

South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA)

Business Plan 2025-27

v1.3 4th July 2025



Introduction:

The South of Scotland's [Responsible Tourism Strategy](#) 2024-34 has unprecedented ambition for our destination, uniting all public and private organisations in one collective endeavour: to grow our visitor economy by £1bn and support 20,000 jobs. The South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA), with VisitScotland (VS), Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC), Scottish Borders Council (SBC) and South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), was key in the development of this strategy, having co-led the extensive consultation and engagement of hundreds of visitor economy businesses.

Having collectively invested considerable time developing this Strategy, and the associated [2024-27 Action Plan](#), we are now firmly in the *delivery* period. Collectively, the SSDA, VS, DGC, SBC and SOSE hold themselves accountable to delivery, publishing quarterly reports on the progress and impact achieved against this strategy.

As the official destination management and marketing organisation for the South of Scotland, all that the SSDA does in the coming years is clearly aligned to the delivery of the Responsible Tourism Strategy.

This document outlines the SSDA's Business Plans for 2025-27, structured clearly around the four strands of the Responsible Tourism Strategy, with a fifth strand around the SSDA's own organisational development.

This is a two-year Business Plan but with a mid-term review point, planned for April 2026. It should be read alongside the SSDA's Marketing Strategy and Income Diversification Strategy, which cover the same time period.

Taking time to articulate the 58 pieces of work the SSDA plans to deliver in this period, each as clearly delineated projects with a stated objective, approach and targets, has a number of advantages. It allows the SSDA to:

- Align all operations with a clear overarching strategic purpose;
- Maintain the SSDA's corporate culture as a strictly outcomes-focussed organisation;
- Share with members, funders and partners what we plan to achieve and how, inviting their active involvement;
- Clearly track impact as multiple projects move forwards;
- Empower staff by giving clear operational responsibility for individual projects, offering a high degree of autonomy and, with it, organisational efficiency;
- Hold ourselves publicly accountable.

The SSDA is proud to be a fast-moving, lightweight, responsive organisation which is quick to innovate. This efficiency of operation and speed of movement is key to our success.

It is inevitable therefore that as soon as this Business Plan is published it will start to become out of date. Events beyond our control will mean that some areas of work will become less important or unachievable, while other new opportunities will emerge which we should embrace. The SSDA staff team is tasked with delivering this Business Plan but is also asked to think innovatively, and at times laterally, about the best way of achieving the overall objectives of the Responsible Tourism Strategy. This will mean evolving what is in these pages.

With all humility, we recognise that, even with the clickable links on pages 5-6, few people will have the time or appetite to go through this 47-page document in detail. We therefore have an [online interactive Mind Map version of this Business Plan](#) which allows the viewer to see at a glance what we are setting out to achieve, clicking areas of interest to dig down to the detail. It is this online interactive version of this document which we will keep updated over the next two years with live information, such that anyone, anywhere can easily track how each project is progressing.

The SSDA commits to working with partners and Members both in the delivery of this Business Plan and in being transparent and accountable to changes in operational focus through this period. The SSDA's Board (themselves business leaders, elected by SSDA members and volunteering their time without remuneration) will help govern and oversee delivery of this Business Plan.

This is an exciting time for the South of Scotland's visitor economy. We look forward to working with Members and partners to deliver on the plans here detailed.

Together, if we sustain the collective will, we will deliver the agreed £1bn of economic growth supporting 20,000 jobs

David Hope-Jones OBE

Chief Executive

SSDA

Vicki Steel

Chair

SSDA



Funding and capacity:

The SSDA is grateful to SOSE for its continuing backing of the South of Scotland's visitor economy. A further two years of funding has been agreed, building on the 2020-25 grant, which is the principal funder of the work outlined in this document.

Without this SOSE funding it would be impossible to deliver on these plans and successfully deliver the Responsible Tourism Strategy.

The focus of the 2025-27 SOSE grant funding includes ten specific priority areas, which all 58 projects outlined in this Business Plan fall into one or more of:

1. Attracting higher spending visitors
2. Extending the season
3. South of Scotland Thistle Awards
4. Support any emerging tourism projects or initiatives
5. Food and drink tourism
6. Work with the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere and the Natural Capital Innovation Zone
7. Delivery of the Responsible Tourism Strategy
8. Promoting businesses through the *Scotland Starts Here* website
9. Engaging the International Agritourism Conference in 2026
10. Signposting to other support provided by other organisations

In addition, investment from Scottish Borders Council to help deliver nine named projects, a generous corporate sponsorship from Caledonia Park Designer Retail Outlet and membership income, will enable our on-going activity.

The SSDA is committed to supporting our members, supporting growth in the region's visitor economy and supporting the unique and strong partnership model we've established across the South. As we head into the work plan for 2025/26, we have undertaken an efficiency savings review of activity, supplier contracts and team capacity, prioritising the 58 areas outlined in this business plan as determined by the Responsible Tourism Strategy and needs of our membership.

Partnership and collaboration are at the very heart of all the SSDA does. We are proud to work very closely with our core partners of VS, SOSE, SBC and DGC. These partnerships, and this closeness of working, are a huge strength of the South of Scotland's visitor economy. Integrated within this Business Plan are the partners we are working with for each of the 58 projects listed. This is a collective, South of Scotland, effort.

PROJECTS

(Click link to go to that section)

		Project Lead					
		David Hope-Jones, CEO	Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager	Gowan Miller, Development Agent	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent	Morag Anderson, Finance & Travel Trade	Neen Kelly (PT), River Tweed Trail
STRAND ONE: Inspire visitors to come to the South of Scotland	Scotland Starts Here website		X				
	Scotland Starts Here app		X				
	Scotland Starts Here social media		X				
	Seasonality Marketing Campaign		X				
	Media and PR		X				
	Increasing international visitors	X	X				
	Inspiring the Travel Trade					X	
	Locally-led input to destination promotion		X	X	X		
	South West Coastal 300		X				
	Major international visitor proposition, Stranraer East Pier	X					
STRAND TWO: Develop the visitor experience, with a focus on quality	South of Scotland Thistle Awards				X		
	River Tweed Trail						X
	Flagship events				X		
	Equestrian			X			
	Common Ridings			X			
	Dark Skies			X			
	Paths and Trails	X		X			
	Public Toilets	X					
	Public transport	X					
	Immersive story-telling	X			X		
	Brown Signs	X			X		
	James Hutton Tercentenary	X					
	Big Houses	X			X		
	Food and drink				X		
	Literary Tourism				X		
	Fishing	X					
	Golf				X		
	Blue spaces / marine				X		
	Agritourism			X			
	Visitor Information			X	X		
	Scotland Starts Here visibility				X		
	7Stanes	X					

STRAND THREE: Support businesses to succeed	Annual Conference			X			
	Workforce Development	X					
	Center Parcs	X					
	Planning and licensing support	X					
	Advocacy	X					
	Data insights			X			
	Mediation and business engagement	X					
	Travel trade business training					X	
	Connecting together local tourism groups	X		X	X		
	Membership benefits					X	
	Connecting and signposting to other business support	X					
STRAND FOUR: Act responsibly for long-term collective benefit	Locally Led Destination Development	X		X	X		
	Responsible Tourism Infrastructure Fund	X					
	Natural capital investment	X					
	Inclusive and accessible travel			X			
	Cycling and active travel		X				
	Net Zero Support			X			
	Dog-friendly travel			X			
	Borders Rail Completion	X					
	Visitor Management	X					
STRAND FIVE: Organisational Development	Sustainable funding	X					
	Focus on outcomes and efficiency	X				X	
	Membership growth	X		X	X	X	
	B2B Social Media		X	X			
	Fair Work					X	
	Responsible Tourism Strategy delivery and reporting	X					



