

Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting  
 SELKIRKSHIRE, AREA: Woll Golf Course, Selkirk, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2023, 6-8pm  
 Summary of meeting

Attendees:

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Surname</u>	<u>Company</u>
Lee-Anne	Gillie	Unique Cottages
Stewart	Wilson	Tweed Valley Blogger
Teyl	de Bordes	Whitmuir Wildlife
Sonny	Fascia	Heatherlie House Hotel
Caroline	Cochrane	SBC Councillor
Andy	Murray	Community Council Chair - Selkirk
Virginia	Grant	Riddell Estate & House
Vicki	Steel	Aikwood Tower
Barbara	Harrison	E&Y Tourism Association
Susan	Briggs	The General Store
Helene	Sinclair	VisitScotland
Sarah	Gorrill	The Barn @ Doormouse Cottage (and cycling)
adrian	leopard	Philipburn House Hotel
graham	hobson	Philipburn House Hotel
Marion	Livingston	SB National Park Campaign
David	Hope-Jones	SSDA
Sarah	MacDonald	SSDA

Lead SSDA business contact in AREA:

Sarah Macdonald, [sarah@ssdalliance.com](mailto: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/](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.





- Wish for a genuinely joined up approach to creating delivery a sustainable world class visitor experience.
- Require more visitors staying spending money but doing it in sustainable way and learning from the areas like Skye that are over saturated.
- Discussion around the word “Slow”: to emphasis vibrancy but unwinding; slow but not static
- Ten years is a long way off: the world will look like a different place. Rather than looking at question through the prism of next few years, we should be thinking “let’s think about the huge opportunities in ten years”.
- We require a mapping exercise. Look at what will shape the environment in next ten years and then address using the insight.
- Communicating the benefits of tourism to the local community, the benefits of having more tourism in the area.
- NC500 – created with no infrastructure. SOS not follow suit.
- C2C has been created with no infrastructure as yet, needs to be addressed.
- Need to take better advantage of the train.
- Need to raise profile in Edinburgh. Consider collaborative ventures with joint train tickets, buses to meet the train and entry to Visitor Attractions, Border Abbeys etc
- “Sell the secret”. Develop the mystery tour South/
- Trains also to Reston, Lockerbie etc – not just Tweedbank.
- Look at the East to West connections- not just the north/south routes.
- We require a consultation on buses, create a positive strategy that will be listened to.
- Lack of proactive infrastructure-based thinking. We require a plan about the doing!
- Cycling versus walking. Walking holidays equally important and do not want to lose site of this with talk of cycling.
- Require a segmentation exercise for the area.

#### 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 February, when we next meet the local businesses at Selkirkshire, 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 Selkirkshire 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:

We asked how businesses and the community wanted Selkirkshire represented. The following points came up in the discussion:

- Etrick Forest
- Sports: rugby, fishing, golf
- Independent shops
- Nature and wildlife: red squirrels, golden eagles, buzzards, pine martin, kingfishers, otters
- Wetlands (more than anywhere else?)
- Rivers
- St Mary's Loch
- Haining and Bowhill
- William Wallace – underused
- A family destination
- Selkirk's Market Place
- Cycling – quiet roads
- Honey Cottage
- Dark skies
- Literary history: James Hogg
- Cultural heritage: Summer of festivals – Hawick, Galashiels, Selkirk – each is different
- About the people and the community – friendliness, welcoming, personal recommendations
- Make it easy to visit- Have a range of activities available in an easy to access way: where to stay, what to eat, how to get there, etc
- Show the accommodation that is available
- *Put ourselves in the shoes of the visitor*

#### Next steps/actions:

Within the next few weeks, the SSDA will commission a 60-90 second marketing video for the Selkirkshire 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 Selkirk, we will have the Selkirkshire area 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 were some of the key points in the Selkirk discussion about how we could strengthen the local tourism offer out of the summer season:

- Philipburn is looking at developing residential Christmas packages.
- Good if there was more for families over the Christmas period – a Santa trail?
- Selkirk market square could have an excellent Christmas market
- First Saturday in December there are festivities as the lights are turned on, could this be made weekly?
- Raise the profile of local music again: Selkirk Sessions, traditional music, different music on different nights –
- \*The new owners of the Philipburn hotel are keen to develop new ideas and have a function room licensed to 400. They have a murder mystery night in October and an October-Fest, with two weeks of German beers
- \*The Ale Valley have a number of winter walking and would like more themed walks celebrating the history and heritage but need a walk leader to take these. Stewart Wilson (Tweed Valley Blogger) could do this.
- \*The new owners of the Philipburn hotel have bought two electric minibuses, these could be used to better connect Selkirk and the Yarrow and Etrick Valleys, to benefit all the businesses.
- There are lots of people locally with significant arts and crafts talents, who could run courses through the winter. Could help these people with the craft skills to turn this into a 'product' by running courses.
- Have a regular mid-week event. Lots of events happen at the weekend but if change-over day is Saturday, it's hard for visitors to attend.
- Selkirk Community Council has a 'Welcome to Selkirk' newsletter
- Would be good if Bowhill play facilities opened up

- Could have a tourism course at Selkirk High School to try and encourage young people to stay
- Could have a gin tasting and music night in Selkirk

*[There were three new exciting potential collaborations from this discussion, marked above with an asterisk]*

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 Selkirk 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 Selkirkshire area 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 Selkirkshire, and across the South of Scotland, as well as giving increased ownership locally of the information about Selkirkshire 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 and the SSDA was asked to help move these forwards between now and the next meeting in February:

- 1) Share the [South of Scotland Cycling Strategy](#) with Andy Murray following his questions about this and invite his input to the South of Scotland Cycling Partners Leadership Group which David Hope-Jones sits on (next meeting 31/08/23).
- 2) Work with Visit Scotland to get more information about the South of Scotland in the Visit Scotland Tourist Information centre on the Royal Mile, so more visitors are encouraged to come south.
- 3) Support further sharing and collaboration between Selkirk businesses and those in the Ettrick and Yarrow valleys – potentially a WhatsApp group to make it as easy as possible to share information between businesses.
- 4) Share high quality local images and videos which local businesses can use, so everyone is showing this area in the best possible light.
- 5) Give the Scotland Starts Here logo and other digital elements for local businesses to themselves use in their own marketing and communications.
- 6) Help distribute and build audience for the new James Hogg Ettrick Valley leaflet.
- 7) Support possible new transport collaborations between Philipburn and the two valleys, using the two new electric minibuses.
- 8) Help share Stewart Wilson's (Tweed Valley Blogger) blogs and videos.

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