



Food and Drink in the South of Scotland's Visitor Economy Outcomes and Actions following Multi-Stakeholder Roundtable

Thursday 29th August 2024, 13.30 – 15.30

Carmont House, The Crichton, Bankend Road Dumfries DG1 4TA

Further strengthening the South of Scotland's food and drink offering is a priority within the Responsible Tourism Strategy. On the 29th August 2024, the SSDA convened a roundtable meeting bringing together many of the organisations that are actively involved in supporting food and drink.

Challenges, successes and opportunities were discussed and there was a board consensus that this is an area where continuing partnership working is fruitful. An objectives-focused approach was agreed, with a strong focus on practical actions, to avoid just creating a talking shop.

Five objectives were agreed:

1. To increase the **quality** of our food and drink offering
2. To increase the **local** provenance of our food and drink offering
3. To build awareness and **pride** in our food and drink offering
4. To develop quality food and drink **experiences**
5. To establish a **reputation** as a quality food and drink destination

For each objective, 3-5 practical actions were agreed. Together, these actions are beyond the capacity of the SSDA (this is one of 50+ projects being delivered by a team of 5), so there is a need to spread responsibilities between organisations in a collective, collaborative and collegial approach.

Through September and October, organisations are asked to share which objectives and actions they could lead with and we will then have a digital meeting on the **23rd October, 10am**, to agree who will lead with what and finalise specific outcomes to be achieved in the next 12 months (by Oct 2025). We will then meet three times in the coming 12-months to plan collaboratively and review progress.

Attendees:

In person:

Karen Birch	Abundant Borders
Katrina Reynolds	Allanton Inn/Borderland Tours
Fiona Richmond	Food & Drink Scotland
Sheena Horner	Food from Farming
Cat Thomson	Journalist F&D
Duncan Mconchie	Laggan/Gather

Abi Mordin	Propagate (Food Hub/ Partnership)
Justin Orde	SOSE
Karen Jackson	SOSE
Mark Rowley	SOSE
Lee Medd	The Globe /Annandale Distillery
David Hope-Jones	SSDA staff
Douglas McMillan	SSDA Board
Keith Mundell	SSDA Board & Johnstons of Elgin
Matthew Wallace	SSDA Board & Cairndale Hotel
Vicki Steel	SSDA Board & Aikwood Tower & Cross Keys Ettrickbridge
Patricia Picken	SSDA Board & Solway View Holidays
John Henderson	SSDA Board & Born in Scotland
Morag Anderson	SSDA Staff
Sarah Macdonald	SSDA Staff
Neen Kelly	SSDA staff
Caroline Millar	Scot Agritourism
Lorna Young	Indigo Words
Wilma	The Ethical Dairy

Digital:

Jemma Reid	JR Events F&D Bookables
Emily MacLeod	Scottish Borders Council
Jane Warcup	Scottish Borders Council

Apologies:

Sian Downes	SSDA Board & Strawberry Events
Gordon Smith	VisitScotland
Esther Tacke	SSDA Board
John King	D&G Council
J Watt	Thomson food Services
David Ibbotson	SSDA Board & Knockinaam Lodge
Ruaridh Hesketh	Galloway Lodge
Kerry Waddell	Giacopazzi's
Paul Swarbrigg	SOSE
	APC Overnight
Jay Rubinstein	Dumfries International Street Festival
	Penninghame Estate
Anne Massey	VisitScotland

Strategic Context:

Together, the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA), South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), Visit Scotland, D&G Council and Scottish Borders Council, [launched the South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy](#) on the 20th March 2024, following almost a year of consultation.

Behind this ten-year [Strategy](#) (2024-2034), is an [Action Plan](#) (initially, 2024-27, with annual updates), which gives greater detail as to which combination of agencies will lead with which aspects of delivery.

Through the consultation process, it was clear that, for businesses, communities, public agencies and other key stakeholders, supporting and enhancing our food and drink offering is critical to developing the South of Scotland's visitor economy.