STRAND ONE: Inspire visitors to come to the South of Scotland:

Scotland Starts Here website:

Objective:	Maintain and develop the <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> website as the leading source of inspiration and information about the South of Scotland as a destination.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regularly review existing content and develop new content. - Focus growth in target markets (e.g. North America, seasonal visitors). - Increase <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> brand visibility in region. - Increase number of partners/members signposting to website. - Collect, and act on, user feedback.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	Double website views, from c.1 million in 2025 to c.2 million in 2027.
Staff lead:	Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager
RTS Ref:	1.1

Scotland Starts Here app:

Objective:	Maintain and develop the <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> app as the leading source of destination information for visitors within the region.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and promote new multi-media content for app, including audio tours. - Increase <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> brand visibility in region. - Increase number of partners/members signposting to app. - Collect, and act on, user feedback.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council
Target:	10% annual growth in app downloads
Staff lead:	Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager
RTS Ref:	1.1

Scotland Starts Here social media:

Objective:	Promote the South of Scotland as a leading UK destination to key target markets, by managing <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> (B2C) social media
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manage Discover South of Scotland Facebook (66k) - Manage Discover South of Scotland Instagram (10.2k) - Manage Scotland Starts Here YouTube - Manage South West Coastal Facebook (9.4k) - Manage Visit South West Scotland Instagram (6k) - Develop and share daily content across these platforms/accounts, tailored for maximum reach into target markets/segments. - Encourage and support businesses to engage and share social media content, for collective destination benefit. - Work with social media influencers to reach target markets.

In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall social media reach of 4 million - 2 influencer trips per year, with itineraries covering key regional USPs
Staff lead:	Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager
RTS Ref:	1.1

Seasonality Marketing Campaign:

Objective:	Deliver an annual marketing campaign promoting the South as a leading Scottish destination in the autumn, winter and spring, in order to extend the season and develop the region as a genuinely year-round destination.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Target the 14m within 2-4 hours drive of region to extend the season. - Key messages around: rural idyl, proximity and ease of visiting, authentic and local, slow and sustainable. - Use images which convey a sense of winter cosiness and warmth: feet up by the fire, warm woolly jumpers, whisky, winter food, laughing with friends, etc. - Actively engage businesses in the design and delivery of the campaign. - Social media destination promotion content to targets audiences/segments. - Pro-active PR/media campaign. - Blogs and other digital content. - Focus on key themes including: dark skies, Robert Burns, food and drink, winter walking, winter wellness (saunas, hot tubs, spas, etc), Spring farm experiences. - Link to key events, including: Stranraer Oyster Festival, Moffat Eagle Festival, Wigtown Book Festival, Wild Goose Festival, Monteviot Lights, Big Burns Supper, Curling Championships, Kirkcudbright Book Week, Borders Art Fair, Hawick Reivers Festival. - Advertorials and competitions, where budget allows. - Combine marketing activities with support for businesses to develop off-season product. - Where possible and appropriate, partner with organisations like VisitScotland, UNESCO Biosphere, DFDS Ferries, etc.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 million reach - 50k landing page visits - 70% of members engaged say SSDA has helped extend season
Staff lead:	Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager
RTS Ref:	1.2

Media and PR:

Objective:	Secure a constant drip feeding of positive media coverage, promoting the South of Scotland as a world class destination and amplifying key marketing messaging.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proactive PR and media pitching - Regular reactive PR, with live interviews, pre-recorded content, quotes on request etc. - Invite journalists and influencers into the region and manage their visits to gain positive coverage, advancing key messaging to target audiences - Maintain and develop media partnerships with: Explore South of Scotland, D&G Life, DGWGO, Reach, BBC, ITV Borders and others
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'To be continued...' (PR agency) - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 100 pieces of positive media coverage secured annually - Total, aggregated annual reach of 1bn
Staff lead:	Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager
RTS Ref:	1.1

Increasing international visitors:

Objective:	Increase the number of higher-spending international visitors to the South of Scotland, especially targeting the North American and European self-drive markets.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In Europe, focus on Germany, Netherlands and France, with key messages around: Scotland – but different (focus on South's USPs), quiet and underexplored, authentic and inspirational, sustainable and natural; leveraging UNESCO Biosphere. - In North America, build profile and positioning in US and Canada, with key messages around: ancestral home / personal connections, history and heritage, equestrian, country sports, variety of experiences, authentic and local; with a strong focus on travel trade. - Support businesses to build product to connect with these markets. - Build new product collaborations between businesses which have existing or potential international product/markets, to entice visitors to stay longer in the South of Scotland. - Develop marketing collaborations between businesses to maximise our reach into target international markets. - Strong focus on working with/through the travel trade, to build the South's international market share. - Build a network of contacts and advisers in the Scottish-US diaspora.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Travel Trade partners - US-Scotland diaspora - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	- Increase proportion of international visitors to SSH from 18% to 25% by 2027

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint international marketing reaching 1m+ in target audiences - 70% of members engaged say SSDA has helped increase international visitors
Staff lead:	[Marketing lead] - Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager [Strategy/product lead] – David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	1.5

Inspiring the Travel Trade:

Objective:	Promote the South of Scotland as an exciting, vibrant and fast-growing destination to the domestic and international travel trade.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Represent the South of Scotland at VisitScotland Connect - Represent the South of Scotland at British and Irish Marketplace trade fair (BIM) - Communicate general and specific product/experiences information to travel trade representatives via newsletters, email shots etc. - Work with travel trade operators to help construct itineraries for promotion. - Establish direct connections between the travel trade representatives and South of Scotland travel trade ready businesses. - Work in partnership with VisitScotland for ad-hoc marketing and participation such as familiarisation trips, representation at trade fairs.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Travel Trade partners
Target:	- Introduce at least 20 new travel trade operators to the South of Scotland
Staff lead:	Morag Anderson, Admin, Finances & Travel Trade
RTS Ref:	1.3

Locally-led input to destination promotion:

Objective:	Regularly engage businesses at a very local level across the South of Scotland, seeking their input and engagement, and offering a high degree of local ownership and influence over how their area is promoted on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> , to give an honest, local and authentic perspective.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Divide the South of Scotland into 14 geographical areas, with each area having its own distinct landing page, information and video on the <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> website. - Have twice-yearly Locally Led Destination Development meetings (alternating in-person and digital), in which businesses come together to review content on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> and give their input.
In partnership with:	- SSDA members
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 28 Locally Led Destination Development meetings a year in each - 300+ businesses attending Locally Led Destination Development meetings <i>[Note: it may be required to reduce frequency to annual due to budget/capacity reductions, in which case these numbers would be halved]</i>
Staff lead:	[LLDD meetings lead] - Sarah Macdonald and Gowan Miller, Development Agents [SSH content lead] - Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager
RTS Ref:	1.1 & 3.2

South West Coastal 300:

