

Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting Galashiels, 9th August 2023, 11.30am – 2.30pm Summary of meeting

Attendees:

- Angela Crow, Energise Galashiels and Hike & Bike Galashiels
- Jane Bower, Scottish Borders Campaign for a National Park and Gorrenberry House
- Gordon Stewart, National Trust for Scotland
- Sandy Maxwell-Forbes, Great Tapestry of Scotland
- Callum Black, GTS
- Thania Meneses Flores, Trimontium
- Helene Sinclair, VisitScotland
- Katharine Mathison, Borders College
- Rosamund de la Hey, Main Street Trading Company
- Marianne Bailey, MB
- Stewart Wilson, Tweed Valley Blogger
- Iain Goddard, Stow Hub
- Davie Lowe, Borders College
- Shelley Breckenridge, Interface
- Neen Kelly, Bluebell Scotland
- Julien Borghino, Rose and Julien Photographers
- Ian Dalgleish, Chair Energise Galashiels
- Donald McPhillimy, Greener Melrose
- Rob Claridge, Live Borders
- James Brosnan, Live Borders
- Emily MacLeod, Scottish Borders Council
- Mike Chandler, Chairman, Borders Family History Society
- David Pike, Explore the Borders
- Mark Rowley, SOSE
- David Hope-Jones, SSDA
- Sarah MacDonald, SSDA
- Gowan Miller, SSDA

Lead SSDA business contact in Galashiels and the Leaderdale area:

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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.



- It's important we get the infrastructure right, thinking specifically to the Highlands and Islands. What do we want to learn? Both positive and negatives.
- Toilets - why not pay for this service? Should we be fixated in providing a free service?
- The SOS is different to the H&I. When clients ask to go north we should be highlight the differences
- How does the action plan link to the strategy and who will write it?
- Question raised what the exact benefits for Peebles were of the UCI at Glentress.
- Borders Touch – Ambassadors – the old SBTB ambassador programme was successful in its day. Perhaps this could be revisited?

Galashiels and Leaderdale specific:

- Suggestion for local support: in Galashiels fill all empty shops with crafters.
- Business rates are too high and discourages businesses coming into town.
- Question around suitable investment for Galashiels
- Galashiels seen as a go through town, the trails are not known about even by the locals
- Galashiels is a Student town – promotion should be linked to College and promote the significant design innovation - include in promotion, unique to Galashiels
- Consider the opportunities around the Jean Muir accommodation (Heriot Watt) offering in the Summer. See if there is more that can be done.
- To recognise textile manufacturing generally and the links to international designers.

Next steps/actions:

Every single word shared by attendees through Menti and the additional notes has been passed 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 Galashiels and Leaderdale 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 Galashiels and Leaderdale 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 Coast300' 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 Galashiels meeting, we asked how businesses and the community wanted the area to be represented. The following points came up in the discussion:

- **Romans, Archaeology and Trimontium**
- **Ancestral Tourism**
- **Take further advantage of the Railway**
- **To consider themes versus geography**
- **Is Lauder in Berwickshire?**
- **Consider the rivers as boundaries, look at the route from Gala Hill, river, Ladhope to Stow**
- **Soor plums, Coulter's Candy, Street Art**
- **Mac Arts**
- **Gala Hill**
- **Wild swimming**
- **Southern Upland Way**
- **Old Gala House**
- **Mellerstain**
- **Require drone footage of the area**

We also asked if any local businesses/community leaders wanted to volunteer to help develop the specific content for the Galashiels and Leaderdale area: Julien Borghino (Rose and Julien), Rosamund de la Hey (Mainstreet Trading Co), Thania Meneses Flores (Trimontium) and Angela Crow (Energise Galashiels and Hike & Bike Galashiels) volunteered.

Next steps/actions:

Within the next few weeks, the SSDA will commission a 60-90 second marketing video for the Galashiels and Leaderdale 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 the Galashiels and Leaderdale area, 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:

This is the input we had from the Galashiels and Leaderdale area meeting, with regards how we should market the region in the off-season and strengthen the local tourism offering out of the summer season:

- Consider that Christmas and New Year are the busiest in year.
- Consider the outdoor activities and what is available to do on rainy days
- October a good month for the Scottish Borders with the half term holidays (local, Edinburgh and English) all happening at different times.
- Develop and support events that extend the season.
- Can it be regarded as a bonus that the area is not "too" snowy and cheaper – more appealing?
- Look at the dog friendly promotion out of season.
- Accessibility – SOS the closest Scottish location to the rest of UK. Take advantage.
- Look at the knock on trade around fishing, field sports, racing and hunting.
- Mental health: promote our landscapes, rural living and friendly communities.
- Whisky, fires, food, textiles/wool, books
- Provide a seasonal calendar – month by month highlights/programme
- Social media campaign that details what to look out for "this month spot the ospreys"
- Expanding the business and visitor information for those already visiting in area
- Promotional ideas from elsewhere:
 - Ensuring a food offering to visitors in evening. Businesses splitting the trading day, ensuring clear communication about who open and when.
 - Consider the SB Big Houses collaboration
 - Christmas markets – what opportunities for SOS?

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 Galashiels and Leaderdale 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 the Galashiels and Leaderdale area 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 Galashiels' meeting felt that the 'Scotland Starts Here' brand could be locally promoted by:

- **Providing QR codes in local press with direct links to App**
- **Tagging local people in social media posts.**
- **Advertise in petrol stations, window stickers and air fresheners.**
- **Scotland Starts Here road signs on the A1, A7 and A68**
- **Supporting and attending local events (sporting)**
- **Look at promotion on railway and other transport links.**
- **Produce an educational piece which highlights why locals should be aware of what is going on, and why the visitor is important (Visitor Economy). Engage communities.**
- **Look at creating ambassadors and information points in different towns.**

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. 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 the Galashiels and Leaderdale area, and across the South of Scotland, as well as giving increased ownership locally of the information about the Galashiels and Leaderdale area 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:

- Produce specific itineraries, what can you do in the area – what to do when arrive
- Itineraries for each interest/theme (historic, walking etc)
- Look at promoting South of the Border
- Look at the visitor's day – it's not just a visit to a castle, it's the lunch before, the drink, accommodation and shopping near by
- Lack of "better quality" eating
- Questions around the service provided – can training be signposted?
- Provide FAM trips amongst business – learning journeys
- Look at the potential of the local community halls.
- Develop Scottish Border unique experiences including music and storytelling.

The agreed three priorities were:

1. Dog friendly: tap into the national assets already set up for Dog Friendly holidays, specific campaigns with SSDA. Make it easier for business to tap into market. Use Galashiels as a test.
2. Common Riding opportunities – start a dialogue with Galashiels about the opportunities and highlighting the benefits. Mapping out details of route, making the event less secret to the visitor to enable engagement.
3. Bring an influencer to Galashiels.

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 the Galashiels and Leaderdale area, which will take place in February 2024.