



Responsible Tourism Strategy Quarterly Actions and Progress Report #1 20th March – 20th June 2024

Introduction:

Following a year-long consultation, the all-agency South of Scotland's [Responsible Tourism Strategy](#) was launched on the 20th March 2024 at the SSDA's Annual Conference. Of the c200 businesses attending the launch: 97% said they supported the strategy (84% 'strongly' support). In other feedback at the end of the consultation process, 95% of business respondents said they saw themselves involved in the delivery of the strategy and 97% said they saw themselves benefiting from the strategy.

It is the collective responsibility of the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA), VisitScotland (VS), South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), Scottish Borders Council (SBC) and Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC) to deliver on this strategy, increasing our visitor economy by £1bn and supporting a further 6,000 jobs. However, to succeed, this strategy must be owned and delivered by every visitor economy business and community in the South of Scotland. It is our *collective* ambition. We therefore invite every businesses to get involved in the delivery: [joining the SSDA as members](#), being listed on the 'Scotland Starts Here' [website](#) and [app](#) (our consumer-facing brand), and actively being involved.

At the same time as the Strategy was launched, the first three-year [Action Plan](#) was published, with 122 actions across the four strands of the strategy; each with one or more lead agency responsible for delivery and a clear description of where we want to be by 2027.

We have committed to publishing brief quarterly progress reports for the next ten years, as well as more detailed annual reports and externally produced triennial reports, to ensure we continue to be transparent and accountable for delivering on the unprecedented ambition we have set for the South of Scotland's visitor economy.

This is the first quarterly report, covering 20th March to 20th June 2024. It gives a flavour of some of what we have done in the last three months to advance the strategy but is not exhaustive. We aim to keep these quarterly reports as brief as possible, to maximise the readership.

[CLICK HERE](#) for further live info on the work of the SSDA and monthly five-minute briefing videos on what is being done right now to support tourism in our destination.

Delivery systems and progress tracking:

The five agencies (SSDA, VS, SOSE, DGC & SBC) have established systems to push forwards delivery of the Action Plan in a coordinated and coherent way. The responsible officers meet every week for 90 minutes: the first 30 mins are for key updates and sharing, and the remaining 60 mins go through the 122 actions in the Action Plan, line-by-line, with each meeting picking up where the last one ended. For each action, next steps and responsibilities are agreed. In the 3-months since the launch we have had seven such meetings and have progressed 61 of the 122 actions. We hope that by quarterly update 2 or 3, we will have a live system published so everyone can see live progress and what is being done in each of the 122 areas at any time.

Areas of delivery in this quarter included:

STRAND 1: Inspire Visitors to come to the South of Scotland

Seasonality marketing campaign [Ref: Action 1.1.i]:

The SSDA has completed its 2023-24 seasonality marketing campaign. This included a promotional campaign with VisitScotland and DFDS Ferry Services targeting the German self-drive market for shoulder and off-season trips, with 8.7k clicks. The 'Endless Adventures All Year Round' campaign then ran on the Scotland Starts Here social media channels and website, with 2.3 million reach. Finally, the publishing activity saw advertorials in five outlets in key locations across Scotland's Central Belt and the north of England, generating 11k views and 200k impressions.

VisitScotland worked with Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere following the news that the Biosphere was included in the National Geographic's Cool List 2024. The campaign aimed to capitalise on this momentum. VS used a combination of paid social, on both Facebook and Instagram targeting domestic visitors from the central belt and North England. This resulted in 3.9m impressions, 20,900 link clicks, 7820 visits to landing page with a 56 second dwell time.

Media and Marketing [Ref: Action 1.1.i]:

From March to June 2024, the SSDA had 64 pieces of coverage in the media, reaching an estimated total audience of 490 million. Coverage ranged from the launch of the Regional Responsible Tourism Strategy to the unveiling of the sculpture at the start point of the Kirkpatrick Coast to Coast cycle route in Stranraer.

'Scotland Starts Here' visibility [Ref: Action 1.1.iv & 2.3.iv]:

SBC has installed road signs on their eight key entry points with the 'Scotland Starts Here' brand. We will look to roll this out to D&G and also build brand visibility *within* the region. The SSDA has established a partnership with Caledonia Retail Park in Gretna (2.4m footfall) to vinyl wrap empty units in 'Scotland Starts Here' branding. If successful, we will look at rolling this out in empty shopfronts across the region.