Objective:	Manage the South West Coastal 300 (SWC300) and promote to target markets as a responsible driving and cycling route.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with local businesses and communities to ensure the SWC300 is sustainably and responsibly managed, attracting higher spending visitors who travel slowly, with respect for local communities, within the infrastructure carrying capacity. - Manage the SWC300 website with inspiration to visit and visitor information. - Manage South West Coastal Facebook (9.4k) - Manage Visit South West Scotland Instagram (6k) - Develop, print and distribute physical maps of the SWC300. - Promote the SWC300 to the travel trade. - Provide information about responsible travel on the SWC300 to visitors. - Respond quickly and effectively to any concerns from local communities/businesses or any evidence of visitor management pressures. - Deliver PR and marketing campaign with VisitScotland promoting EV driving.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Local community - VisitScotland
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social media following increased to 18,000 - At least one mitigation made annually based on local community feedback to ensure the route continues to be locally appropriate
Staff lead:	Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager
RTS Ref:	1.1, 2.6 & 4.6

Major international visitor proposition, Stranraer East Pier:

Objective:	Develop, and secure all-agency support for, creating a game-changing national visitor attraction in Stranraer, telling the story of Scottish emigration to target high-spending North American visitors.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure all-agency support for de-industrialising the Stranraer waterfront by establishing an alternative location for lorry parking. - Establish formal commitment from all-agencies and key stakeholders that this is part of the long-term vision for the Stranraer waterfront. - Secure funding and support for the Feasibility Study, Outline Business Case and Full Business Case. - Build a network of high net worth supporters in the Scottish-US diaspora.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Stranraer Development Trust - Stranraer Town Team - Creative Stranraer - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Local MPs and MSPs - Stena Ferries - Scottish Government - VisitScotland
Target:	Full feasibility study completed and all agencies committed by 2027
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	1.5



STRAND TWO: Develop the visitor experience, with a focus on quality:

South of Scotland Thistle Awards:

Objective:	South of Scotland Thistle Awards celebrate outstanding achievements in the visitor economy, inspiring businesses and individuals to deliver exceptional products and services to visitors, raising the South of Scotland's profile with both industry and consumers.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Engage with exemplary businesses in the South of Scotland, encouraging and supporting them to take part in the awards.- Provide support and training to help businesses improve their visitor offering, increasing the number of quality applications and ensuring a strong South of Scotland presence at the national Scottish Thistle Awards.- Represent the South of Scotland on the national Industry Panel to deliver relevant aims and ambitions, providing a credible judging process that provides validation.- Raise the profile of the Thistle brand amongst consumers.- Have a clear and coherent theory of change, through which the South of Scotland Thistle Awards drives investment in quality.
Funding:	Specific funding is secured from event/category sponsors
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- VisitScotland- SSDA members- Dumfries and Galloway Council- Scottish Borders Council- South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)- Highlands and Islands Thistle Awards- Aberdeen City and Shire Thistle Awards- Green Tourism- Association for Cultural Enterprises- Scottish Licensed Trade Association
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Achieve 150 applications per year – each of a high quality and each year attracting new businesses to take part.- At least three finalists for each regional category.- Engage and collaborate with stakeholders/sponsors to ensure the South of Scotland Thistle Awards are profitable and self-sustaining (£14K) along with ticket sales of at least £6/7K
Staff lead:	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.1

River Tweed Trail:

Objective:	The strategic foundations of business awareness and engagement, product development and future marketing for the River Tweed Trail are in place, ensuring it has a significant, positive and sustained impact on the visitor economy when launched.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Increased business awareness of the River Tweed Trail.- Increased business engagement in the development of the River Tweed Trail.- Increased business readiness to maximise economic benefit of the River Tweed Trail.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of tangible new visitor products and services which will meaningfully contribute to the economic success of the River Tweed Trail when launched. - Input to the future consumer-facing marketing of the River Tweed Trail, when ready for launch.
Funding:	Specific funding secured for this project from the Shared Prosperity Fund.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members on/near the river Tweed - Destination Tweed - VisitScotland - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 80 businesses /enterprises receiving non-financial support. - 12 potential new enterprises assisted in development . - 8 businesses/enterprises adopting new or improved products or services. - 20 organisations engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support .
Staff lead:	Neen Kelly, River Tweed Trail Tourism Business Engagement Officer
RTS Ref:	2.7

Flagship events:

Objective:	Clear mutually-beneficial partnerships between the SSDA and the organisers of the top 50 events in the South of Scotland, which see <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> promoting events in return for events promoting <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> , encouraging those who come into the region for an event to stay longer, explore further and spend more.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify and reach out to the organisers of the top 50 events in the region, agreeing partnerships wherever possible including: monthly promotion of major events in consumer marketing – prioritising shoulder and winter events; ensuring a SSH presence at each event – either digital or physical collateral; encouraging reciprocal links to <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> through event websites, social media and confirmation emails. - In addition to the full events listings, which is free and open to all, have a dedicated section of <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> to promote these flagship events which have committed to sharing visitor information with those who attend. - Actively promote these events across social media and, where possible, in the media. - Work closely with the D&G Council and Scottish Borders Council Event’s officers to support the delivery of regional event strategies and feed into funding support.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisers of the top 50 largest events in the South of Scotland - VisitScotland - EventScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - Creative Scotland
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree formal relationships with 20 events in 2025 - Develop collaborations with 10 additional “warm events” to provide opportunity for formal agreements in 2026.
Staff lead:	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.4

Equestrian:

Objective:	The South of Scotland positioned as the UK's leading equestrian tourism destination.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a destination equestrian tourism asset register, assessing the current regional landscape and potential partnerships. - Key routes and trails published on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>. - Support businesses to access and map existing trails and with partners identify potential signage improvements. - Equestrian-suitable properties and suppliers featured on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>. - Develop strong brand identity for the region in the equestrian community. - Develop travel trade materials and business toolkits. - Deliver development workshops across the region. - Press and Influencer content positioning the region as an equestrian destination. - Develop the Common Ridings as a clear visitor offering (see separate section).
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - British Horse Society, Scotland - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - Sustrans
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10 riding routes available on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> - New image assets available - 30 new equestrian-related businesses on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.2

Common Ridings:

Objective:	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 each year.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a clear, coordinated and inspiring visitor offering around the Common Ridings. - Individually engage each of the organising committees for each Common Riding to bring together visitor information, ultimately having tourism development plans agreed for each, which include specific, practical details (where to view, when, where to stay, etc) to be shared with prospective visitors. - Build upon and learn from past projects in this space, including 'Return to the Ridings'. - A dedicated Common Ridings one-stop-shop webspace created on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> with detailed visitor information pages 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.

	- New images, video and social media content created for the Common Ridings as a collective resource.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common ridings organising committees - Local tourism groups - SSDA members - Scottish Borders Council - Travel Trade
Funding:	This project is included in a specific funding agreement with Scottish Borders Council and hence will have an initial focus in the Scottish Borders but we will look to emulate and scale this up to include Dumfries and Galloway as far as capacity and budget allows.
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overarching Common Ridings landing page live on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> in 2025. - At least six individual Common Ridings visitor information pages live on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> in 2025. - All Common Ridings have a visitor information page on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> by 2026.
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.2

Dark Skies:

Objective:	South of Scotland established as a leading Dark Skies destination, attracting visitors year-round through sustainable, nature-based tourism.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage, inform and support businesses to develop dark skies product and marketing. - Support the development of the Scottish Dark Skies Observatory at Clatteringshaws. - Develop a collective consumer-facing identity as the leading dark sky region in UK. - Partner with astronomers, guides, and educators to support events and story-telling. - Continue to develop our dark sky offering through business awareness and leveraging our existing international certifications and groups, with a recognised regional accreditation scheme. - Promote responsible tourism and protecting nocturnal wildlife through low-impact infrastructure - Collaborate with local businesses to offer stargazing-friendly accommodation, tours, and packages.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scottish Dark Skies Observatory - Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere - Dark Sky Network - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Forestry and Land Scotland
Target:	- Scottish Dark Skies Observatory opens in 2027, with at least 15 businesses within 30 miles offering a dark sky product
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	1.4 & 2.2

