



Scottish Borders Council-funded Tourism Projects to be delivered by the SSDA

March 2025

Scottish Borders Council (SBC) has funded the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA) to advance nine key tourism priorities for SBC in the coming year. All nine projects, listed below are formal parts of the South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy.

The SSDA is working closely with key partners, including South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), VisitScotland, Dumfries and Galloway Council and others in advancing the below projects, as well as visitor economy businesses across the South of Scotland.

This is an update report for quarter one, summarising key developments April-June 2025.

Ref	Project	Responsible Tourism Strategy	Key outputs	Outcome	Key updates April-June 2025
1	Paths and trails	"Working collectively to develop and support our paths network" (pg39)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Walking, cycling and equestrian paths uploaded onto Scotland Starts Here with a dedicated interface, with full topographic and terrain details mapped.- Significantly improved digital discoverability, so this information is quick and easy to find.- Route information to be easily downloadable for offline access through the app, free of charge.- Path mapping information fully integrated with business listings information, so visitors can easily find where to stay, eat or buy something on a route.- Businesses across the Scottish Borders directly engaged in the development and delivery, with businesses able to propose local walks/cycles which drive spend to their business (e.g. a popular 2-hour walk ending at a local pub).	Scottish Borders businesses are better able to leverage the economic value of our natural capital, with visitors drawn to the area to walk or ride, then staying longer and spending more, and visitors able to easily find digital information to enable them to explore the SBC path network.	We have: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Undertaken a review of existing paths and trails content on Scotland Starts Here website and app and established priorities for improvement.- Met with relevant SBC officials and agreed key priorities for this period and set dates for quarterly meetings. SBC are drafting a paper which brings together all the key information about the different long distance routes, including where visitor information is available online. This will help inform next steps.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each popular route to have information about key attractions on route as well as key route-finding details (e.g. turn left at this tree). - Work with all existing maps, guidebooks and local leaflets, to reach agreement about including this information on Scotland Starts Here. - Support SBC in distributing their existing stock of printed maps to visitor economy businesses. - Create new webpages on SSH with signature recommended walking and cycling routes, with more detailed information about accessibility, what to see and businesses to visit on route. - Install small, long-life QR signs on key footpath posts and information boards in car parks, to raise awareness of the resource. - Give businesses physical marketing collateral, for them to signpost visitors to, with an easy-to-use QR code taking visitors directly to recommended local paths. - Deliver media and marketing engagement to raise public awareness of this resource, including recommended walking/cycling/riding itineraries linked to key businesses. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Run an five agency Tuesday afternoon meeting looking at paths and trails. - Fed into the SBC Active Travel Strategy consultation. - Developed a multi-agency partnership supporting the development of the Deep Time Trail on the Berwickshire Coast, to maximise economic benefit and lasting legacy from the James Hutton 2027 tercentenary: www.ssdalliance.com/destination-development/james-hutton-tercentenary/ - Set dates for the November Locally Led Destination Development meetings, which will be our key time for going out to businesses.
2	Public toilets	"Identifying locations where the provision of toilet facilities ... can be improved and work with partners and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A series of pilot studies delivered, capturing clear learning and evidence to inform a new approach to public toilets in the Scottish Borders. - This would include pilots in four different types of toilets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Council-run dedicated public toilets b) Community-run dedicated public toilets c) Publicly available toilets in public buildings (e.g. leisure centres, Live Borders etc) d) Publicly available toilets in private businesses (e.g. cafes, restaurants, etc) 	By March 2026 there is a clear plan which SBC can adopt such that, by March 2027 all major settlements and visitor locations in the Scottish Borders offer public toilets which are easy to find, accessible, clean and welcoming, while working within the economic	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submitted an expression of interest to the Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Fund 2025-26 which has been successful and we are confident will secure c£25k to support a major pilot in this area, to learn: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What digital payment technology is most cost effective, testing contactless payment, QR-