Tracking attitudes to holidaying in our region [Ref: Action 1.1v]:

VisitScotland has released regional results from its Scotland Visitor Survey including reports for [Dumfries & Galloway](#) and [Scottish Borders](#). The Survey explores all aspects of the visitor experience in Scotland and helps us understand why visitors take a holiday or short break in Scotland and how they rate their experiences.

Travel Trade representation [Ref: Action 1.3.iii]:

The SSDA represented the region at the VisitScotland Travel Trade expo 'Connect 2024' in Aberdeen. VisitScotland Connect also provided Abbotsford House, SCHLOSS Roxburghe, Cairndale Hotel & Spa, Annandale Distillery Group, Great Tapestry of Scotland, Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere and Gretna Green the opportunity to profile their product to buyers.

In addition, VisitScotland provided several businesses the opportunity to showcase their product offer to buyers during event fam trips that included the South of Scotland in itineraries. Businesses included: Abbotsford House, Schloss Roxburghe, Great Tapestry of Scotland, Peebles Hydro, Thirlestane Castle, Trimontium Museum and Robert Smalls Print works.

In March, VisitScotland announced a new partnership with Tourism Cares (a US non profit organisation) to profile trade ready responsible experiences. Scotland is the first European destination to feature on the map, this will extend our reach with global tour operators and travel advisors, who are looking to add meaningful travel experiences to their itineraries. At launch both Trimontium and Great Tapestry of Scotland feature.

The SSDA have also expressed a formal interest in hosting the UKInbound 2026 conference, which would bring hundreds of the largest travel trade buyers to Dumfries.

UCI Bike Region [Ref: Action 1.4.i]:

We are better leveraging our prestigious [UCI bike region](#) accolade by having this UCI branding on eight entry points into the Scottish Borders, thanks to SBC.

Scottish Dark Skies Observatory [Ref: Action 1.4.iv]:

We are very actively supporting the purchase of the Clatteringshaws Visitor Centre from FLS, to build the new Scottish Dark Skies Observatory in the

Galloway National Park. If successful, we could have this key national asset open within two years, to significantly increase the economic benefit of our dark sky status.

Stranraer East Pier proposition [Ref: Action 1.5.i]:

The SSDA has developed a game-changing proposition for the East Pier of Stranraer: to develop a leading national visitor attraction of international significance in order to significantly increase the number of high-spending international visitors. SOSE has funded a pre-feasibility study which is nearing completion and which has positively endorsed the proposal.

Levelling Up funding, Scottish Borders [Ref: Action 1.5.iv & 2.5.v]:

Scottish Borders Council moved very quickly after the announcement of the UK general election to ensure the £20m Levelling Up funding was allocated before purdah. This was successful, with [major allocations](#) to tourism. Over £11m has been allocated to support local economic development, including hotel development in Galashiels, Crook Inn Bunkhouse, purchase of business units in Eyemouth. A further £2.3m will support the bus network.

STRAND 2: Develop the Visitor Experience

Quality [Ref: Action 2.1.i]:

The SSDA is hosting a roundtable with business leaders and the partner agencies on the 27th June to deep-dive into the question of building quality in the sector. Others are welcome to join his discussion where key next actions will be agreed.

Thistle Awards [Ref: Action 2.1.ii]:

After the record-breaking 2023 (for the first time ever the South of Scotland won more national Thistle Awards than any other region - we secured as many as we had the previous 17 years combined) we are pushing forwards with the 2024 South of Scotland Thistle Awards (3rd Oct), with over 100 applications received.

Actively supporting businesses to improve the quality of their food and drink offering [Ref: Action 2.1.v]

VisitScotland, in partnership with Scotland Food & Drink, has recently launched a new [Food Tourism Industry Guide | VisitScotland.org](#) designed to help businesses tap into this lucrative market and attract visitors by providing a quality food and drink experience.

Businesses on ‘Scotland Starts Here’ [Ref: Action 2.3.iii]:

The SSDA has [introduced free membership](#) to make listings on SSH more inclusive and open to all. The network has doubled in size in recent months and is now the largest and fastest growing destination management and marketing organisation in Scotland. There is an ambitious outreach plan through which we are looking to double again, to get as many businesses listed on ‘Scotland Starts Here’ as possible.

Equestrian Trails [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:

SBC and the SSDA have led in the development of an Equestrian Trail action plan. We want to make the South of Scotland the UK capital of equestrian tourism. The SSDA is bringing together stakeholders to develop a five-year action plan by November 2024 to achieve this.