Paths and Trails:

Objective:	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 path networks.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Walking, cycling and equestrian paths uploaded onto <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> 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 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). - 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 <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>. - Support Scottish Borders Council in distributing their existing stock of printed maps to visitor economy businesses. - Create new webpages on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> 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.
Funding:	This project is included in a specific funding agreement with Scottish Borders Council and hence will have an initial focus in the Scottish Borders but we will look to emulate and scale this up to include Dumfries and Galloway as far as capacity and budget allows.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Local walking groups - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council (incl DG Trails) - Scottish Borders Council - Sustrans
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All relevant Scottish Borders paths and trails on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> by March 2026 - Ten key routes to have physical signage directing to <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>
Staff lead:	<p>[Project lead] Gowan Miller, Development Agent</p> <p>[Strategic lead] David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive</p>
RTS Ref:	2.6

Public Toilets:

Objective:	By 2026 there is a clear proposal, with proof of concept, as to how public toilets can be sustainably managed within reduced budgets.
Approach:	<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 South of Scotland. - This will 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) - It will test both QR-based and contactless payment technologies, as well as a range of different messaging/sign designs to inspire people to donate. - Significant engagement and consultation of local businesses, local communities and it would be in partnership with existing town-level groups, including the Town Teams. - Close working with the relevant Council teams and those who clean/maintain the existing toilets. - Desk research of case studies and learning both in Scotland and internationally. - 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 Councils can manage a scalable, sustainable, fit for purpose public toilet network, within budget allocations.
Funding:	This project is included in a specific funding agreement with Scottish Borders Council and hence will have an initial focus in the Scottish Borders but we will look to emulate and scale this up to include Dumfries and Galloway as far as capacity and budget allows.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Go Tweed Valley and other local groups - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council
Target:	- Proposal, with clear evidence base, submitted by 2026 to Councils.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.6

Public transport:

Objective:	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 net zero targets
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with public transport providers to create a one-stop-shop of digital information about public transport on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>. This will 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 will be the first time all this information is together in the same place.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It will include live, RSS embedded timetabling information, as well as links to the service provider website. - The mapping information will be linked to businesses on routes, so the user could filter for visitor attractions, accommodation, shopping etc on all the routes. - There will be a partnership with all the service providers such that they all promoted and linked to this webspace on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>. - Work with businesses 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. - Work with businesses, supporting them to add the Traveline live public transport information widget to their websites, so visitors have easy access to up-to-date public transport information. - Deliver dedicated PR to secure positive coverage across the region. - If additional funding secured, this could also include a full branded <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> bus, to raise the profile of this information.
Funding:	This project is included in a specific funding agreement with Scottish Borders Council and hence will have an initial focus in the Scottish Borders but we will look to emulate and scale this up to include Dumfries and Galloway as far as capacity and budget allows.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transport operators - SSDA members - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - VisitScotland - Transport Scotland - SEStran - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transport landing page/information hub on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> live by March 2026. - At least two public transport itineraries live and promoted 0by March 2026. - At least 15 businesses have added the Traveline public transport widget on their website.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.6 & 4.2

Immersive story-telling:

Objective:	Stories around the South of Scotland's unique history and heritage are available for visitors to enjoy in inspiring and immersive ways, encouraging more people to visit the destination.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop new immersive audio tours in the South of Scotland, including for Burns Tourism in Dumfries and also to mark the James Hutton Tercentenary at Siccar Point. - Develop an affordable process for the development of significant numbers of new high-quality immersive audio tours across the South of Scotland. - Explore new augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) possibilities, including with GeoTourist.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the continued success of the Trimontium VR experience and develop opportunities to share this learning and emulate this approach at key locations elsewhere in the South of Scotland. - Support Trimontium to develop the interpretation boards at Newstead, with an immersive element. - Work with Center Parcs to develop a Heritage Hub in their new holiday village with 360 degrees, immersive projections, telling the story of the Scottish Borders' unique heritage.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Trimontium museum - Burns tourism businesses - James Hutton Institute - Visit Berwickshire Coast - GeoTourist - Center Parcs - VisitScotland
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two new audio tours launched in 2025/26 - Development plan published for the significant expansion of immersive story-telling across the South of Scotland.
Staff lead:	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.2

Brown Signs:

Objective:	Both councils supported to undertake a full audit of all (c3,000) brown signs in the South of Scotland, with clear industry-led recommendations as to how these can be updated and new, sustainable systems established for their ongoing management.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A full review conducted of the Brown Signs across the South of Scotland, profiling and prioritising them on their condition, accuracy and utility. - A detailed industry consultation conducted by the SSDA of visitor economy businesses to get their input on the needs of businesses. - Close working with both councils, Transport Scotland, Bear Scotland, VisitScotland and others to develop clear proposals as to what improvements are needed to existing brown signs and how brown signs can be managed going forward (i.e. the application and decision-making process) in a sustainable way.
Funding:	This project is included in a specific funding agreement with Scottish Borders Council and hence will have an initial focus in the Scottish Borders but we will look to emulate and scale this up to include Dumfries and Galloway as far as capacity and budget allows.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - VisitScotland - Transport Scotland - BEAR Scotland - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full South of Scotland brown signs audit by March 2026 - At least 30 businesses fed into developing recommendations. - Recommendations and formal report published by March 2026

Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.6

James Hutton Tercentenary:

Objective:	The South of Scotland the centre of celebrations around the 300 th anniversary of James Hutton's birth, marking his lasting impact on geological sciences and farming techniques, and leveraging this to build visitor offering and attract key higher-spending markets.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitate the coordinated cross-agency planning around the tercentenary. - Support the development of the Deep Time Trail, to Siccar Point on the Berwickshire Coast, with a clear and compelling visitor offering. - Develop immersive audio (and if budget secured Augmented Reality) story -telling as part of the Deep Time Trail. - Create dedicated visitor information landing page on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> to mark the anniversary and secure positive media coverage. - Work with others to use this story to inspire higher-spending north American visitors to the South of Scotland.
Funding:	The development of the Siccar Point path requires further fundraising.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - James Hutton Institute - Geo-walks - Scottish Borders Council - Edinburgh Geological Society - Scottish Borders Council - Paxton House - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	- Deep Time Trail open in time for the tercentenary (June 2026), with immersive storytelling.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.2 and 1.5

Big Houses:

Objective:	To support the South of Scotland's major 'big house' heritage attractions to regularly come together, developing new collaborations and joint-working, offering a well-coordinated visitor offering which leverages the destination's unique heritage and history, attracting more visitors (especially in key target markets) and increasing spend.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the Scottish Borders Big Houses group to re-start, with regular meetings supported by the SSDA to agree a clear Big Houses business development plan. - Bring key Dumfries and Galloway attractions, such as Drumlanrig Castle, into this group to create a South of Scotland approach. - Big houses information on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> is updated and refreshed, with inspiring new content. - Dedicated marketing and PR to push the big houses offer in the Scottish Borders.
Funding:	This project is included in a specific funding agreement with Scottish Borders Council and hence will have an initial focus in the Scottish Borders but we will look

	to emulate and scale this up to include Dumfries and Galloway as far as capacity and budget allows.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - South of Scotland heritage attractions - Historic Houses - National Trust Scotland - Historic Environment Scotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council, - Scottish Borders Council,
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Big Houses group regularly meeting by 2025. - Big Houses business development plan published by 2026
Staff lead:	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.2

