

Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting
 Annan & Eskdale, 17th August 2023, 18:00 – 20:00
 Summary of meeting

Attendees:

- Daan van Belzen, Bike Seven
- Graeme MacGregor, Annan History Town
- Scott Wells, Caladonia Gateway
- Fiona Stoddart, Solway Connections
- Sharon Tolson, The Langholm Alliance
- Neen Kelly, Bluebell Scotland
- Gordon Smith, VisitScotland
- Stuart Thompson, Annan Riding of Marches
- Stephen Montgomery, Our Place and Scottish Hospitality Group
- Graham Smith, RGKMS Ltd Trading As The Mill
- David Hope-Jones, SSDA
- Gowan Miller, SSDA

Lead SSDA business contact in Annan & Eskdale:

Gowan Miller, gowan@ssdalliance.com, 07815 316 365

Purpose of meeting:

This meeting, hosted by the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA), was one of 14 in-person and 13 digital meetings taking place across the South of Scotland. Full details can be found at: www.ssdalliance.com/destination-development/

The meetings have been arranged to allow local tourism organisations to be able to:

- Feed into the development of the South of Scotland **Responsible Tourism Strategy** which will underpin the work of all related agencies, including SOSE, Visit Scotland, D&G Council, Scottish Borders Council and SSDA.
- Feed into a local and regional plan for **extending the visitor season**.
- Decide **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.
- Agree how to **raise awareness locally** of the ‘Scotland Starts Here’ brand and assets, so it supports local businesses.
- Agree **actionable points** which the SSDA can advance in the next six months to **meaningfully support local businesses**.
- Share and build **new local collaborations** between local businesses.



This is part of the SSDA's commitment to being as locally-led as possible, as it looks to both market the South of Scotland and support, represent and connect-up businesses engaged in the visitor economy.

Input to Responsible Tourism Strategy:

Intro:

The first hour of the meeting was spent supporting those attending to feed into the development of the South of Scotland's new Responsible Tourism Strategy. You can learn more about the Strategy and the different ways you can take part in the consultations [here](#).

The meeting used Mentimeter as a digital tool to ensure that everyone present had the same ability to share their own views and vote on the points that mean most to them. This allowed the SSDA to be as inclusive, transparent and accountable as possible.

Local input:

You can view the full results of the meeting's input to the development of the South of Scotland's Responsible Tourism Strategy by [CLICKING HERE](#) (click right and left arrows to navigate the different questions, and scroll up and down to see all the responses to each question).

This is how those attending the Annan & Eskdale meeting felt that we should be promoting the South of Scotland:



Other input to strategy that came out through the discussions:

- What is the USP, that's what brings profitability- no point in bringing visitors if we don't have those.
- How do busy organisations and businesses get a handle on social media, haven't got time- How do we do it well
- Tourism training, make it a career option there are no courses for chefs etc.- Take pride in it as an occupation.
- Very difficult to get any media space locally or nationally
- Workforce development, pride in tourism
- Travel trade- how to engage- FAM trips, how to engage US market i.e busy time of year
- How do we better capitalise on the Common Riding, not just on the day?

- How do we tell the story of emigration, Lowland clearances + Harbours etc.
- Easttriggss + Gretna munitions factories, how do we market these to the world

Annan & Eskdale Specific

- Hospitality needs to get itself in order AND get governmental buy-in for Hospitality so it is discussed in schools.
- We don't recognise what we have, we are comparable with Highlands , Lake District We are the forgotten corner.
- Shout about the brilliant opportunities in hospitality. We still struggle for numbers in the region of availability
- Don't get any funding for the Common Riding, all volunteers they see the value
- Learn from Northumberland.- we have the best of both worlds' we can learn from them.
- Great Data for CSCI- Costs lots of money but we know where coming visitors are from, going to and where they are spending.
- We use data capture on our wifi to specifically target users for offers. We need to get better at data collaboration.

Next steps/actions:

Every single word shared by attendees through this system has been past to an independent company which is collating all findings and will make recommendations on what should be in the strategy based on what was said through all the consultations. We will make public all the Menti data from all the meetings, so you can see what the 13 other in-person meetings said across the region, as well as what came up in the 13 digital meetings and the one-to-one meetings.