		to find locally-appropriate solutions.” (pg31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It would test both QR-based and contactless payment technologies, as well as a range of different messaging/sign designs to inspire people to donate. - There would be significant engagement and consultation of local businesses, local communities and it would be in partnership with existing town-level groups, including the Town Teams. - There would be close working with the relevant SBC teams and those who clean/maintain the existing toilets - There would also be desk research of case studies and learning both in Scotland and internationally. - There would be associated positive PR and public meetings hosted by the SSDA to show that SBC is thinking innovatively and strategically about how to tackle this problem while being honest about the financial constraints. - The end result would be a clear, evidenced proposal as to how SBC can manage a scalable, sustainable, fit for purpose public toilet network, within budget allocations. 	reality of reduced budgets.	<p>based systems and text message systems.</p> <p>2) What communication messages (signs on the doors/walls, social media messaging) are most effective in encouraging donations.</p> <p>3) What physical infrastructure, messaging and community partnerships most effectively discourage vandalism.</p> <p>4) What is the most cost-effective way of keeping toilets clean and safe for all.</p> <p>5) What is the best way of communicating to visitors and residents where public toilets are available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developed a formal partnership with Go Tweed Valley for the delivery of this work.
3	Public transport	“Tourism can only succeed where the right infrastructure is in place. For the South of Scotland, this includes: an	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with all the public transport providers in the Scottish Borders to create a one-stop-shop of digital information about public transport on Scotland Starts Here. This would include a digital, interactive route map showing all the different bus and rail routes, both as a map and a simplified graphic (like the London underground map). This would be the first time all this information is together in the same place. - It would include live, RSS embedded timetabling information, as well as links to the service provider website. 	A clear, coherent, easy to use public transport visitor offering, with more visitors using the rail and bus network, reducing the cost of service provision as a result and contributing to SBC’s net zero targets	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduced Go Tweed Valley to Borders Buses which has resulted in destination marketing videos now being played on busses from Edinburgh into the Scottish Borders - Started developing the new Scotland Starts Here public transport information pages.

		effective integrated public transport network (bus and rail)... (pg31)”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The mapping information would be linked to businesses on routes, so the user could filter for visitor attractions, accommodation, shopping etc on all the routes. - There would be a partnership with all the service providers such that they all promoted and linked to this webspace on Scotland Starts Here. - The SSDA would also work with businesses across the Scottish Borders to develop specific visitor-focused public transport itineraries and ensure businesses have up to date information on their websites about ‘how to get here by public transport’, including links to this SSH information webpage. - The SSDA would deliver dedicated PR to secure positive coverage across the region. - If additional funding included, this could also include a full branded Scotland Starts Here bus, to raise the profile of this information. 		
4	Brown Signs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A full review conducted of the Brown Signs across the Scottish Borders, profiling and prioritising them on their condition, accuracy and utility. - A detailed industry consultation conducted with Scottish Borders visitor economy businesses to get their input on the needs of businesses. - Close working with SBC, Transport Scotland, Bear Scotland, Visit Scotland and others to develop clear proposals as to what improvements are needed to existing Brown Signs and how Brown Signs in the Scottish Borders can be managed going forward in a sustainable way. 	Propose a clear solution for brown signs that delivers an equitable, efficient and effective Scottish Borders Council approach with consistent, accurate, high quality brown visitor signage across the region.	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Had a five partners Tuesday afternoon deep-dive meeting looking at the brown signs project, agreeing next steps.
5	Applying for an RTIF grant	“Applying for the Rural Tourism Infrastructur	- Support the development of an RTIF application from SBC for the April 2025 deadline which has strong industry support and advances the delivery of the Responsible Tourism Strategy.	An excellent RTIF application is submitted in April, securing £150k-950k of investment to	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-written the funding application for support to develop

		e Fund to take forward key priorities” (pg31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consult industry on their infrastructure priorities, to develop a proposal which serves clear need and addresses a known problem. - The SSDA would work closely with relevant SBC departments in supporting the development of the proposed work to ensuring it fits within existing work and priorities. - Similarly, the SSDA would work closely with DGC, SOSE and VS, to ensure the proposed work was consistent and complementary at a pan-South level and firmly embedded in the Responsible Tourism Strategy. 	support tourism infrastructure in the Scottish Borders.	the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set dates for the consultation of businesses at the Locally Led Destination Development meetings in November.
6	Common Ridings	“...establishing the South as the equestrian capital of the UK to attract high-spending visitors” (pg27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a clear, coordinated and inspiring visitor offering around the Scottish Borders’ Common Ridings. - Tourism development plans agreed both collectively and individually with all Common Ridings, which include specific details about what practical details will be shared to prospective visitors, where visitors will view from, where they can stay and how we maximise spend. - Build upon and learn from past projects in this space, including the Homecoming. - A dedicated Common Ridings one-stop-shop webspace created on Scotland Starts Here with detailed visitor information for all Common Ridings. - Dedicated PR, marketing and social media work to raise awareness of the Ridings and inspire more visitors to visit. - Strong partnership working with each of the towns and committees, to ensure all parties are confident that increased visitors are within infrastructure limits and do not dilute the authentic and historic local community experience. - Connections made to the travel trade, to develop a clear Common Ridings offering. 	The Common Ridings developed into a compelling visitor proposition which is inspiring, easy to engage and increases spend across a large number of local businesses from May to September.	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborated with the majority of Common Riding and Riding of the Marches committees to revitalise the Common Ridings presence on the Scotland Starts Here website. - Dedicated section within SSH main site navigation. - Individual festival pages, and tailored visitor information, with refreshed imagery, detailed descriptions of the key rideouts, and insider tips on the best viewing spots - Increased website traffic and growth in media and travel trade interest. - Working on 2026 festival dates

