

Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting  
Dumfries, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2023, 11:30 - 14:30  
Summary of meeting

Attendees:

- Eva, Milroy, Dumfries & Galloway College
- Hester Binge.
- Angus, Fordyce, Cavens Hotel
- Ian, Main, Lindean Guest House
- Liz, Peacock, Trail Skills
- Ronnie, MacNeillie, Southernness Golf Club
- Alistair, Alcock.
- Kevin, Stewart, The Stove Network
- Jake, McLaughlan, Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere
- Rachel Cowper, The Crichton Trust - Easterbrook Hall
- Ian Tunaley, VisitScotland
- Suzanne, Mitchell, Cairndale Hotel
- Matthew, Wallace, The Cairndale Hotel & Leisure Club
- Matthew, Wallace, The Cairndale Hotel & Leisure Club
- Elaine, Carruthers, The Cairndale Hotel & Leisure Club
- David, Wood, None
- Anne, Lindsay, Loreburn Community Council
- John, Hill, Mostly Ghostly Tours
- John, Stewart, Shambellie House Trust
- David Hope-Jones, SSDA
- Gowan Miller, SSDA

Lead SSDA business contact in Dumfries: Gowan Miller, gowan@ssdalliance, 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/](http://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**.





In addition to Menti the following comments were recorded in this section of the meeting:

- **The area gets people escaping the Lake District – lots of German visitors**
- **Why are we being put through the STL legislation? Will not make it back in 10 years, it is prohibitive and making lots of people give up. It's an exhausting and dispiriting process.**
- **Many locals don't know what events are going on – how would visitors?**
- **Need to engage communities in tourism, especially in the current economic climate.**
- **How do community events promote and market – minimal money and FB s not everything!**

#### Dumfries specific

- **D&G is an area of high deprivation and some areas lack of hope – how do we keep young people in the area – Tourism can support apprenticeships and training.**
- **What bed stock is available in Dumfries, how many spaces? STL is having an effect and we have just lost one hotel (Mercure, government housing for refugees)**
- **How do we learn from H&I where did they start from.**
- **NC500 take the good learning points from it, how we disperse visitors.**
- **How do we emulate H&I who had a diminishing young population? If we become popular housing can be difficult for young people.**
- **Told we need to be green how do we do it? Practically what are the steps? What can we do now smaller steps make it more manageable.**

#### Next steps/actions:

Every single word shared by attendees through this Menti and the additional notes 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 at Dumfries 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 Dumfries 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 Dumfries meeting, we asked how businesses and the community wanted the area represented. The following points came up in the discussion:

- Diversity of the coastline (sand/stone)
- Monuments and hills
- Nature: Nith, bore, birdwatching
- History and heritage: oldest stone bridge in Scotland; castle; was busiest port in Scotland in 1700s – need to be proud of our history and sell it better; Kirkbean (sextant developed here); John Paul Jones; George Washington's doctor
- Pilgrimage route – birthplace of Christianity in Scotland
- Architecture: Sandstone – connection to Statue of liberty
- Dark skies
- Activities for all: golf (of different standards); cycling (can tailor to different needs)
- Equestrian (but need knowledge)
- Southern Esk – 1<sup>st</sup> seaside destination
- Lots to see and do: distillery; gardens; largest stone circle in mainland Scotland
- Culture: classical music
- Literary
- The people – vibrant, friendly, farmers market, local produce
- Weather – have fun in the rain
- Have a cheeky voice – e.g. Titanic at Belfast: "It was fine when it left here"

There was the offer of photos and videos of the local area from Rachel Cowper at the Crichton.

Rachel Cowper, Wayne Whittaker (Arbigland Estates), Rachel Cooper (Easterbrook ), Matthew Wallace Jr (Cairndale), Sally Campbell (Southernness Golf Club) and Kevin Stewart (The Stove) all volunteered to look at marketing content/copy between now and the next meeting.

#### Next steps/actions:

Within the next few weeks, the SSDA will commission a 60-90 second marketing video for the Dumfries 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 Dumfries, we will have the 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:

**These are some of the key points that came up in the Dumfries discussion on how to extend the season: promoting the local area off season and supporting businesses:**

- Need to know what the local package is – who is open when
- Ice bowl – ice hockey – good winter attraction
- Golf – open 12 months of the year
- Tagline – e.g. “Perthshire: rain does not stop play”
- Water good for canoes!
- Challenge: lack of nightlife; town centre can be a big turn off – lack of pride and attention – needs community buy-in
- Champion Scotland's land access – can mountain-bike year round “we are open”

### 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 at Dumfries 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 Dumfries represented on 'Scotland Starts Here', the meeting discussed how best to raise awareness of the 'Scotland Starts Here' brand and assets locally in the area, to ensure it's really working for local businesses.

### Local Input:

The Dumfries meeting felt that the 'Scotland Starts Here' brand could be locally promoted by:

- Need more signs telling visitors what is the area.
- FAM Visits
- Clear call to action needed on the collateral
- Get Asda/ Tesco/ Sainsbury's etc advertising SHH in store also on town entry/ exit points
- Web graphic versions of the posters for T.V's and displays
- SHH signs (and towns) on the Motorway, M6 and M1/ A1
- It's a unique region – market it in a unique way, be bold, be different.

### 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 Dumfries, and across the South of Scotland, as well as giving increased ownership locally of the information about Dumfries 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:

### 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 actions to take forwards were identified through discussion:

- 1) Ensure that all local visitor information centres and accommodation have 'Scotland Starts Here' info
- 2) Better integrate the Scotland Starts Here website and the SSDA website, to reduce confusion.
- 3) Make it easier for local events to know how to promote their event on the 'Scotland Starts Here' website and app.
  1. Explore possible collaboration with colleges, making tourism an attractive career
  2. Support collaboration around visitor economy data sharing and help businesses to access and use data well.
  3. How do we better support and promote activity providers –Liz Peacock to look at activities and feedback to DHJ
  4. Make the 'Scotland Starts Here' logo readily available for businesses to use themselves

### Offers to help:

- Liz Peacock- collaboration opportunities with accommodation and food providers
- Liz Peacock Promotion of activity providers
- Eva Milroy- involve the college, i.e. students
- Eva Milroy- training and development
- Hester-activities area would be interested
- Matthew (Cairndale)- happy to assist with any FAM trips etc.
- Jake McLaughlan- Any networking events
- Suzanne- I'd like to be involved in any collaboration and FAM TRIPS
- Rachel- Really keen to support marketing efforts.
- Kevin, The Stove Network - Working on localism and community-led activity through the creative sector that would support increasing the visitor market

### 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 Dumfries, which will take place in February 2024.