

Locally-Led Destination Development Meeting
The Tweed Valley, 19th November 2024, 12noon
Online

SUMMARY OF MEETING

Attendees:

- Stewart Wilson – Tweed Valley Blogger
- Ian Buckingham – John Buchan Heritage Museum
- Catherine Maxwell Stuart – Traquair House, Chair Go Tweed Valley
- Hannah Davis – Barony Castle
- Katie Archibald – Barony Castle
- Margot Smolenska – Tweed Valley Pods
- Ylva Dahnsjo – Robert Smail’s Printing Works
- Dale Clancy – Borders College
- Sarah Binks – Hillside Outside
- Graham Adcock – Cleikum Mill Lodge
- Carmel Scott – The Hub, Innerleithen
- Xica Dabin-Debono - Whitmuir Farm
- Rich Rowe – Go Tweed Valley
- David Hope-Jones – SSSA
- Neen Kelly - SSSA
- Sarah Macdonald - SSSA

Apologies:

- Aidan Nicol – Southern Upland Partnership
- Hearthstanes Estate

Lead SSSA business contact in The Tweed Valley:

Sarah Macdonald, 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/

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. Here from **Go Tweed Valley**.
4. Be briefed on **progress against the Responsible Tourism Strategy**.
5. Get engaged and benefitting from the SSDA’s **Seasonality Marketing Campaign**.
6. Learn about, and get involved in, the SSDA’s **current projects to support tourism**.
7. Build **new local collaborations** between businesses.
8. Learn about the **Center Parcs** proposition for the Scottish Borders.
9. Learn about, and get involved in, the new **Tweed Trail** long-distance walking and cycling route from Moffat to Berwick.
10. 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. Support with **local planning**
2. **Joined up museum trail**
3. Better **coordinated public transport**, helpful information around timings and services.
4. **Map of visitor attractions.**
5. **Map showing bike routes and facilities.**
6. **Collaboration between businesses** and local regular meetings.
7. **Traffic management** on Innerleithen High Street.
8. **Secure bike racks.**
9. Increase profile of **tourism & hospitality careers** at school.
10. Promotion to engage a further reach of potential **event visitors.**
11. Promotion of **Tweed Valley as near neighbour of Edinburgh.**
12. **Developed transport links** between Tweed Valley and Edinburgh
13. Capitalise on **existing product.**
14. **Retention of past visitors.**

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

1. **Support with local planning:** Any visitor economy business applying for planning permission or new licensing can contact the CEO of the SSDA (davidhj@ssdalliance.com) and he can directly support applications.

Where applications get stuck or are significantly delayed, David should be kept informed so he can ensure the senior leadership of the councils are informed. David meets regularly with the two Leaders of the councils and it is agreed in the Responsible Tourism Strategy that we will work more closely between the public and private sector to make the planning process more efficient and effective.

2. **Additional Trails:** We currently have a really strong user interface on the Scotland Starts Here website for visitors to see exact walking and cycling routes and how these connect with businesses in the same areas ([See this example](#)). We will soon be delivering a significant piece of work to improve this by:
 - Making it much quicker and easier to find these paths and trails on the website and the app
 - Working with local businesses and councils to identify more walking, cycling and equestrian routes, and uploading to SSH
 - Working with local businesses and councils to help visitors know about and find these routes – e.g. QR codes at key locations linking directly to nearest paths and trails.
3. **Better coordinated 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.
11. **Event support and promotion:** The SSDA is actively engaging the 50 largest events in the South of Scotland to support them and better connect them to the visitor economy, so those who attend these events are encouraged and supported to stay longer, explore further and spend more. We are offering specific support to events that operate in the autumn, winter and spring, as we recognise how important they can be in supporting businesses to stay open. The SSDA sits on the Events Management groups for both Scottish Borders Council and D&G Council.

Update from Go Tweed Valley

Rich Rowe, BID Manager gave an update on their recent activities and further information about the renewal Tourism BID. Further details can be found [here](#).

The SSDA and Go Tweed Valley 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 Tweed Valley on ‘Scotland Starts Here’:

Businesses were shown the new webpage for [The Tweed Valley](#) on ‘Scotland Starts Here’ and the video produced by Go Tweed Valley 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](#). The content of this webpage came from suggestions at the last two The Tweed Valley meetings.

