



Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting  
The Machars, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2024, 9:30am, in person at the New Town Hall  
Whithorn.

SUMMARY OF MEETING

Attendees:

- Rebecca Jarre – Triskeli Swims
- Matt Kitson – Driftwood Cinema, Wigtown Shindy, Wigtown Brewery
- Alastair Scoular – Five Kingdom Brewery and The Steam Packet Inn
- Charlotte Mannion – St Ninian’s Hall and Tearoom
- Kerry Whitham – Burrowhead Holiday Village
- Becki Castle – South Machars Community Centre – Whithorn
- Anne Barclay – Wigtown Book Festival
- Hazel Smith – All Roads Lead to Whithorn
- Julia Muir Watt – The Whithorn Trust, Pend House Lettings
- Lizzie Koronka – All Roads Lead to Whithorn
- The Swallow Theatre
- Amye Lloyd – The Hive, Garlieston
- Gordon Smith – Visit Scotland
- Amy Farley – Bladnoch Distillery
- Christopher Nicolson – Tenant Farmers Association/Self-catering property
- Chloe and Gavin Vance – Balnab Farm Self Catering Holidays
- Fiona Rabson – Machars Mermaids
- Tracey Warman – Machars Mermaids and Elm Grove B&B
- Laura Campbell - Nature Scot
- David Hope-Jones – SSSDA
- Sarah Macdonald - SSSDA

Apologies:

- Sammy Johnson, Bladnoch Distillery
- Roy McKinnel
- Alison Roberts
- Kevan McGinty, McGinty Fine Arts and Picture Framing

Lead SSSDA business contact in The Machars:

Sarah Macdonald, [sarah@ssdalliance.com](mailto:sarah@ssdalliance.com), 07770 781464



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## Purpose of meeting:

As part of its Locally Led Destination Development work, every six months, the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA) brings together local tourism businesses and community representatives in each of the 14 areas of the South of Scotland.

Full details can be found at:

[www.ssdalliance.com/destination-development/](http://www.ssdalliance.com/destination-development/)

This meeting was arranged to allow local tourism organisations to:

1. Highlight their own **local priorities** to strengthen tourism in the area and develop work collectively against these
2. Be briefed on the **new local area video and webpage** on ‘Scotland Starts Here’, and feed into the development of these local pages.
3. Be briefed on **progress against the Responsible Tourism Strategy**.
4. Get engaged and benefitting from the SSDA’s **Seasonality Marketing Campaign**.
5. Learn about, and get involved in, the SSDA’s **current projects to support tourism**.
6. Build **new local collaborations** between businesses.
7. Be briefed by NatureScot on the **Galloway National Park** consultation.
8. Learn about opportunities to get the most from the SSDA and ‘Scotland Starts Here’.





### Priorities of local businesses:

All those attending the meeting were invited to share one thing they would like to see improved about tourism in the local area. Key priorities identified were:

1. Provide **easier access to beaches** for all abilities to encourage open water swimming for all (specifically wheelchairs)
2. Support in extending reach to potentially **new customers**
3. **Improved event licencing** system, frustrations that licences approved last minute – blocking event development
4. **Signs at Gretna “turn left”**
5. Marketing to **support year round visits**
6. Support with **planning applications**
7. **Engaging locals** in visitor economy
8. **Improving the litter problem**
9. To take advantage of **film tourism** linked with The Wicker Man
10. **Increased profile of The Machars**
11. **Changing locations and toilets** for open water swimmers
12. Increase **year-round footfall** to support businesses to remain open all year
13. **Collaboration** between local businesses
14. Better **joined up transport** across the region
15. Better **information around trails** and “what to do” for visitors
16. **Improved signage**
17. **Increased work force** – supporting affordable housing
18. Develop the **promotion around wild swimming** – potentially huge market with the clean waters around the peninsula.
19. **Development of a tidal pool**

The SSDA gave a response/update on what it is doing against these priorities, some of the points included:

1. **Access and facilities linked to beaches; promotion around wild swimming:** We are keen to be doing more on the coastal and marine visitor economy. This will be a likely area of new work in 2025.
13. **Collaboration between local businesses:** We're really keen to encourage more local businesses and community representatives to join these Locally Led Destination Meetings as they are the key opportunity to come together, listen to each other, plan collectively and build new collaborations.
14. **Better joined up transport:**
  - The SSDA sits on the Strategic Action Group for Transport which is part of the Regional Economic Partnership. In this we recently presented a written brief on the top transport priorities for our visitor economy, based on what businesses said in these LLDD meetings and what is in the Responsible Tourism Strategy.
  - We will continue these discussions at the Convention of the South of Scotland, with the Deputy First Minister, to really drive forwards the priorities of Members as communicated in these meetings.
  - We have had hugely positive conversations on public transport with the two councils and will soon be sharing joint plans on how we will, together, better connect and inform public transport provision and the visitor offering.
16. **Improved signage:** Having heard from businesses through the 2023 consultations and three rounds of the these Locally Led Destination Development meetings, we have clearly communicated the significance of this signage issue to all partner agencies. We have specifically raised it as a topic of business for Convention of South of Scotland, with two Scot Gov Cabinet Secretaries and the leaders of all relevant public agencies. It is agreed that:
  - There will be a full review of all brown signs in the South of Scotland, which businesses will be able to feed into.
  - Budget and capacity will be committed to ensure out of date or poorly maintained brown signs are removed.
  - We will, with the industry, establish a new, sustainable system for the application for brown signs. We do not want a significant proliferation of such signs, and it's important to emphasise they will continue to be at cost, but we want a more effective, efficient and sustainable system for all.
  - We will have 'Scotland Starts Here' branding on the key entrance points into the region.
17. **Affordable housing and youth engagement:**
  - Housing is one of the three core priorities on the Regional Economic Partnership, on which the SSDA sits. Collectively, an emergency [South of Scotland Housing Action Plan](#) has been agreed and is being instigated. The SSDA also feeds business experience on housing into the workforce development work, where this relates.
  - The SSDA is really actively involved in a piece of work looking at how we strengthen our workforce development in the visitor economy, how we address key skill gaps in the industry, and how we better inspire more young people to enter into career in tourism and hospitality. The SSDA is consulting businesses on exactly this and the results and recommendations from this industry insight will then feed directly to the Deputy First Minister and the Convention of the South of Scotland in March 2025. We are working closely with the Scottish Borders College, D&G College, University of Glasgow, Skills Development Scotland, Springboard, DYW, SOSE, both Councils and others on exactly this.

The SSDA will report back in the next meeting, in February 2025, about what more it has done against the local priorities communicated in this meeting.

## Representation of The Machars on 'Scotland Starts Here':

Businesses were shown the new webpage for [The Machars](#) on 'Scotland Starts Here' and the new video produced for this area. If you wish to [download the video](#) (Instructions on how to directly embed it included) or if you want embed via [Youtube](#). Both the content of this webpage and the promotional video came from suggestions at the last two The Machars meetings.

The video and webpage were enthusiastically welcomed by those attending the meeting.

The SSDA encouraged local businesses to:

1. Actively signpost to 'Scotland Starts Here' so visitors engage this local page. Free marketing collateral with QR codes to SSH are available from the SSDA (posters, table talkers, window stickers etc).
2. Use the promotional video however they wish- including embedding the video, free of charge, on their own website to give a sense of the wider area.
3. Feed into the content of the local area webpage which is easy to update by the SSDA.
4. Ensure they are a [member of the SSDA](#) so their own business is represented on 'Scotland Starts Here', and ensure they keep their listing information up to date.