Food and drink is included in four key sections of the Responsible Tourism Strategy:

Quality (pg 26):

- “Increasingly, visitors are looking for quality experiences across every part of their trip: attractions, accommodation, food and drink. We need to build quality into every part of the South of Scotland's offering: it needs to be built into our DNA if we are to establish a reputation for quality. We have many outstanding businesses which are shining beacons of quality but we also have many others that need to be supported to reach this level. As a destination, we need to ensure that we do not stand still, instead encouraging and supporting our tourism businesses to improve the quality of their offering across the region.
- “We will do this by ... **Actively supporting businesses to improve the quality of their food and drink offering, with systems established to make it easier to use local ingredients and products.**”

Growth and Development Hubs (pg 27):

- “There is a need to think strategically about how to grow and develop the South of Scotland as a destination and to maximise the impact of projects linked to Borderlands Inclusive Growth investment. The region has a number of key assets, linked to its unique geography, culture and history, which can become catalytic growth centres with the right investment and collaboration. Together these areas become the story we tell about the South of Scotland and determine the visitors we attract....
- “These areas include... **Agritourism and Food & Drink – building our reputation as a leading rural destination with outstanding local products**”

Infrastructure (pg 31):

- “Tourism can only succeed where the right infrastructure is in place”
- “With specific regard to our region's local food and drink offering, there is a need to develop the necessary supporting industry, including an effective distribution network, a distribution centre, and an abattoir.”
- “We will do this by... **Establishing effective logistics and distribution systems to support businesses to use local ingredients**”

Workforce development (pg 36):

- “There are many challenges in recruiting and retaining staff across the industry, including a lack of housing, seasonal employment, fair wages, and career development. Although these issues are not unique to the South of Scotland, or the tourism sector, ageing demography and early retirement means that the region has a smaller workforce than other areas – put simply, there is less of a pool of people to draw upon.”
- “We will do this by ... **Looking for practical solutions to the specific shortage of trained chefs in the region**”

2024-27 ACTION PLAN:

- Delivery through: Practical support, training and information, and the development of specific logistics and distribution systems to facilitate use of local products and ingredients. Utilise the strength of national programmes including development of Regional Food Tourism Ambassador Programme.
- 2027 Objective: 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

What is our collective mission?:

1. To increase the **quality** of our food and drink offering
2. To increase the **local** provenance of our food and drink offering
3. To build awareness and **pride** in our food and drink offering
4. To develop quality food and drink **experiences**
5. To establish a **reputation** as a quality food and drink destination

Why?:

- Increase the **number and spend of visitors** coming to the South of Scotland for our food and drink offering
- To support quality year-round local **jobs**
- To support healthy, **sustainable food choices**, by visitors and locals

How do we work together?:

- Clear sense of what, exactly, we want to achieve and a commitment to working together to do so
- Understand the challenges businesses face in increasing the quality, local provenance and pride in the F&D offering
- Be honest about what capacity organisations have to deliver and spread actions and responsibilities between organisations (this is one of 50+ projects for the SSDA, with a team of just 5).
- Bring together all stakeholders/partners working in this area to ensure we are working collaboratively and not risking duplication
- Research how other areas/countries have solved some of these challenges
- Avoid lots of talk and no action – be laser-like focused on real-world deliverables!
- Avoid just doing the easy bits: for example, just celebrating our food and drink offering, which risks preaching to the choir, rather than the harder, nuts-and-bolts logistics systems
- Achieve *both* the quick, easy wins and start the first steps to solving the bigger challenges
- Avoid relying entirely on public budgets as it is clear that budgets will be contracting

Challenges:

- How do we define and communicate our distinctive food and drink offer as a region?
- Lack of education/understanding about Scottish produce
- Low population density & geographic dispersion means hard to make businesses sustainable
- Affordability of quality, local ingredients
- Hard to know which businesses are doing what and offering what / lack of visitor information
- Cost of doing business means low profitability, making it harder to invest
- Cost of living makes customers more focused on price than quality
- Difficulties recruiting and retaining skilled staff
- Challenges in the distribution of local produce to local restaurants/cafés/hotels
- Awareness of local produce available and motivation to use them by restaurants/cafés/hotels
- South of Scotland lacks a 'foodie' reputation so we're not attracting people willing to spend
- Lack of an abattoir
- Further education courses focus more on theory than practical skills
- Poor perceptions of working in the industry (we need to emulate the events sector)

Opportunities and successes:

- Galloway Food Hub – bringing together 25 local food producers with fortnightly delivery to collection points. Currently powered by volunteers – need to look at sustainability if scaling up.
- D&G Single Food Partnership: looking at bringing local food into every public body
- Cross Keys Ettrickbridge: bringing in local brewer to build support from locals
- Increasing South of Scotland visitor economy
- VisitScotland funding and support
- SSDA/SFA-funded food and drink imagery
- Stranraer Oyster Festival and other key foodie events
- Strong agritourism offering
- Potential for Galloway National Park?
- Scottish Food and Drink Ambassadors
- Good Food Partnerships
- Larder of the Lowlands
- New whisky Festival in Lockerbie
- Hairy Bikers and other media exposure
- Currently have least diverse agri-tourism offering as a region (most is accommodation), means opportunity to diversify into local produce sales / farm shop.
- Abundant Borders – Foodscape podcast is a platform for storytelling.
- Good food partnership in Scottish Borders and D&G Sustainable Food Partnership
- Regenerative Farming Network – farmer to farmer support group
- Standhill Farm, Hawick – Sweet Red Balls
- Farmers Market Network
- Scottish Agritourism monitor farms
- World 2026 Agritourism Conference

Key considerations from discussions:

- Experiences need to be online bookable and travel trade ready
- We need to define what we mean by 'quality' (must include sustainable) and 'local' (where are the ingredients from or where the processing is done)
- What is our region's *unique* food and drink offering?
- Good to look at what we don't currently have but could develop (e.g. pre-packaged butter).
- Communities need to be 100% behind us.
- Need to ensure propositions are commercially viable and economically sustainable given our low population density
- Different views as to whether we should be trying to increase fruit and veg production in the South of Scotland, or if we're happy to focus on produce best suited to our climate

Objectives and Actions:

1) Increase the quality of our food and drink offering:

- a) Collect and track consumer data insights on the quality of our food and drink offering by scraping user review sites, so we can identify trends, track progress and identify priority areas which need addressing from the consumer's perspective
- b) Support motivation and inspiration through case studies and peer sharing
- c) Develop the offering through support for businesses to develop new menus
- d) Increase skills through formal training/qualifications, including developing a practical chef school in region, designed to keep graduates in the region

2) Increase the local provenance in our food and drink offering:

- a) Build awareness of local products through an audit of what products are already available and what production capacity there is, sharing this through digital listings and local taster events. We do not have to start from scratch but can build on:
 - the national food and drink supplier directory which will be launched in September
 - Sheena Horner's 400+ directory
 - Previous work collating information in the Scottish Borders
- b) Have an audit of which businesses are proudly using local ingredients and use this to promote those that are and target support for those that could be
- c) Increase motivation to use local produce through business case studies and peer sharing
- d) Establish distribution/logistics systems which allow local businesses to more easily and cost efficiently use local produce, perhaps through:
 - a digital platform with local aggregation and pick-up points
 - innovative partnerships with delivery vehicles already travelling in the area
 - a large-scale distribution centre in the region

3) Increase pride in our food and drink offering:

- a) Raise local awareness through 'Good food' sections in local papers/publications/radio/social media
- b) Raise staff awareness through training and tasting for all front of house staff, and 'meet the producer' evenings
- c) Raise customer awareness through information on menus, website and social media, and by entering local awards

4) Develop quality food and drink experiences:

- a) Identifying what food experiences are already available in the South of Scotland, promoting and supporting these, drawing learning from them and sharing, and developing as inspiration case studies.
- b) Researching innovative experiences outside the South of Scotland which businesses can learn and be inspired from.
- c) Offering tangible support for businesses to develop new and improved, online bookable, travel trade ready food and drink experiences.

5) Establish a reputation for the South of Scotland as a quality food and drink destination:

- a) Having inspiring visitor information by getting the 'Scotland Starts Here' branding visible across the region and used by all, with a strong food and drink message on the website and app, and all relevant businesses listed
- b) Building bookable products for foodies, including food tours and itineraries, a travel trade product, farm to fork experiences, linking to agritourism offering, etc
- c) Achieving media coverage through journalist visits and other active PR work, locally and nationally
- d) Achieving social media exposure through influencer visits and other active social media campaigns
- e) Achieving TV and film exposure by reaching out to production companies and offering active support when approached.

Next steps:

- **September – October:** get feedback on, fine tune and build consensus for these five objectives and the actions under them. Organisations to volunteer what areas they could take responsibility for, or have existing planned work in. SSDA to meet with key partners to explore options, with a specific focus on capacity.
- **23rd October, 10am:** Digital meeting to agree which organisations will lead with which objectives and finalise specific outcomes to be achieved in the next 12 months (by Oct 2025).
- **February 2025:** Digital meeting reviewing progress against outcomes and objectives, after four months.
- **June 2025:** Digital meeting reviewing progress against outcomes and objectives, after eight months.
- **October 2025:** Digital meeting reviewing progress against outcomes and objectives, after 12 months.