



Responsible Tourism Strategy Quarterly Actions and Progress Report #2 20th June – 20th September 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), Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC), and all in the South of Scotland, to deliver on this strategy: increasing our visitor economy by £1bn and supporting a further 6,000 jobs. 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.

The SSDA, VS, SOSE, DGC and SBC can serve an enabling role, establishing the pre-conditions for success, but it is businesses themselves who will ultimately deliver the economic growth we collectively seek. And so we look to support, and get behind businesses, to really deliver on our ambition.

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 second quarterly report, covering 20th June to 20th September 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. Many of the topics from our first quarterly report are, of course, also included here as we continue to push forwards these projects.

[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 6-months since the launch we have had 17 such meetings and have reviewed and moved forwards all 122 actions. We hope that by quarterly update 3 or 4, 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. In the coming period (September – December 2024) we will have a specific (but not exclusive) focus on 22 key areas of delivery– more details about this is given on the final page of this document.

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 developed a new seasonality marketing campaign for 2024-25. The campaign will include a variety of marketing activities, such as paid social media, new web content, press and PR, media publishing activity, and a collaborative international element. The campaign aims to generate 25,000 additional visits to the Scotland Starts Here website, with a reach of 3m and 17m impressions. Key to this campaign is the mobilisation of businesses in three ways: (1) feeding into the design of the campaign, (2) being involved in the delivery by sharing content, and (3) being inspired to the campaign to develop their off-season offering.

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

From June to September 2024, the SSDA had over 30 pieces of positive destination coverage in the media, reaching an estimated total audience of 1.16 billion. See sample coverage from [June](#), [July](#) and [August](#). VisitScotland supported press trip with the Mail on Sunday to Rhins of Galloway Aug 2024,

Die Welt (DE) press trip to Stranraer Oyster Festival, Sept 2024, TV Hoeren und Sehen (DE) TV +Literature Locations including Drumlanrig Castle and Abbotsford, Sept 2024, VisitBritain Scotland on Screen (US) press trip covering South of Scotland locations Sept 2024.

Locally Led Destination Development videos [Ref: Action 1.1.i & 4.3.i]:

Following the SSDA's [Locally Led Destination Development](#) work, the South of Scotland is divided into 14 different areas. The SSDA meets businesses in each area every 6-months. Through these meetings, businesses fed into how they want their local area promoted and the SSDA has created 14 dedicated [landing pages](#) on 'Scotland Starts Here' and 14 short promotional videos, one for each area, based on this input. The SSDA will now publish these videos, two a week, for seven weeks, September – October.

'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), with empty units vinyl-wrapped in 'Scotland Starts Here' branding. We will track the number of QR

code scans and, if successful, we will look at rolling this out in empty shopfronts across the region.

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

In this quarter, the SSDA has: reviewed and developed travel trade itineraries; worked with over 10 regional businesses to give advice and guidance about [working with the travel trade](#); and met with 4 travel trade operatives to promote the SoS as a destination. VisitScotland has been creating various trade development opportunities that will see South of Scotland tourism businesses participate in market specific business develop missions in autumn 2024. In addition, the annual VisitScotland Connect 2025 is now accepting bookings providing a great platform for South of Scotland profile raising across the global travel trade.

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

We are very actively supporting the development of the new Scottish Dark Skies Observatory in the South of Scotland. Details remain confidential but we are hopeful that we will be able to announce this shortly. 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. We have actively opposed a planning application for a lorry park on the east pier and are in the process of securing funding for the full feasibility study. We have had senior talks with Stena in this period and hope to be able to announce more publicly in the coming period.

STRAND 2: Develop the Visitor Experience

Quality [Ref: Action 2.1.i]:

We are continuing to move forwards the agreed actions from the 27th June multi-stakeholder meeting deep-diving into the question of building quality in the sector. The SSDA is in the process of developing new webpages and business support in this area. VisitScotland has created a new range of best [practice guides](#) for tourism businesses on delivering a quality visitor experience.

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 and 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).

