

Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting
Sanquhar, A' The Airts Community Centre, 30th August, 18:00 – 20:00
Summary of meeting

Attendees:

- Judith Hewitt, D&G Council
- Nicola Hill, D&G Council
- Sharon Glendinning, Crawick Multiverse
- Yvonne Barber, A' the Airts
- Jake McLaughlan, GSAB
- Joan McAlpine, Ellisland Farm
- Ian Tunaley, VisitScotland
- Caroline Bell, Clear as a Bell Marketing
- Tom Henry, Southern Upland Way Ranger Service
- Jon Evans, Wanlockhead Museum Trust

Lead SSDA business contact in Sanquhar:

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.

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

- Southern Upland Way
- Oldest Post Office
- Wild landscape
- Walking
- Elisland
- Scots Language widely spoken (living culture of Burns)
- Tangible culture: knitting, Burns, ridings etc – living traditions

- Mennock Pass
- Museum for Lead Mining

- Crawick Multiverse
- Toll Booth
- Blend the history and heritage with the people
- Narrative of how different things are connected up – might not be immediately obvious but show the connections
- [Look at the brochure Yvonne has put together highlighting the local area]

Other points that came up in this discussion:

- Local boundaries mean that a lot of local people see themselves as very separate to the neighbouring community – this is something we need to move beyond.
- Need to be active in using social media – e.g. TikTok influencer recently brought in more visitors to Crawick Multiverse in 3 weeks than all the previous season.
- Need collaboration between businesses but people lack time.

We also asked if any local businesses/community leaders wanted to volunteer to help develop the specific content for the Sanquhar area: Jon Evans and Yvonne Barber volunteered.

Next steps/actions:

Within the next few weeks, the SSDA will commission a 60-90 second marketing video for the Sanquhar 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 Sanquhar, we will have the Sanquhar 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 Sanquhar meeting, with regards how we should market the local area in the off-season and also what ideas and new collaborations could support businesses locally off-season:

- Frame the area differently in winter – show the tobogganing on the hills
- Local businesses could explore a winter festival which the SSDA could then promote. This could be built around Burns and Burns Suppers (most local Burns Suppers are just for existing group, not visitors)
- Use Valentines Day to leverage the Burns story as well.
- There are significant challenges though- The Lead Mining Museum is the only real employer in Wanlockhead – with c£100k on salaries. However there isn't enough custom off season to be able to afford to keep staff on.
- The Crawick Multiverse has year-round staff and their café stays 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 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 Sanquhar 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.

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:

- Help provide information and support about how businesses could work more collaboratively and potentially have joint ticketing. There is specific legislation that makes it much harder to have joint ticketing but this is something the SSDA can provide useful, appropriate and supportive information on locally.
- Work with and help support the local tourism partnership now that it is back up and running.
- Bring together information about the quirky, unusual local offerings – churches etc

- Feedback to SOSE the challenge for small businesses of only having capital grants available (as opposed to revenue)
- SSDA representation on the ground – visiting Elisland and Crawick. Knowing and understanding the product in the area.
- Offering further support and guidance on work with the Travel Trade – how do we collaborate/link up.
- Help represent the impact that withdrawn SG funding for winter festivals has had, for example on the Big Burns Supper

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 Sanquhar, which will take place in the springs: