

Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting
Duns, 22nd August 12:30 – 2:30
Summary of meeting

Attendees:

- Katrina Reynolds, Allanton Inn
- Neen Kelly, Bluebell Scotland
- Anne McNeill, A Heart for Duns
- Belinda Don, Paxton House
- Sarah McLean, The Plough Inn Leitholm
- David McLean, The Plough Inn
- Frances Renton, Jim Clark Memorial Rally
- Eloner Crawford, Greener Duns
- Lynn Gray, NC Melrose
- Mark Rowley, SOSE
- David Hope-Jones, SSDA
- Gowan Miller, SSDA

Lead SSDA business contact in Duns:

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 Duns meeting felt that we should be promoting the South of Scotland:



In addition to Menti the following comments were recorded:

- Golf courses – 20 in the Borders, 8 within easy distance of the Plough (Leitholm)
- Pubs and bars are struggling with planning, the infrastructure is poor.
- The Pingo bus is unreliable, the normal buses are ½ empty most of the time, do we need more buses or better roads and signage?
- Join up the networks – bike, bus etc
- Paxton venue – no ongoing transport if people want to stay in the area
- Do we need to ‘unpack history’
- Can park campervans at The Plough (uses Britstop)
- **Develop food tours i.e Allanton – tomatoes, beef etc – a bookable product. Needs someone to put it together i.e a local tour operator**

Next steps/actions:

Every single word shared by attendees through 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 Duns, 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 Duns 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 Duns meeting, we asked how businesses and the community wanted Duns represented. The following points came up in the discussion:

- **Unique history and heritage**
- **It is a very rural/agricultural area**
- **Agri-tourism**
- **Space – rolling, immersive landscape**
- **Geology – James Hutton, Siccar point**
- **Food and drink offering**
- **Tranquillity**

- Encourage spread through the year
- Genealogy – especially for international visitors – find your ancestors
- Friendly, welcoming and passionate

Anne McNeil volunteered to help look over the content we develop, informed by the above.

Next steps/actions:

Within the next few weeks, the SSDA will commission a 60-90 second marketing video for the Duns 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 Duns, we will have the Duns 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 Duns meeting, discussing possible approaches/priorities in promoting the area out of season and working collaboratively to extend the season:

- Fishing and shooting in the winter – very popular with Dutch and Scandinavian visitors but are they interested in more than the shooting/fishing they came for?
- Dark skies – but most accommodation in this part of the region is in towns with less dark skies
- Dog friendly offering – Northumberland, Yorkshire and Cotswolds all do well
- Paxton house closes in October but kept its café open last winter. We could do more to promote and support this.

- Could there be an autumn/winter pass? Work with the Big Houses Group and offer greater incentives to getting around them all.
- Could there be a collaboration, with one attraction open each day of the week?
- Need to get past the mindset against offering discounts to get people in
- Collaboration with golf courses – a golf pass
- Could we run a sculpture treasure hunt, so many hidden sculptures around the landscape
- How do we highlight events to the locals as well.

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 at Duns 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 Duns 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.

Local Input:

The Duns meeting felt that the ‘Scotland Starts Here’ brand could be locally promoted by:

- A1 signage
- Get the Scotland Starts Here digital logo to local businesses so they can use on websites etc

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 Duns, and across the South of Scotland, as well as giving increased ownership locally of the information about Duns 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 local priorities were identified through discussion:

- 1) Support the local calls for a signpost at Duns and Chirnside to show where the grave is of Jim Clark.**
- 2) How to we promote local events (like the Jim Car rally) to local people as well as visitors.**
- 3) Get the Scotland Starts Here digital logo to local businesses so they can use on websites etc**
- 4) Help support PR work by local attractions and businesses such as Paxton House: amplifying their press and offering dedicate PR support so when a business has a good news story for the region, we all get behind it.**
- 5) Have a media/marketing webinar to offer businesses, information, advice and support in these areas.**
- 6) Look at the idea of some kind of treasure hunt in the area which could bring people in.**
- 7) Support call for more/better brown tourism signs.**
- 8) Support collaboration between businesses and idea of a pass to get into a number of attractions.**

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 Duns, which will take place in February 2024.