The webpage was 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 Tweed Valley webpage:

- Ensure seasonality comes through on LLDD pages
- Tile linking to the John Buchan Way
- Promotion of wet weather provision (being developed by Go Tweed Valley)

Call to action:

The meeting ended with businesses being reminded of 8 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 [Tweed Valley](#) local area page on Scotland Starts Here
- 4) Feed into the [National Park consultation](#) before 14th February 2025
- 5) Get involved in the [River Tweed Trail](#)
- 6) Signpost visitors to Scotland Starts Here ([website](#), [app](#) and [social media](#))
- 7) Get involved in the seasonality marketing campaign:
- 8) Attend the [19th 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 Tweed Valley will be in person and in partnership with Go Tweed Valley. Dates will be confirmed shortly.

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.

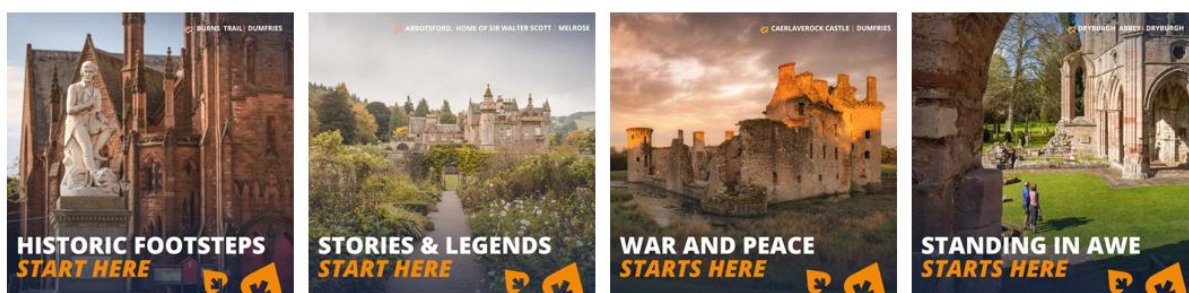
The recent announcement that [Center Parcs will build its first Scottish holiday village in the South of Scotland](#), investing £400m (the largest ever such investment in this region), creating 1200 permanent, year-round jobs and supporting £30-40m of additional salaries, bringing in c300,000 visitors 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

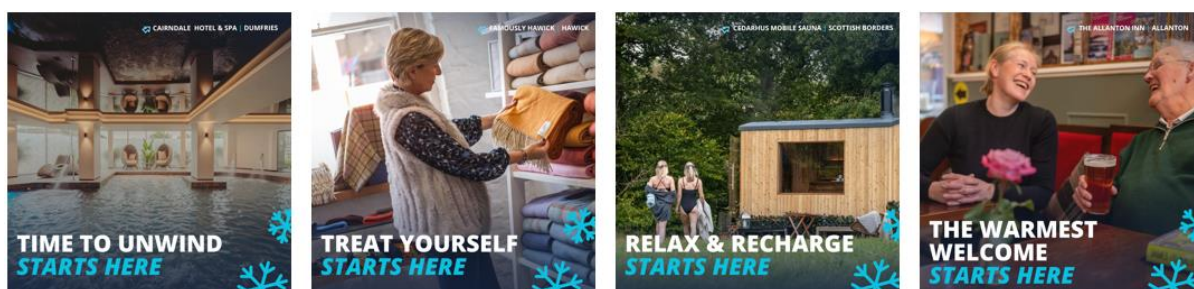
Seasonal Marketing Campaign:

[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). [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.