Burns Tourism [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:

The SSDA delivered a surge [six-month Burns Tourism Action Plan](#) (Nov 23-May 24) and convened an 11-June high-level meeting for 30 key businesses and partners, briefing on the impact of this surge and together agreeing a short, medium and long-term plan for how this will be sustained.

Kirkpatrick C2C [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:

The 250-mile [Kirkpatrick C2C](#) cycle route (Stranraer to Eyemouth) was formally launched in May, with DGC commissioning a statue visitors can sit on of the original ‘Velocipede’ bike, with SSDA helping secure coverage in The Times, the Scotsman, the Herald and the BBC. There are now significant

numbers undertaking the route, with 2,500 visiting the planning webpage in the first 5-days. The SSDA will collect business impact reports over the summer from the first year since the (soft) digital launch.

Events [Ref: Action 2.4.iv]: -

DGC hosted a networking event for event organisers in D&G on 7th June, with VS briefing on the new [National Events Strategy](#) and SSDA briefing on the Responsible Tourism Strategy. The SSDA is developing a new partnership system which supports the 50 largest events in the South of Scotland to promote ‘Scotland Starts Here’, encouraging attendees to stay longer, spend more and explore the wider area.

Scottish Borders Rail [Ref: Action 2.6.i]:

The SSDA, VS and SBC have worked ScotRail and Christine Grahame MSP, with Abbotsford, Trimontium, the Great Tapestry and other key attractions, to develop a ‘Kids Go Free’ rail discount promotion to increase day visits on Borders Rail. It will be launched for the school holidays and, if successful, will continue year-round to help extend the season.

Destination Tweed [Ref: Action 2.2i & ii]:

The SSDA has a ten-month Destination Tweed Business Engagement Officer post to Feb 2025. This will build the strategic foundations of business awareness and engagement, product development and future marketing for the River Tweed Trail ready for its launch. It will identify key gaps in visitor experience and service (e.g. baggage courier) and actively support business to fill these. VisitScotland has provided branding expertise to the Destination Tweed team as they develop plans for marketing and promotion to visitors.

EV Charging Network [Ref: Action 2.6.6]:

DGC have launched a Tourism EV Charger grant of up to £3000 for any tourism or hospitality business to put in an EV charger funded by the UK government Levelling Up programme.

STRAND 3: Support Businesses to Succeed:

Short Term Lets [Ref: Action 3.1.ii]:

SBC and DGC are continuing to support businesses to apply for Short Term Let licences where required, supported by the SSDA, SOSE and VS. In total 2,328 licenses have been issued and no license application has been rejected.

Regional Economic Partnership [Ref: Action 3.2.v]:

VS, the SSDA, SBC, DGC and SOSE are all actively represented on the REP, as well as Strategic Action Groups including on Transport. This allows us to represent tourism at the centre of economic planning.

STRAND 4: Act responsibly for long-term collective benefit:

Southern Upland Way [Ref: Action 4.1.iii]:

DGC is leading with work to celebrate and revamp the Southern Upland Way for its 40th anniversary, breaking the route into three achievable sections and new physical signage.

Contacts:

Key contacts for those responsible for delivering the Responsible Tourism Strategy:

- **SSDA:** David Hope-Jones, CEO [davidhj@ssdalliance.com]
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- **Scottish Borders Council:** Jane Warcup, Economic Development Officer [jwarcup@scotborders.gov.uk]
- **Dumfries & Galloway Council:** John King, Economic Development Officer Food and Drink and Tourism [john.king@dumgal.gov.uk]
- **SOSE:** Mark Rowley, Strategy Manager – Tourism [mark.rowley@sose.scot]

We hope you enjoyed this update. We are, together, committed to increasing our visitor economy by £1bn. We will achieve this by being the most active, engaged, strategic and united destination in Scotland. If you haven't already, [join the SSDA](#) and get involved!

7Stanes Master planning [Ref: Action 4.1.iii]:

We are actively feeding into the FLS consultations around the 7Stanes master planning process: supporting the development of major new multi-user path networks and amplifying local community voices around ensuring that paths remain with faster storm repair work.

VisitScotland Climate Impact Guide [Ref:Action 4.2 v]:

VisitScotland has developed a revised [Reduce Your Climate Impact Guide](#) | [VisitScotland.org](#) to support businesses in their journey to work towards Net Zero.

Accessibility [Ref: Action 4.4.iii]:

Paul J Ralph, Founder of [Partners In Access](#), addressed the SSDA Annual Conference, speaking about access for those with disabilities. This was well received by businesses and we are looking at using his services to help advise businesses on accessibility.