In the autumn, we will share the draft strategy, alongside all the results from the consultations, so those who took part can directly see how their views fed into the draft. We will invite input to the draft as it continues to develop in the autumn and will only proceed if we feel we have broad-based support from not just the public agencies involved but also the businesses, key organisations and communities. If there is consensus, we plan to launch the strategy at the start of 2024.

In the spring, when we next meet the local businesses in the Annan & Eskdale area, we will formally present the final Responsible Tourism Strategy, highlighting which key points from their local input went into the strategy and discuss opportunities as to how local businesses and communities can be involved in its delivery.

How to Market and Represent the Annan & Eskdale area:

Intro:

The SSDA is active in marketing all of the South of Scotland and uses the economies of scale of a 'pan-south' approach to ensure we are able to have the punch-through the region needs to be heard. This involves, for example:

- bringing in journalists, influencers and other media to secure national and international coverage for the region, at least every month;
- working with the Travel Trade to represent the South of Scotland at all relevant international travel expos;
- running the consumer-facing 'Scotland Starts Here' [website](#), [app](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and other social media channels;
- running the 'South-West Coast 300' route, including its [webpages](#), social media and developing and distributing printed maps (as requested by local businesses);

- securing significant global accolades for the region, including having the South of Scotland named [Lonely Planet's 'Best in Travel 2023'](#) and a [prestigious UCI Bike Destination](#).

However, we recognise that in addition to this 'pan-south' work, we also want to remain true to the *local*. We want to tell an authentic local story of place within the 'Scotland Starts Here' website, so we are creating landing webpages for 14 different parts of the destination and giving a high degree of local autonomy as to how each of these areas are represented. This approach has come from specific requests for a greater degree of local identity within the 'Scotland Starts Here' brand.

Local input:

In the meeting, we asked how businesses and the community wanted Annan & Eskdale represented. The following points came up in the discussion:

- **History of runaway marriages**
- **World famous blacksmiths shop**
- **Space (best captured with drone)**
- **Border Reivers**
- **Devil's porridge**
- **History of the area: Burns, Telford**
- **Outdoor activities: mountain biking, walking**
- **Riding of the Marches: combination of old archive and contemporary footage**
- **Tibetan monastery**
- **Seafood and scampi**
- **Ship building**

Stuart Thompson volunteered to look over what we develop on this before the next meeting.

Next steps/actions:

Within the next few weeks, the SSDA will commission a 60-90 second marketing video for the Annan & Eskdale area, based around the above local input we received. This video will be produced within the next year (depending on the season local businesses want represented) by a professional videographer.

By the time we next meet in February, we will have the Annan & Eskdale webpage live on the 'Scotland Starts Here' website and local businesses can review this and feed into the content and layout, to ensure it accurately reflects how they feel the local area should be represented.

Extending the Season:

Intro:

The SSDA has been asked by businesses and communities across the South of Scotland to help extend the visitor season. Too many tell us that they have a thriving business for eight weeks a year, a slow business in the shoulder seasons, and then have to close in the winter. We currently have one of the shortest visitor seasons anywhere in Scotland and this has various knock-on effects, including making it harder to recruit and retain staff if we cannot offer year-round employment.

This is a complex and multi-faceted challenge. It is an incredibly hard nut to crack but we passionately believe that, by working collaboratively together, and by strategically focusing a proportionate amount

of destination marketing spend on the promoting the region out of season, we can begin to make progress.

But there is little value in unthinkingly promoting the region out of season, only for visitors to find that businesses aren't open and product aren't there. This is why we are having these in-person meetings across the region: to ask organisations what is open when, what appetite there is to change this, what products could bring in more visitors at quieter times, and how we could better facilitate collaboration to ensure businesses that choose to stay open longer do so without making a loss.

In support of this, the SSDA is committing £60k this year to a seasonality campaign and we will ensure that its design and implementation is informed by what local businesses have told us.