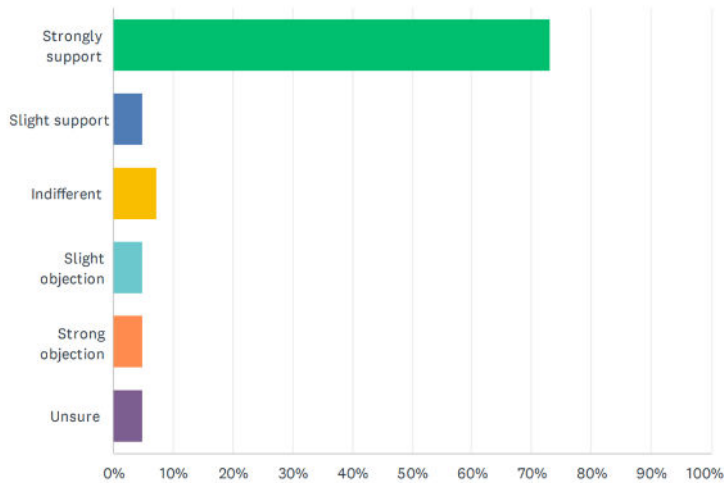
All the SSDA's consumer-facing work is under its 'Scotland Starts Here' brand. See:

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

Center Parcs Scotland:

The SSDA briefed businesses on the [Center Parcs proposition](#). £400m was secured for the investment on the Bonds market the day before the proposed location, between Hawick and Selkirk, was announced.

The SSDA immediately launched a snapshot [survey of its members](#) which found overwhelming support for the proposition:



The SSDA is working closely with the top leadership of Center Parcs UK on this proposition. We are advocating for every one of the 300,000+ visitors to the new Center Parcs to receive 'Scotland Starts Here' marketing information, encouraging them to extend their stay and explore the South of Scotland. We are also looking to secure explicit agreements with regards the local food and drinks offering on the site. On the day of the launch the SSDA posted a [short interview with the Center Parcs CEO](#) discussing these two points.

SSDA Members will have the chance to meet the Center Parcs CEO and Chief Corporate Officer as part of these discussions to share their views and learn more about the exciting plans.

In addition to the 750-800 construction jobs, the proposed new Center Parcs site will create an estimated 1,200 permanent new jobs; the overwhelming majority of which will be locally filled. As such, it has the potential to transform the central Scottish Borders, bringing new opportunities to towns like Hawick, Selkirk, Jedburgh and Galashiels. This will give young people a reason to stay in the Borders and invest in careers in the visitor economy.

We understand that it is anticipated that this new Center Parcs village will generate around £27m of additional spend, outside the parc, with other business, in the local economy a year.

The year-round nature of the Center Parcs offering, with over 97% occupancy, will breathe new life into the Borders through the autumn, winter and spring. It will help businesses to invest in extending their season (another of the key priorities in the Responsible Tourism Strategy), knowing that there will be steady flow of higher-spending visitors 12-months a year.

Further details can be found on the [SSDA website](#) and at www.centerparcscotland.co.uk.

River Tweed Trail:



The SSDA briefed businesses on the River Tweed Trail, one of 12 [Destination Tweed](#) projects. The 113-mile walking trail and facilitated cycling route will run from Moffat, past the source of the river, to Berwick-upon-Tweed where the river meets the sea. The Trail will be launched by spring 2028. The multi-faceted initiative will see an investment of around £25 million in the area.

As a result, the Destination Tweed project will deliver **significant economic benefits** for the Borderlands area and the wider region.

- By the end of the project investment in year 10, there will be an **additional 267,700 visitors** per annum which will be maintained thereafter (compared to business as usual)
- These additional visitors will **spend approximately £27.9m** (gross) pa in year 10
- The additional spend will support approximately **390 jobs (gross)** pa in year 10, or 190 net additional jobs
- The project will **stimulate private investment and growth** in the local and regional visitor infrastructure (e.g. accommodation, food and drink outlets, retail, and tour group activities).

There is a need to develop the visitor experience, and a world class trail requires:

- Transport – getting to/from start/finish
- Baggage transfer
- Suitable accommodation for single nights
- Welcoming walkers and cyclists- facilities
- Food and drink experiences- luxury picnics, packed lunches, wild dining, foraging, tastings
- Wellbeing experiences – riverside yoga, wild swimming and sauna
- Guided experiences – walks, storytelling, wildlife
- Activities – canoeing, horse-riding, photography

If you require further information or have a business idea, please contact [Neen Kelly](#) who is responsible for business engagement along the Trail. Further details on the Trail and business support can be found [here](#).