			- New images, video and social media content created for the Common Ridings as a collective resource.		
7	Big Houses	“History and Heritage:...Systematically identifying key growth hubs and developing stakeholder working groups for each, with agreed outcomes and clear timescales to develop the offering, inspire new bookable products and bring in new audiences” (pg 26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the Big Houses group to re-start, with regular meetings supported by the SSDA to agree a clear Scottish Borders Big Houses business development plan. - Big houses information on Scotland Starts Here is updated and refreshed, with inspiring new content. - Dedicated marketing and PR to push the big houses offer in the Scottish Borders. - If appetite with the businesses, to co-develop a joint promotion such as ‘visit two houses, get the third free’ which inspires visitors to stay longer and explore more. - With the businesses, develop fresh new marketing collateral (digital and print) promoting all the Scottish Borders’ big houses. 	To develop the Scottish Borders big house visitor offering, better leverage the heritage and history, attracting more visitors in and increasing spend.	We have decided that it is better to wait until after the busy summer period before advancing this work but the first meeting will be in the autumn.
8	Food and drink	“Actively supporting businesses to improve the quality of their food and drink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Scottish Borders B2B local food and drink directory created to support and encourage local visitor economy businesses to use, and celebrate, quality local ingredients. - A number of quality local food and drink products developed and promoted to the consumer, with new, fresh content on Scotland Starts Here celebrating the 	More local businesses use and celebrate local ingredients and consumers inspired to visit the Scottish Borders because of the local food and drink offering.	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supported and published nine major reports looking at how we get local food on local plates - Published a South of Scotland Food & Drink Toolkit

		<p>offering, with systems established to make it easier to use local ingredients and products” (pg 26)</p>	<p>‘Taste of the Scottish Borders’ with associated media and marketing work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This work would complement, dovetail and build on the SOSE-funded work in this area, currently in development, with a specific focus on the Scottish Borders. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Done an audit of food and drink experiences along the forthcoming River Tweed Trail
9	Connecting local tourism groups	<p>“Responsible tourism...has local ownership, community leadership, collaboration and partnership at its core” (pg9)</p> <p>“Identifying potential clusters – these could be locations, themes, activities, events – and work with businesses and communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bring together, coordinate and support the various local town-level groups, with formal partnerships of mutual support agreed with each of the local groups in Kelso, Selkirk, Jedburgh, Hawick, Eyemouth, Melrose, Peebles, Galashiels, Duns, Coldstream, Newcastleton and, as well as Go Tweed Valley and the Ale Valley. - Over 400 new businesses are added to the Scotland Starts Here website and app as a result of these partnerships. - Bi-annual meetings established which bring together all the town groups to listen to and support local priorities, and ensure each town is embedded in-and benefitting from- the SSDA and Scotland Starts Here. - Clear linking between Scotland Starts Here and local town-level websites and information sources. 	<p>Increased coordination and collaboration between efforts to support tourism at a town and regional level, with 400 new businesses benefiting as a result</p>	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Met with Visit Kelso and are scheduling a meeting with the full group to agree a formal partnership - Met with Go Tweed Valley and started partnerships and membership sharing - Met with Jedburgh Tourism Alliance and taken part in their litter pick - We are reaching out to all local town groups around our Borders Rail advocacy work.

		to develop a seasonal offer, where relevant maximising our natural capital” (pg22)			
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