The following specific asks from local businesses were made for The Machars webpage:

- Investigate if the four "where to stay" businesses can be randomised and if different types of accommodation can be displayed (ie one hotel, one self-catering, one B&B etc)
- Remove Newtown Stewart from main list and make location local to business.
- Incorporate map of LLDD on each page – showing location
- Incorporate What3Words into description
- Under individual listings add "similar properties to your search"
- The Machars video: Garlieston – not just a beach – to incorporate/highlight village, remove "beach" from titles.

## Call to action:

The meeting ended with businesses being reminded of 7 key actions:

- 1) [Join the SSDA](#) if you haven't already
- 2) Make sure your business listing on 'Scotland Starts Here' is kept up to date
- 3) Keep giving your feedback on [The Machars](#) local area page on Scotland Starts Here
- 4) Feed into the [National Park consultation](#) before 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025
- 5) Signpost visitors to Scotland Starts Here ([website](#), [app](#) and [social media](#))
- 6) Get involved in the seasonality marketing campaign:
- 7) Attend the [19<sup>th</sup> March Annual Conference](#) for South of Scotland Tourism in Peebles (early bird ticket discounts before the end of 2024).

## Date of next meeting:

The next Locally Led Destination Development meeting for The Machars area is: Friday the 7<sup>th</sup> March 2025, Online at 10am

## MEETING UPDATES

### Progress against Responsible Tourism Strategy:

The SSDA briefed local businesses on the extensive business consultations through 2023 which informed the drafting of the all-agency 2024-2034 South of Scotland [Responsible Tourism Strategy](#).

The Strategy sets out how, by working together across the private and public sector, we will:

- [Inspire](#) more visitors to come to the South of Scotland
- [Develop](#) the visitor experience, with a focus on quality
- [Support](#) business to succeed
- [Act responsibly](#) for long-term collective benefit

Together, we will transform our visitor economy by:

1. extending the season and developing the South of Scotland as a year-round 'rural escape' destination for the 14m people within 2-4 hours travel time
2. becoming a 'go to' rather than a 'go through' destination
3. increasing international visitor numbers, who spend significantly more and stay longer than domestic visitors.

The ten-year strategy has unprecedented ambition for the South of Scotland. Together, we will:

- Increase our visitor economy by £1 billion, to £1.76bn by 2034.
- Support a further 6,000+ jobs, to 20,000 FTE posts by 2034.

The Strategy was launched in March 2024 by the SSDA and its 750 members, VisitScotland, SOSE, D&G Council and Scottish Borders Council. This is just the beginning. The SSDA will ensure all partners are held accountable to deliver this change. We will do this by:

- Having a clear [Three-year Action Plan](#), with 109 actions with clear responsibilities and delivery timescales.
- Every three months, the SSDA, VS, SOSE, DGC and SBC together publishing [a quarterly impact report](#) on what has been achieved in the last quarter and what will be delivered in the next quarter.
- Every month the SSDA posting a [5-minute video](#) sharing clear deliverables that month.
- Every week, the SSDA meeting for two hours with VS, SOSE, DGC and SBC to push these 109 actions forwards.

The SSDA briefed businesses on the progress made in the first eight months of delivery against this ten-year strategy:

The SSDA [recently announced with the Deputy First Minister](#) that the latest independent STEAM data shows:

- the South of Scotland **visitor economy grew by 20%** in the last year (£150m increase)
- there was a **14% increase in jobs**
- every £1 spend on destination marketing and management is resulting in **£275 increase** in local economic impact.

