is to raise awareness of regions’ seasonal offering: Endless Adventures all year round. A Spring campaign was confirmed, after which there would be a review.

Each season will be created using the input gathered from businesses in the autumn meetings and dedicated marketing webinar sessions and next year it is hoped that the season’s offerings will be reviewed and developed. The Seasonal campaign activity includes a bucket list, a season specific landing page on SSH, and is supported by press, advertorials, and a social media campaign.

Updates were provided on a highly successful Autumn campaign where SSDA worked closely with VS and DFDS. The campaign activity included paid promotion on social media, press and advertorials.



### ‘Scotland Starts Here’ webpage and video:

An update and first site of the Locally Destination page to appear on Scotland Starts Here was presented for comment. This first draft included introductory copy; up to six “tiles” with links to regional specific articles or websites; a link to four of the area’s most iconic points of interest and four most celebrated accommodation providers. Requests were made for local input to ensure the final published page was a true reflection of the location.

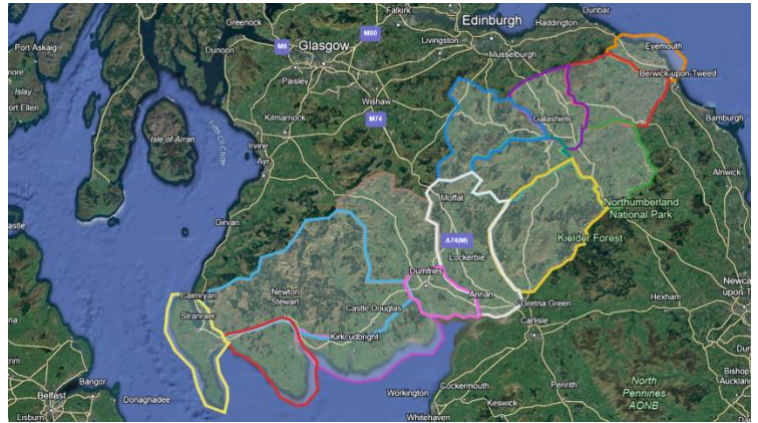
Maps were provided to highlight how the South of Scotland would be split into 14 attractive locations and names suggested – again for comment and discussion. Each area’s map will be geo-fenced to return tailored listing results for each area page.

A summary of each destination’s key themes for the proposed locally produced video. Available footage was highlighted and shared for comment to ensure themes were correct, to determine which locations/activities were priorities for inclusion, and which were the must-haves and priorities.

Next Steps:

Meetings and correspondence was had with those who expressed interest in inputting. Each page is now live on Scotland Starts Here and has the advantage of not being static should views change or areas develop.

[The Solway Firth Locally Led Destination Development page](#)



Free 'Scotland Starts Here' Collateral

In response to feedback from businesses and partners on low visibility of the brand and need for print collateral, SSDA created a variety of posters and table-talkers, which are available free of charge to all interested.

A new initiative engaging a couple of local individuals to go out in the region and visit businesses and local information points has resulted in a large increase in prominence. This activity is ongoing.

All who attended in-person meetings were actively encouraged to take and display the Scotland Starts Here collateral.





**Date of next meeting:**

The next Locally Led Destination Development meeting for the Solway Firth area is: online on 26<sup>th</sup> November at 10am to 11.30am.