Food and drink:

Objective:	The South of Scotland develops a reputation as a 'foodie destination', celebrating quality food and drink of local provenance, and supporting local businesses to connect with local suppliers and producers.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete a full South of Scotland Landscape Assessment report and food and drink toolkit with clear recommendations about how this can be further supported. - Disseminate the recently produced F&D Toolkit. - Agree next steps for the South of Scotland Landscape Assessment report with appropriate funding sourced. - Support the recommended key outcomes of the SOS Local Food Growth Plan.
Funding:	<p>This project received SOSE/SG project funding in Q1 2025 to deliver the mapping exercise and we are waiting to hear back about possible further funding to deliver the proposals.</p> <p>There has also been some project support from Scottish Borders Council to assist with this continuing work.</p>
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Food and drink producers and suppliers - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - Abundant Borders - Galloway Food Hub - Food & Drink Scotland - Propagate - Scottish Agritourism - Food from Farming - JR Events F&D Bookables - Stranraer Oyster Festival and other food festivals - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council
Target:	Secure funding to deliver on the South of Scotland Local Food Growth Plan.
Staff lead:	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.2

Literary Tourism:

Objective:	The South of Scotland established as the leading Scottish literary destination, with particular emphasis on the strong links to the internationally recognised Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott, as well as two award-winning book festivals and many outstanding independent book shops.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliver on the 15-point Sept 2024- Sept 2025 Burns Tourism Action Plan, including the development of a recognised Burns itinerary, a Travel Trade product and an audio guide, and hand this work over to local businesses and other core partners for delivery to be sustained. - Reengage members of the Literary Heartlands project and explore the opportunities and interest to develop a literary experience for the South of Scotland. - Develop an independent bookseller's Book Trail that celebrates the regions literary links and experiences. - Provide advisory role for the Tweed Valley Words trail map - Continue to include <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> marketing including social media, press and influencers. - Revisit the Literary database and see where opportunities lie to create a tool useful for businesses.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SMP members - Ellisland Farm - Globe Inn - Burns House - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Ettrick Valley businesses - Abbotsford - Go Tweed Valley
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 80% of objectives in the Burns Tourism Action Plan achieved or underway - Clear next step for literary tourism by end of 2025
Staff lead:	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.2

Fishing:

Objective:	Provide clear, coordinated, one-stop-shop visitor information relating to fishing on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> which inspires more people to visit the South of Scotland, and which local businesses connect to, to strengthen their visitor offering.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build strategic relationships with all key organisations relating to fishing in the South of Scotland, developing formal partnership agreements where appropriate, for the promotion of these activities to visitors. - Collate accurate information about fishing opportunities in the South of Scotland and, through relationships with key organisations, establish systems to ensure these remain up to date. - Establish <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> as the most complete and user-friendly single online source of information about all forms of fishing in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. - Develop marketing materials and actively promote fishing and golf, signposting to these new web-hubs on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>.

In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Local angling associations - FishPal - Fish Wild - River Tweed Commission - River Tweed Foundation - VisitScotland
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publish significantly updated fishing and golf sections of <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> before the end of 2025 - Establish formal relationships with key stakeholders in 2025. - Engage at least 20 businesses, supporting them to share more information about local fishing offerings.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.2

Golf:

Objective:	Provide clear, coordinated, one-stop-shop visitor information relating to golf on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> which inspires more people to visit the South of Scotland, and which local businesses connect to, to strengthen their visitor offering.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build strategic relationships with all key organisations relating to golf in the South of Scotland, developing formal partnership agreements where appropriate, for the promotion of these activities to visitors. - Collate accurate information about golf opportunities in the South of Scotland and, through relationships with key organisations, establish systems to ensure these remain up to date. - Explore the potential of joint-ticketing and making it easier for visitors to take part in these activities locally. - Develop marketing materials and actively promote golf, signposting to these new web-hubs on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - South of Scotland Golfers Association - Golf courses - Accommodation businesses with significant numbers of golfing guests
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Publish significantly updated golf sections of <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> before the end of 2025 - Establish formal relationships with key stakeholders in 2025. - Engage at least 20 businesses, supporting them to share more information about local golf offerings.
Staff lead:	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.2

Blue spaces / marine:

Objective:	The South of Scotland's significant coastline and globally-renowned rivers (including the Tweed, Nith and Annan) are developed as visitor opportunities bringing in target markets, with water-based activities a key part of the South's offering.
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Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage with partners to develop a collaborative approach across the South, supporting the sharing of best practice and developing opportunities for collaborative marketing approaches where appropriate. - Meet and agree support for the Three Rivers Active Tourism Project, specifically Annan Harbour Project and Peebles Chamber Institute. - Work with Stranraer Marina in preparation of its imminent completion. - Actively oppose the industrial use of the Stranraer waterfront as a lorry park. - Approach Solway Firth Partnership to see where support can be provided to fulfil funding requirements for the successful Investment in Nature application. - Support the ongoing marketing of the Tweed Canoe trail. - Provide the lead to develop consumer experiences linked with the River Tweed Project. - Develop a formal partnership with Tweed Commission/Foundation.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Visit Berwickshire Coast - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - Scottish Borders Council - Solway Firth Partnership - Tweed Forum - Tweed Commission & Foundation - Stranraer Development Trust - Nature Scot
Target:	- Clear approach agreed, with related <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> content live, by 2026
Staff lead:	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.2 & 4.1

Agritourism:

Objective:	South of Scotland established as one of the leading agritourism destinations in Scotland.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a strong regional agritourism brand linked to local food, landscapes and heritage. - Promote authentic, seasonal experiences that connect visitors to working rural life. - Support farms and land managers to diversify into visitor experiences - Connect in with the regions food & drink producers - Support the World Agritourism conference in 2026 with FAM trips in the South of Scotland. - Build further partnerships with Scottish Agritourism / <i>Go Rural</i> around the SSDA's seasonality campaign. - Develop a strong agritourism travel trade offering - Work with travel media looking for unique, year-round story-rich itineraries - Increase year-round visitor offering through agritourism offerings
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scottish Agritourism / <i>Go Rural</i> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)
Target:	South of Scotland seen as one of the leading destinations by the time of the World Agritourism Conference in May 2026
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.2

Visitor Information:

Objective:	All existing community/business-run visitor information centres in the South of Scotland are actively engaged in and signposting to <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> , so all visitor information is connected, coherent and coordinated.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build partnerships with existing community/business-run visitor information centres, so they signpost to <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>. - Increase <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> visibility in all information centres with printed collateral/posters/pop-ups – explore funding to have an interactive screen in all centres linking to the <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> website. - Develop a South of Scotland visitor information map which is available both digitally and physically and, if successful, explore producing 14 additional maps for each of the 14 areas of the South of Scotland. - As part of the Brown Signs review, audit all signs pointing to visitor information centres and ensure these are accurate and up to date.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All existing visitor information centres in the South of Scotland - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - By end of 2025, partnerships agreed with existing community/business-run visitor information centres, with <i>Scotland Stars Here</i> promoted in all. - By end of 2025, South of Scotland visitor information map produced. - By end of 2026, 14 additional local area visitor information maps produced (if funding secured).
Staff lead:	[Visitor Information Centres] - Gowan Miller, Development Agent [Maps] - Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.3