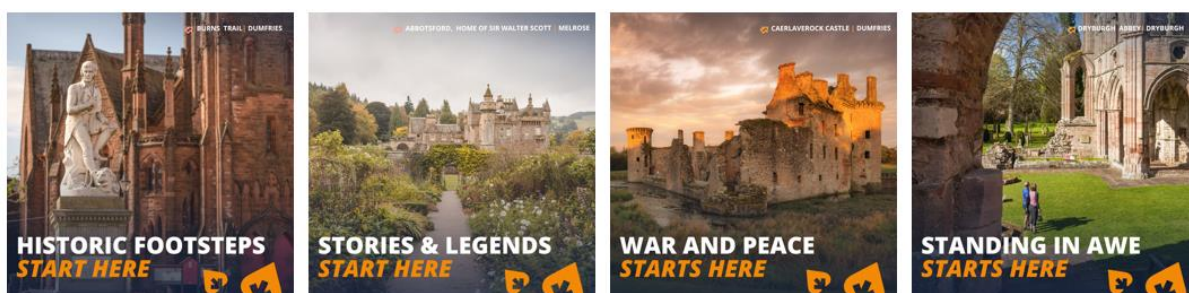
The recent announcement that [Center Parcs will build its first Scottish holiday village in the South of Scotland](#), investing £400m (the largest ever such investment in this region), creating 1200 permanent, year-round jobs and supporting £30-40m of additional salaries, bringing in c300,000 visitors a year, with £100m of spend on the site and £27m economic benefit off-site with other businesses.

Together these two announcements mean after only eight months (6% of the ten years) we are already:

- 28% of the way to hitting our economic target of £1bn
- 32% of the way to hitting our jobs creation target of 6,000

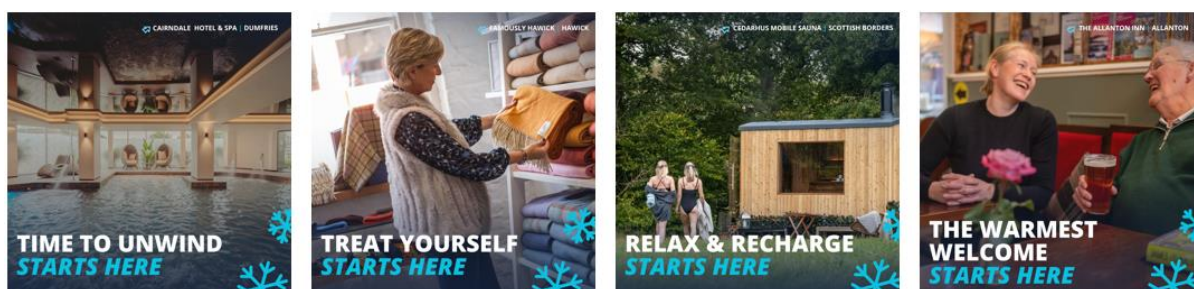
## Seasonal Marketing Campaign:

[Get involved in our marketing activity with our campaign toolkit](#)



Seasonality and promoting trips to the South of Scotland in the traditional shoulder and off-season have been identified by local businesses as a priority. Establishing the South of Scotland as a year-round destination of choice is a crucial part of the South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy, and as a result, the SSDA is running its second seasonal marketing campaign through Scotland Starts Here, centred around the unique themes and selling points of the region that were identified at the 2023 LLDD Meetings.

2024 builds on successful elements of the 2023 seasonal activity, growing the content on Scotland Starts Here and working closely with business to implement additional activities. The SSDA is dedicating a budget of £60,000 to promoting the South of Scotland from October to March, encouraging potential visitors to consider a break in the autumn, winter and spring.



Key messages for the 2024 seasonal marketing campaign are:

- Proximity and Accessibility: The South of Scotland is closer than you think, making it an ideal destination for a break at this time of year
- Escape and Relaxation: Rest, relax and indulge while escaping the hustle and bustle. The South of Scotland is the ideal destination to recharge and reconnect with loved ones, whatever that may look like for you. Enjoy a spa break, indulge in the local cuisine or relax by a cosy fire in a holiday cottage.
- Rural idyl: The South of Scotland is a rolling, rural, destination that offers fresh air, an authentic countryside experience, with lots of space to explore and reconnect; a warm welcome in every town and community with authentic, local experiences.