Local Input:

This is the input we had from the Annan & Eskdale meeting, with regards how we could market the region in the off-season and work together to help extend the season:

- **More information about what is open in the winter and winter events/festivals**
- **Christmas fairs, lights and markets**
- **More collaboration: stay at the mill and do your Christmas shopping at Calendon Park**
- **Winter walking from Langholm- 14 way marked trails, free parking**
- **Cycling: UCI Championships and Kirkpatrick Coast to Coast – could we do more to push in the shoulder season?**
- **Langholm bunk house accommodation**
- **Curling, skating – world championships**
- **Royal Scottish Pipe Band Assoc winter competition**
- **Big Burns Supper**
- **Cross border 10K**
- **Events – need support from the council**
- **Spring music events**

Next steps/actions:

Informed by the above local information, input and priorities, the SSDA will move quickly to agree a marketing strategy for a Seasonality Campaign which we will run between now and the Spring. We will have a digital meeting on the 19th September (10am) to share information and plans for the campaign, seek further input, and explain how businesses can get involved. It will be a collaborative campaign which we invite any and all to get involved with. We will then have monthly digital meetings to continue to keep businesses engaged, informed and feeding back.

In the spring, when we next meet the local businesses in the Annan & Eskdale area we will present on how the campaign was run, what evidence of impact there was, and we will start planning for the 2024/25 off-season.

'Scotland Starts Here' Branding

Intro:

Over the last three years the SSDA has created a strong, award-winning consumer-facing brand, 'Scotland Starts Here', with a website, app and social media presence. The social media channels raise awareness and sell the region; the website helps people plan visits; and the app is a brilliant tool to help guide and inform visitors when they are in the region.

These assets can only help power the visitor economy if people know about them, especially when they arrive in the region. 'Scotland Starts Here' needs to be a collective and collaborative endeavour: it needs to be owned by all businesses and every community in the region.

If we all shout "Scotland Starts Here" loud enough and if everyone knows to steer visitors with questions to the website and app, we can really use these tools to support businesses and improve the visitor experience.

Having agreed how we want Annan & Eskdale area represented on 'Scotland Starts Here', the meeting discussed how best to raise aware of the 'Scotland Starts Here' brand and assets locally in the area, to ensure it's really working for local businesses.

Next steps/actions:

Everyone attending was encouraged to take the free collateral available (A4 posters, A3 posters and freestanding 'table talkers') which had QR codes directing visitors to the 'Scotland Starts Here' website, as well as branded lapel badges. The SSDA can offer as much of such collateral as is useful to build awareness and engagement locally – this is probably best done by having a local hub where we can store items, for local collection. Everyone was asked to put these posters up wherever they think is most visible for visitors.

Over the coming six months, the SSDA is keen to work with the businesses and communities to get the 'Scotland Starts Here' brand visible in Annan & Eskdale, and across the South of Scotland, as well as giving increased ownership locally of the information about Annan & Eskdale which appears on the website and app. The SSDA is keen to also have permanent, physical signs, including on roads and railways, to ensure our shared 'Scotland Starts Here' brand and assets, really are supporting the visitor economy.

Local Priorities / Actions to take forwards:

Intro:

The SSDA is keen to be honest about the amount of capacity it has: a total of five staff members, with a huge area to cover and over a dozen different areas of responsibility relating to tourism. While much of our work is focused on 'pan-south' benefits, we are keen to also dedicate some capacity to responding to local priorities in the 14 different areas within the South of Scotland. We therefore 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.

Local Input:

The following local priorities were identified through discussion:

- 1) Build a collaboration with Caledonia Park retail centre, to give visitor information and get the Scotland Starts Here visible as soon as people come off the M74.
- 2) Support better data collaboration and use.
- 3) Engage D&G Council (Ian Barr) to encourage support for more community-level events.
- 4) What about a quarterly or 1/3 per year newspaper highlighting events & funded by advertising or business.

Next steps/actions:

With just a small fraction of one staff member able to respond to each of the 14 areas' priorities, we need to manage expectations as to what is possible but we absolutely hope to be able to report tangible progress against the locally identified priorities in the next meeting at Annan & Eskdale, which will take place in February 2024.