Scotland Starts Here visibility:

Objective:	<i>Scotland Starts Here</i> , as the South of Scotland's destination brand, is visible across the region, with public agencies and private businesses all signposting to the website and app for visitor information, with increased consumer awareness.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnerships with the two local authorities to have <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> road signs on entry points to the region. - Partnerships with the two local authorities to have <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> signs on public buildings with a visitor offering. - Commercial partnership with Caledonia Park Designer Retail Park, promoting <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> visitor information.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members encouraged and supported to display <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> promotion both physically at their business and on their website/booking information. - Explore partnership with the two local authorities for funding to wrap empty shopfronts at key locations with <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> branding.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - VisitScotland - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	- 300 opportunities to view <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> branding, directing to website/app, in strategic locations.
Staff lead:	Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.3

7Stanes:

Objective:	Facilitate Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) business engagement, as part of the 7Stanes master-planning for Dalbeattie and Newcastleton, such that they can progress past the Official Business Case stage and these trails are developed as lasting, high-quality assets which demonstrably support the visitor economy.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a formal, funded partnership with FLS in which the SSDA leads in supporting their local businesses engagement. - Actively consult and engage businesses, both digitally and in-person, within 30 miles of Dalbeattie and Newcastleton. - Demonstrably influence the development of the Outline Business Case (OBC) and Full Business Case (FBC), based on the priorities and needs of local visitor economy businesses. - Ensure FLS secures funding to complete this work.
Funding:	The SSDA is exploring a funded partnership with FLS over this work.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Forestry and Land Scotland - SSDA members - VisitScotland
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 30 businesses feed into the development of the masterplans. - At least ten key businesses are named partners, publicly supporting this investment. - At least three clear areas where the master plan has been influenced by business input. - FLS proceeds past OBC and FBC
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.6 & 4.1



STRAND THREE: Support businesses to succeed:

Annual Conference:

Objective:	SSDA hosts an annual conference in the early spring which is the most significant event in the South of Scotland visitor economy calendar, bringing together c200 key businesses from across the region, supporting shared learning, building collaborations and energising and inspiring business leaders.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Keep the day inspiring, interactive and genuinely useful for business.- Location of conference to alternate between Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway.- Secure inspiring, quirky speakers who can attract wider press and socials coverage.- Consult businesses five months before the conference asking what they want to get from the day, to ensure it is meeting specific needs and focuses on the key issues for businesses.
Funding:	Specific funding is secured from event sponsors
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SSDA members- Sponsors- South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)- VisitScotland- Dumfries and Galloway Council- Scottish Borders Council
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 200+ businesses attending.- 80%+ of attendees say it was a quality, well delivered event.- 70%+ of attendees say it has strengthened their business.
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	3.1

Workforce Development:

Objective:	<p>Visitor economy businesses are consulted and a programme of activity is designed and delivered which directly addresses the key workforce challenges identified by businesses, with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- increased awareness and desirability of careers in the visitor economy.- Those facing barriers to employment receiving specific targeting and enhanced support.- Hospitality and tourism further education courses more directly linked to industry, with strengthened employability and graduates equipped with the skills, experience and insights needed to enter the visitor economy.- Increased coordination and collaboration between the public and private sector across all employability work, with increased collective impact as a result.- Businesses able to recruit, retain and support staff.- Scottish Borders Center Parcs embedded within the existing visitor economy.- Businesses able to easily fill local vacancies, with a pipeline of high-quality candidates equipped with the skills and confidence needed to succeed.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Establish a one-stop shop digital employability hub, broadly emulating Cumbria's successful Tourism Talent Hub, in partnership with 50+ named businesses, with:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Career pathways information, inspiring people to join the sector. - Information about the visitor economy as inclusive, welcoming and accessible to all. - Specific information about additional support available. - Live job vacancies listings in the South of Scotland visitor economy. - A digital employability support interface for those interested in the sector/looking for work to be matched to training and employment. - Inspiring, diverse case studies of people working in the visitor economy. - Information about vocational training and support and qualifications. - Information and resources for employers. <p>- Public outreach campaign delivered across print media, radio and social media, with activity and outreach in secondary schools, to build a positive narrative around the visitor economy.</p> <p>- Deliver a freely available intensive, interactive, in-person, industry-led one-day employability customer services training course with 1-5 star grading for all who take part.</p> <p>- Deliver packages of digital support for continuing professional development.</p> <p>- Develop an enhanced support package for those experiencing barriers to employment.</p> <p>- Develop a promotional video advertising this training and development.</p> <p>- Industry Working Group established, bringing together colleges and industry, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - give input to the design of relevant courses qualifications; - improve quantity and quality of work placements and apprenticeships; - maximise employment opportunities at the completion of courses. <p>- With SOSE and other partners, look to bring the South of Scotland into the successful Hospitality Apprenticeship Scotland programme.</p> <p>- With SOSE and other partners, explore developing the first Scottish Hospitality Skills Passport pilot in the South of Scotland.</p> <p>- South of Scotland Visitor Economy Employability Forum established.</p> <p>- Webinars, training, information and support given to visitor economy businesses to help them recruit, retain and support the workforce they need.</p> <p>- Specific partnership established with Center Parcs UK.</p> <p>- 40+ key employers in the South of Scotland involved in designing the employability customer services training and are partners of the programme.</p> <p>- Those who receive 'Outstanding' or 'Very good' customer service rating are given industry endorsement of customer excellence and supported into employment.</p> <p>- Deliver a package of enhanced post-training support and information.</p> <p>- Provide regular newsletters and check-ins with those who complete the course.</p>
Funding:	<p>This is a specific project which is <u>reliant on additional funding</u>. The SSDA has applied to the Scottish Borders Local Employability Partnership and will do the same in Dumfries and Galloway.</p>
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Borders College - Dumfries and Galloway College - Skills Development Scotland - Developing Young Workforce (DYW) - Springboard UK - University of Glasgow - Effective Now - Scottish Borders Local Employability Partnership - Dumfries and Galloway Local Employability Partnership

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 50+ key visitor economy businesses engaged in the development and delivery of the hub and clearly listed as project partners. - Digital employability hub receives 30,000+ visitors. - 80+ job vacancies listed, with 1,000+ views by job seekers. - 150 people registered on the employability support interface. - 8 case studies viewed by 2,000+ people. - 5+ print media features with a total reach of 2 million. - 120+ people taking part in the employability support interface, 40% barriers to employment. - 240+ opportunity and check-in emails sent with a 30%+ open rate. - Ten courses delivered, attended by 120 people, of which at least 50% will be experiencing barriers to employment. - 75% of those who complete the training say that it helped improve their confidence and customer service skills. - Promotion for this employability training has a total social media reach of 100,000. - Ten key businesses joining this Industry Working Group, which meets twice-yearly. - At least two new/improved courses/programmes developed at the two colleges, with strong industry input through this group. - 2,000+ views on the web-hub pages giving information about further education opportunities. - 50% increase in the quality and quantity of work placements. - 30% increase in the quality and quantity of apprenticeships. - Ten key, representative businesses and all relevant public agencies joined the Visitor Economy Employability Forum which meets twice yearly, with 80%+ of participants stating that this represents a demonstrable step forwards in terms of coordination, collaboration and impact. - 11 engagements with industry, with a mix of in-person and digital, attended by 150+ businesses, with 80% of those giving feedback saying they are better able to recruit, retain and support their workforce as a result. - Formal partnership signed with Center Parcs with at least two check-in meetings assessing progress.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	3.3

