

**Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting
TWEED VALLEY: Peebles, Tontine Hotel, 5th September 2023, 6-8pm
Summary of meeting**

Attendees:

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Surname</u>	<u>Company</u>
Lynda	Gilroy	Barony Castle and Tontine Hotel
Andy	Weir	Ridelines
Marianne	Bailey	
Colin	Smith	The Glamis Consultancy
Emily	Macleod	Scottish Borders Council
Fiona	Mackinnon	Bright Light Marketing
Mark	Davey	Peeblesshire News
Thomas	Gifford	Dawyck Botanic Gardens
Ellie	Jones	Netherurd
Colin	Mitchell	Netherurd
Gordon	Smith	VisitScotland
Kerrie	Guiney	Peebles Retail Association
Ian	McFadyen	House of Gaia
Rich	Rowe	Go Tweed Valley
Donald	Greig	SUP/Rhins of Galloway
David	Hope-Jones	SSDA
Sarah	MacDonald	SSDA

Lead SSDA business contact in Tweed Valley area:

Sarah Macdonald, sarah@ssdalliance.com, 07770 781464

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.



Other discussion points around the strategy (but not captured on Menti), included:

- Challenge: how can we make all businesses (including retailers) feel that they are part of the industry. “We want to work with you.”
- People moving to location come because of what we offer. We need to take advantage of it and understand why.
- Need to communicate to businesses using methods that work for the communities and locals i.e. putting notices up in the local newsagent.
- Need to consider the question: “what words stop people coming to SOS”
- Is the possibility of increasing the road network really open to us, can we really develop our transport network. If so, we must do it.
- Accessibility and connectivity required: it takes nine hours to get to Dumfries on bus. No trains or trams and the last bus from Edinburgh is too early. Visitors need to come here by car/coach. Our infrastructure isn’t set for what we have at the moment before another 300 more houses built (no traffic warden, not enough car parking, police, poor road network). Need to get this right before we start looking after visitors.
- However the area is accessible with regards the “right to roam”.
- Forest holidays- the Glentress master plan, is an opportunity that can be exploited.
- Avoid holding events in August. UCI would have been beneficial to area if had been held in the shoulder months.

Next steps/actions:

Every single word shared by attendees through this system 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 Tweed Valley, 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 tweed Valley 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 Peebles meeting, we asked how businesses and the community wanted the Tweed Valley area represented. The following points came up in the discussion:

- Independent High Street (Innerleithen and Peebles)
- Only 40 mins outside Edinburgh (should stay here and only visit Edinburgh on day trips)
- Ospreys and wildlife
- Culture (Eastgate, Film Festival)
- Mountain Biking
- Motorcycling
- Beltane Festival and Peebles Highland Games
- World Class Spa
- Traquair, Oldest Inhabited House
- Neidpath
- Polish Map
- Royal Botanic Gardens
- River Tweed
- Fishing, golf, wild swimming and trail running. Kayaking and many other activities
- Slow travel and tranquility
- Weddings
- Tweed Valley Forest Park
- Everything on door step that you would want to do in a day
- On a lay line
- John Buchan
- Trail running
- St Ronan's Wells
- The people, the community. World class talent: artists, writers, photographers, sport stars

We also asked if any local businesses/community leaders wanted to volunteer to help develop the specific content for the Tweed Valley area: Donald Greig, Lynda Gilroy (Barony Castle and Tontine Hotel) and Kerrie Guiney (Peebles Retail Association) volunteered.

Next steps/actions:

Within the next few weeks, the SSDA will commission a 60-90 second marketing video for the Tweed Valley area, based around the above local input we received and working closely with Go Tweed Valley. 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 Peebles, we will have the Tweed Valley 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 Peebles meeting, with regards ideas for how the season could be extended locally:

- **Night Mountain biking**
- **Live music (in the Tontine)**
- **Food offering – restaurants open all year.**
- **Award Winning Real Ale Pub in the High Street**
- **Emulate the Pitlochry 'Enchanted Forest'**
- **Tontine package – 'explore the Borders'**
- **The Wild Winter & the Film Festival at the Eastgate**
- **Promote the new late night shopping events**
- **Actually, seasonality is less of an issue in this area than others, partly because of the independent shops open 7 days a week.**

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 Peebles 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 Tweed Valley 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 Tweed Valley, and across the South of Scotland, as well as giving increased ownership locally of the information about Tweed valley 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:

- Helping promote and amplify what is already happening in the area, especially the late night shopping.
- Get more information about the area into the Visit Scotland iCentre tourist information hub on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, so their staff know to recommend Peebles as just 40 mins away.
- Work with Go Tweed Valley and Scottish Borders Council to maximise the positive legacy of the recent UCI world cycling championships by exploring whether the temporary campsite could be made permanent.
- Raise the issue of Short Term Let Fees with Scottish Borders Council.
- Support local independent retailers association advocacy with the Scottish Borders council around ensuring there is fair parking in the town – there needs to be a clear strategy (recent survey suggested that 64% of residents were for no change in parking fee structure).

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 Peebles, which will take place in February 2024.