Crucially, these messages are being tied together under the wider Scotland Starts Here branding, highlighting unique experiences, events, offers and more for the wider campaign activity. For winter this for example includes dark skies, winter walks and landscapes, spa, hot tub and luxury stays, as well as festive highlights. Once again, the SSDA is also working with key partners on a local and national level to reach an even bigger audience with the campaign.

Activity & Implementation Plan
Paid Digital Activity: Ads on Facebook and Instagram targeted to chosen audience
Publishing Activity: Media partnership with The Daily Record and The Chronicle
Short-break competition: Win a seasonal stay in the South of Scotland, run via key media partners
Boosted content through SSH: Seasonal blog content, promoting new destination videos
New Seasonal Photo and Video Content
SSH Website: Update seasonal pages on 'Scotland Starts Here'
Collaboration: Working with VisitScotland & TripAdvisor on spring highlight for the SoS on TripAdvisor.com

**Impact to date:**

- For the first time, a competition to win a seasonal short break was run as part of the campaign activity. This attracted almost 5,000 entries and generated 2,000 additional newsletter subscriptions.
- The campaign goal was to create minimum 25,000 visits to campaign-related pages on Scotland Starts Here. This goal was reached in early December, outperforming previous seasonal campaigns significantly.
- We welcomed two travel writers to the region: Amy Lynch, editor for Lonely Planet enjoyed her first visit to the Scottish Borders, while Robin McKelvie returned to D&G to delve into the Rhins of Galloway and the Heart of Galloway.

**Other SSDA work:**

Businesses were briefed on other active SSDA work across three categories:

**Marketing:**

- 'Scotland Starts Here' website- half a million users
- 'Scotland Starts Here' app-25,500users
- Social media (B2B and B2C)- 85,000 followers and 2.4 million reach.
- Seasonality marketing campaign
- Media and PR: journalist and influencer visits
- Border rail 'Kids Go Free'

**Business support:**

- Travel Trade training, engagement and destination representation
- Thistle Awards
- Quality
- Workforce/skills
- Advocacy:
- Seasonal product development (e.g. mobile Sauna)
- Data
- Business toolkits

- Individual business engagement and support
- Annual Conference
- Caledonia Park partnership

#### Destination Development:

- Major new visitor attractions
- History and heritage
- Long distance paths
- Equestrian tourism
- Public toilets
- Events
- Brown signs
- Burns Tourism
- Food and Drink
- Visitor management
- EV Charging network
- Transport partnerships

There is lots of information on the [SSDA website](#) about all these areas of work and more, and businesses are encouraged to contact Sarah Macdonald, ([sarah@ssdalliance.com](mailto:sarah@ssdalliance.com)). [This webpage](#) has a monthly five-minute video from the SSDA CEO, David Hope-Jones, with key highlights and an interactive mindmap of the top 50 current SSDA projects you can explore.

All the SSDA's consumer-facing work is under its 'Scotland Starts Here' brand. See:

- [Website](#) (500k users)
- [App](#) (25k users)
- [Facebook](#) (64k followers)
- [Twitter/X](#) (2.1K followers)
- [Instagram](#) (9.3K followers)

#### Galloway National Park:

Nature Scot attended the meeting for this item, briefing businesses on the proposal to create a Galloway National Park and the consultation process between now and February.

No decision has yet been made on the National Park and Nature Scot and the SSDA are keen to ensure as many local businesses, as well as communities, feed into the consultation as possible before the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2025 deadline.

Full details about the consultation is available on the [NatureScot website](#), where there is [lots of detail about what is proposed](#).

Businesses can complete either a [long survey](#) or a [short survey](#), and there are many local events in the coming weeks and months to explain this and encourage participation.

Businesses were encouraged to visit the website to learn more about [the experience of the existing two National Parks](#) and the overall [value of National Parks to Scotland](#).

Businesses were able to share their views in the meeting and ask questions of the SSDA.

The SSDA has undertaken a survey of tourism businesses and will soon be sharing the results of this on [this webpage](#).