Center Parcs:

Objective:	The proposed Center Parcs holiday village in the Scottish Borders is supported with the SSDA playing a key role in helping ensure it nests well within the existing South of Scotland visitor economy eco-system; maximising the number of local businesses and communities which benefit from this investment, maintaining high levels of public support and minimising possible disruption and displacement for businesses.
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Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuing to consult local visitor economy businesses, asking about their priorities and any concerns they have, and responding quickly to these. - Continuing make the positive case for Center Parcs in the media, in line with the majority view of local SSDA members. - Agree a goodwill partnership between Center Parcs UK and the SSDA, of mutual benefit. - Develop a destination marketing partnership which would see at least one email communication sent to those who have booked to stay at Center Parcs in the Scottish Borders, encouraging guests to explore the wider area before or after their stay at Center Parcs, under the <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> destination brand. The SSDA would be able to regularly adjust the content of the communication to profile different areas and hence help spread visitors around the destination. - Develop a Heritage and Nature Hub within the new Center Parcs which informs guests about the local areas and inspires them to explore more widely or return to the area, signposting to the official <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> website and app for wider visitor information. - Exploring possible information and inspiration about the local area inside the cabins. This could be a conventional information pack, an inspiring Scottish Borders coffee table book, information on CPTV, a QR code to <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> visitor information, pictures on the walls of the local area, or even augmented reality immersive story-telling about the destination. - Maximising the number of local suppliers and food and drink of local provenance: using these to help tell guests the story of the Scottish Borders and the South of Scotland and sharing information externally about the scale of local suppliers to articulate the local economic benefit. - Working with the SSDA and others to make the positive case for the completion of the Borders Railway, through Hawick and on to Carlisle, as part of Center Parcs' commitment to Net Zero. - Being actively involved in all-agency coordination work to develop the visitor workforce, sharing early information about recruitment plans and working collaboratively as a sector to collectively address skills gaps, inspire more people into the visitor economy, and minimise workforce displacement. Key to this is using the scale and immense positivity around the Center Parcs investment to build an inspiring public narrative around tourism as an exciting growth sector, inspiring more people into the visitor economy and reassuring existing businesses that Center Parcs will not be recruiting from their existing staff.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CenterParcs - Local SSDA Members - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - Scottish Borders Council - VisitScotland
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Center Parcs secures planning permission by Q1 2026 - SSDA-Center Parcs goodwill agreement signed by Q1 2026. - £400m investment by 2029 opening
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.7, 2.1 & 2.5

Planning and licensing support:

Objective:	Planning and licensing applications which will strengthen the South of Scotland visitor economy in sensitive and sustainable ways, are actively supported by the SSDA, with the SSDA also able to feed into improvements in how planning and licensing decisions are made.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate planning and licensing applications are actively supported by the SSDA. - Planning and licensing applications which would weaken the visitor economy are actively opposed by the SSDA. - Work closely with Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Borders Council, as the industry liaison partner, to support and strengthen systems for: planning applications, short term lets license applications and enforcement, self-catering non-domestic rates assessments, etc. - Relationships and processes developed for a more systematic, timely and scalable approach to planning decision-making, so it is easier for the two councils to see if/how planning applications do/do not fit within the agreed Responsible Tourism Strategy.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5+ key planning applications actively supported / opposed by the SSDA a year, in line with the Responsible Tourism Strategy. - Demonstrable, fair and strategic influence over the processes for licensing and planning, in line with the Responsible Tourism Strategy.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.5 & 3.2

Advocacy:

Objective:	The views of visitor economy businesses on key issues are effectively represented by the SSDA, with coherent and impactful advocacy work.
Approach:	<p>SSDA to consult members (formally or informally) to inform its advocacy work on key issues including, <i>inter alia</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potholes and other road works - Cross Border Pylons - A708 timber transport - Visitor levy - Renewable energy infrastructure (wind, solar, battery storage, etc) - Forestry and Land Scotland post-storm trail maintenance - Non-Domestic Rates review - Short-term lets
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - VisitScotland
Target:	- Demonstrable evidence of influence.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	3.2

Data insights:

Objective:	Visitor economy businesses are able to access, understand and act on key business insight data, to support and develop their business.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Work with Councils to support the timely sharing of annual STEAM data, with this publicly available.- Explore opportunities and integration of new AI technology.- Be an active part of Scottish Tourism Data Partnership, with the South of Scotland as a possible pilot area.- Upload all publicly available visitor economy data onto the SSDA's data insights webpage, so it is freely available.- Develop partnerships with businesses such as Key Data, to explore and share new types of data.- Support members to access, understand and act on data.- Develop innovative ways of aggregating meta-data, including on visitor feedback, to understand key issues, target areas for investment, and track progress in strengthening the quality of our destination's offering.- Regular insights sharing sessions with VisitScotland data leads.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SSDA members- VisitScotland- Dumfries and Galloway Council- Scottish Borders Council- South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)- Key Data- GTS UK (STEAM Data)- Trip Advisor
Target:	- STEAM data published every autumn.
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	3.4

Mediation and business engagement:

Objective:	The SSDA plays a key role in resolving significant issues in the visitor economy by leading mediation work.
Approach:	<p>As need requires, the SSDA is brought in as the official industry representative for the South of Scotland to mediate key issues and support business engagement, as it has with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Purchase of Clatteringshaws for Scottish Dark Skies Observatory- Tour of Borders Road Closures- River Tweed Trail business engagement- Workforce development
Funding:	Going forwards, this would need to be done on a full cost recovery basis.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Relevant organisations- SSDA members- Dumfries and Galloway Council- Scottish Borders Council- South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)- VisitScotland- EventScotland
Target:	N/A, need-led

Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	3.1

Travel trade business training:

Objective:	Increased numbers of South of Scotland visitor economy businesses are travel trade ready and benefitting from the industry.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliver short, inspiring taster sessions for businesses to make them aware of the potential that working with the travel trade offers. - Deliver formal training and ongoing support for businesses to become travel trade ready. - Offer travel trade knowledge updates on an individual basis to businesses. - Help all trained businesses to become visible on the travel trade directory hosted on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> website. - Ensure all travel trade trained businesses' information is sent to the relevant travel trade operators. - Work in collaboration with VisitScotland, D&G Council and SB Council to ensure training, advice and exposure for South of Scotland businesses.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train 20 businesses per year, taking them from a beginner/intermediate level to become fully travel trade ready. - All SSDA Member businesses already engaged with the travel trade, offered advice and guidance to enhance their travel trade product or experience.
Staff lead:	Morag Anderson, Admin, Finances & Travel Trade
RTS Ref:	1.3

Connecting together local tourism groups:

Objective:	All local tourism groups in the South of Scotland have a partnership with, and are supported by, the SSDA - supporting coherent and coordinated destination management and marketing and a range of scales, while celebrating and supporting local drive and leadership.
Approach:	<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 – for example, in the Scottish Borders: 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 <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> 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 <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>. - Clear linking between <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> and local town-level websites and information sources.
Funding:	This project is included in a specific funding agreement with Scottish Borders Council and hence will have an initial focus in the Scottish Borders but we will look

	to emulate and scale this up to include Dumfries and Galloway as far as capacity and budget allows.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local tourism groups - SSDA members
Target:	- Partnership agreements with all groups by Q1 2026
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	3.1 & 1.1