Food and Drink [Ref: Action 2.1.v]

The SSDA hosted a major roundtable meeting with 30 key food and drink stakeholders from across the region on the 29th August, from which a [clear plan](#) has been agreed as to how we will continue to support and develop our destination's food and drink offering.

Burns Tourism [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:

The SSDA delivered a surge [six-month Burns Tourism Action Plan](#) (Nov 23-May 24) and on the 11th June convened a high-level meeting for 30 key businesses and partners, briefing on the impact of this surge and together agreeing a [12-month \(Sept '24 – Sept '25\) plan](#) for how this will be sustained, with 15 clear objectives to have been delivered by September 2025.

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.

Events [Ref: Action 2.4.iv]: -

The SSDA worked with Music and the Multiverse and the Stranraer Oyster Festival to increase the brand visibility of our collective destination brand 'Scotland Starts Here'. The SSDA has developed an ambitious plan as to how this will be scaled up to the top 50 events in the South of Scotland in 2025, 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. The first phase of this campaign ran through the school holidays, from June to September. [Learn more.](#)

Destination Tweed /Tweed Trail [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. In this period Neen developed the first mapping and gapping report and the [Destination Tweed website](#) was launched. [Learn more.](#)

EV Charging Network [Ref:Action 2.6.6]:

DGC/Business Gateway are continuing to run a Tourism EV Charger grant of up to £3,000 for any tourism or hospitality business to put in an EV charger funded by the UK government Levelling Up programme. The SSDA has

consulted businesses this quarter to understand the challenges of installing to units and, informed by this, is brokering a South of Scotland partnership with a leading installer, to allow accommodation and attractions to have EV chargers installed free of charge.

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.

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.

Data insights [Ref: Action 3.4]:

The SSDA has collated all known data and made this [publicly available](#) for businesses in one place on its website. It has also conducted a survey of businesses, asking what data businesses want and need ([see results](#)). Following this, we are brokering a potential new partnership with a service provider which will give businesses the very best data insights. VisitScotland has refreshed insights for tourism volume and value figures. It has also released regional data for [Scottish Borders](#) and [Dumfries and Galloway](#) from Scotland Visitor Survey 2023.

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.

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. The SSDA have helped key travel trade voices to connect into these consultations.

Net Zero [Ref: Actions 4.2]:

VisitScotland's partnership with [Tourism Cares' Meaningful Travel Map](#) acts as a useful resource for the travel trade to easily source tourism experiences making positive social and environmental impacts on destinations. A recent addition has been GoWildScotland from the Scottish Borders. VisitScotland continues to promote its [Reduce Your Climate Impact Guide](#), with recent sign ups from tourism business across South of Scotland.

Planning and priorities for the next quarter:

The below priorities have been identified for particular focus in the next quarter (September – December 2024), with dates agreed for review and waypoint objectives for December 2024, which will take us forwards towards our published 2027 objectives:

Ref	Area	Strategy Ref	Date of next review	End of 2024 objective	2027 Objective
1	Food and drink	2.1.v	29th August	Audit of existing local food and drink suppliers and clear plan for how we will establish new/scaled up systems for SoS	Demonstrable increase in quality of the food and drink offering across the region, with most visitor economy businesses in the SoS proudly using local suppliers and communicating this to customers
2	Business data	3.4 & 2.5.ii	24th September	Audit of data businesses' data needs (SSDA). Key Data being used by SSDA/businesses. Trends/learning shared with businesses.	Clear, publicly available, easy to use, information identifying key trends businesses can make decisions against
3	History (incl. Roman and Iron Age)	4.3.viii	1st October	Strong relationship with HES, with clear agreement about what assets are open when	Increased visitors coming to the South of Scotland for this cultural heritage

4	Marketing		8th October	High impact seasonality campaign delivered which engages and mobilises businesses	Annual data published on marketing impact and reach achieved, with demonstrable associated increase in visitor numbers and spend
5	Burns Tourism	1.5.iii	15th October	Clear 12-month action plan (Sept 24-Sept 25) which is underway, with significant buy-in	Value of Burns tourism is trebled
6	Signage - brown and SSH	1.1.iv	15th October	Piece of work contracted to audit all brown signs, gets views of business and proposes process for development. SSH signage up/agreed for all entry points to the region and key visitor hubs	SSH visible in every part of destination, with strong local ownership of content on SSH
7	Travel Trade	1.3	22nd October	Clear plan in place as to how we will grow the travel trade	Doubled the number of travel trade ready businesses in the destination. Scotland Starts Here travel trade hub a one-stop shop regularly used by the travel trade. Effective working relationship with 40 key travel trade partners active in the South. 40+ new bookable products developed. Doubled percentage of international visitors 2024-2027
8	Public Toilets	2.6.vii	22nd October	Pilot funded and underway, with clear plan as to how we will transform public toilets in the South of Scotland	15 existing or new public toilets have a secure and sustainable future
9	National Park	1.5.iii	29th October	Clear plan as to how we will engage the national park consultation and present positive messaging on the value of the visitor economy	[Have embraced game-changing opportunities]
11	Scottish Dark Sky Observatory	1.4.iv	5th November	Dark Sky Observatory secured and announced	Scotland's national dark sky observatory open; attracting significant numbers of new visitors, especially through the winter months to extend the season
12	Investment	1.5.iv	12th November	Agree list (which will evolve) of key propositions we want to secure funding for	Significant new investment streams into the destination, with investors welcomed and supported through process

13	Growth deals (Tweed trail, Stranraer Harbour, 7Stanes, Destination Tweed)	2.7.iv	12th November	Clear public messaging (on SSDA website) about each of the major growth deal investments and how we are looking to maximise the visitor economy benefits of these	Significant further investment attracted
14	Getting events to push SSH	2.4.i and iv	19th November	United approach across five organisations which aims to get the top 50 events in region to push Scotland Starts Here	South of Scotland seen as home of festivals and events, with more events selling-out and new major events in development
15	Events	2.4	19th November	Clear plan as to how we will better support, connect up and leverage events, especially in the off-season,	South of Scotland seen as home of festivals and events, with more events selling-out and new major events in development. A joined up approach to events and the visitor economy. At least one very significant new major event brought into the South of Scotland. All major events giving SSH information from the point of booking, with 100% increase in wider regional spend. Clear calendar of year-round events and festivals, with double the number of associated visitors Oct-March. At least two such 'festivals', with dedicated collaborative marketing and a demonstrable increase in bookings and length of stay
16	Digital booking	1.1.ii	26th November	Review of digital discoverability and online booking with development plan - including sign-posting to all training already provided by others.	Almost all visitor experiences are online bookable
17	Stranraer Visitor Attraction	1.5.i	3rd December	Proposition publicly announced with wide support, feasibility study underway.	Building underway, for opening in 2028
18	REP advocacy	2.6.iii	3rd December	REP updated on delivery of Responsible Tourism Strategy and latest STEAM data	Tourism and the visitor economy at the heart of all high-level, long-term decision making and budget setting
19	Motorhomes	4.6	10th December	Outline plan of how to support responsible motorhome visitors, with pilots testing key propositions underway	Standardised visitor experience, with associated spend in region and decreased negative impacts. Improved campervan facilities and community wellbeing.

20	EV charging	2.6.vi & 4.2.ii	10th December	Survey of businesses to find out who offers EV charging and what the experience has been to date. New agreement with EV charge installer and clear plan as to how this will be rolled out across the region	Most accommodation and visitor attractions to offer EV charging at appropriate speeds
21	Net zero	4.2	17th December	A clear 'Route to Net Zero' development plan for the South of Scotland visitor economy	South of Scotland a part of globally-recognised good practice on climate action. Most accommodation and visitor attractions to offer EV charging at appropriate speeds. Visitors able to hire an EV from each of the major transport hubs in the South of Scotland. Most visitor economy businesses in the SoS taking tangible actions against clear net zero plans. A more responsible destination.
22	Path - donations	4.1.iii & 2.6.v	17th December	System for donations to paths in place	Demonstrably improved path network and visitor experience in priority areas. Increase in safe cycle routes.

Contacts:

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

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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!