Membership Benefits:

Objective:	South of Scotland tourism and hospitality businesses benefit from discounted products and services as part of their SSDA membership.
Approach:	<p>Develop and promote member services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Howden Insurance – free consultation and revision of insurance, with potential discounts on any new policy. - RAW (EV) Charging - free EV charging units for those members who qualify, with a sustained revenue source for businesses. - ASSC - discount on ASSC membership for all SSDA members - Supplier discounts – a variety of discount opportunities for businesses for supplies relevant to tourism and hospitality.
Target	50+ members benefitting from discounted products and services.
Staff lead:	Morag Anderson, Admin, Finances & Travel Trade
RTS Ref:	3.1 & 3.2

Connecting and signposting to other business support:

Objective:	All information, training and support relevant to visitor economy businesses is coordinated, integrated and coherent; with the SSDA making it easy for businesses to find the support they are after, whichever organisation provides it.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a one-stop shop webpage on the (B2B) SSDA website, with clear and easy access information from all providers. - Ensure all training, information and support providers are aware of all others' work, to reduce duplication of effort. - Regularly signpost businesses to other organisations' activities and support.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Business Gateway - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - Scottish Borders Chamber of Commerce - Dumfries and Galloway Chamber of Commerce - Skills Development Scotland - Developing the young Workforce (DYW) - Scottish Government
Target:	- Signposting webpage live by the end of 2025
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	3.1 & 3.2



STRAND FOUR: Act responsibly for long-term collective benefit

Locally Led Destination Development:

Objective:	Establish strong, sustained local engagement and local ownership of the <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> brand, and a bottom-up, community-sensitive approach to tourism, through regular Locally Led Destination Development (LLDD) meetings bringing together local businesses to discuss local priorities and how they want their local area promoted.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Divide the south of Scotland up into 14 areas which each have their own landing page, content and video on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>.- Meet twice yearly with each of the LLDDs, alternating in-person and digital.- Have open time in these meetings to listen to the priorities and concerns of local businesses and be alert and responsive to potential hotspots or other visitor management issues.- Publicly share minutes from each meeting and report back on what has been achieved against what was agreed at the last meeting.- Brief partner agencies on the key issues being heard on a local level, for maximum impact.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SSDA members
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 28 Locally Led Destination Development meetings a year- 300+ businesses attending Locally Led Destination Development meetings <i>[Note: it may be required to reduce frequency to annual due to budget/capacity reductions, in which case these numbers would be halved]</i>
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	3.1, 3.2 & 4.3

Responsible Tourism Infrastructure Fund:

Objective:	Both the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway secure significant funding from the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) to address specific visitor management pinch points in the South of Scotland.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Secure funding for Scottish Borders Council from the Scottish Government for the development of a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan (which is required to secure RTIF funds).- Consult industry on infrastructure development priorities for the Scottish Borders, for inclusion in the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan.- Co-author the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan for the Scottish Borders.- Support Scottish Borders Council to make an RTIF application which has strong industry support and advances the delivery of the Responsible Tourism Strategy.- Separately, support Dumfries and Galloway council's 2025 RTIF application for funding for coastal car parks [Note: DGC already has a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan, which allows faster progression].

In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scottish Borders Council - Dumfries and Galloway Council - SSDA members - VisitScotland - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Funding:	This project is included in a specific funding agreement with Scottish Borders Council and hence will have an initial focus in the Scottish Borders but we will look to emulate and scale this up to include Dumfries and Galloway as far as capacity and budget allows.
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At least 30 businesses feed into the Scottish Borders Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan - Scottish Borders Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan published by March 2026. - Dumfries and Galloway Council secure RTIF funding in 2025. - Scottish Borders Council secure RTIF funding in 2025.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.6 & 4.5

Natural capital investment:

Objective:	A clear, compelling, coherent and coordinated ask of the Scottish Government for additional support for the South of Scotland, in the context of the rejected Galloway National Park, which brings new investment in support of responsible tourism, visitor management and the preservation of natural capital.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a clear set of asks of the Scottish Government and move quickly to make this case of the Cabinet Secretary, linking directly to what was heard (from both sides) through the NatureScot-led consultation. - Make this public ask of the Scottish Government, with a strong focus on investing in responsible visitor management. - Work closely with GSAB to increase information about the UNESCO biosphere on <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> (and vice versa), with a fully integrated business plan to ensure no duplication of effort.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere (GSAB) - Scottish Government - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - NatureScot
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear asks of SG during summer of 2025 - UNESCO Biosphere information fully updated on Scotland Starts Here by October 2025
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	1.4 & 4.1

Inclusive and accessible travel:

Objective:	South of Scotland positioned as a welcoming, accessible, and inclusive destination for all visitors, in line with the Responsible Tourism Strategy.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlight inclusive experiences in marketing and storytelling, using lived experience voices. - Encourage and support investment in accessibility infrastructure which benefits all, from ramps to quiet spaces. - A regional toolkit and training programme to support businesses in becoming more accessible.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Euan's Guide - Partners in Access - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An increase in bookable, promoted accessible experiences across accommodation, attractions, and activities. - A strengthened reputation for inclusion, reflected in visitor feedback, case studies, and campaign reach.
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	4.4

Cycling and active travel:

Objective:	Support the collective 'Team South' effort to make the South of Scotland a leading cycling destination.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be an active part of the South of Scotland's Cycling Partnership, supporting with marketing and other activities which relate to the South of Scotland. Specifically supporting, <i>inter alia</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UCI Cycle region accolade - Securing major national and international cycling events - Support for other key events, including: Tour of the Borders, Gralloch UCI Series and Raiders Gravel - Master-planning for the 7Stanes - Continued promotion and support of the Kirkpatrick C2C as well as other routes
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) - VisitScotland - Galloway Cycling Holidays - British Cycling - Tour of the Borders - Raiders Gravel - Gralloch UCI World Series - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - SEstrans
Target:	Three major cycling events, with international reach, promoted by the SSDA a year.
Staff lead:	Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager
RTS Ref:	2.2

Net Zero Support:

Objective:	Visitor economy businesses supported to make tangible steps as part of the collective move towards net zero.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Engage with partner agencies to collate information about existing support, advice and information on offer.- Signpost to this support and only where there is both demonstrable needs and high confidence it is not duplicating others' support, would the SSDA develop its own training and support.- Disseminate the SSDA/SOSE Net Zero Toolkit
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SSDA members- VisitScotland- South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)- Dumfries and Galloway Council- Scottish Borders Council- UNESCO Biosphere- Green Tourism
Target:	N/A – as need requires.
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	4.2

Dog-friendly travel:

Objective:	Businesses supported and the South of Scotland positioned as a leading dog-friendly destination, encouraging year-round travel from pet-owning visitors.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Map and promote dog-friendly accommodation, attractions, hospitality, and outdoor spaces.- Provide resources and training to help businesses confidently welcome dogs and owners.- Develop themed itineraries, trails, and events focused on dog-inclusive travel.- Collaborate with pet brands, influencers, and tourism partners for marketing reach.- A guide to dog-friendly experiences published on Scotland Starts Here.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SSDA members- VisitScotland
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- An increase in pet friendly badges adopted by businesses across the region.- Increased off-season visits from pet-owning households, as part of seasonality campaign
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent
RTS Ref:	2.1 & 2.5

Borders Rail Completion:

Objective:	The SSDA uses its influence and leverage to help secure political and financial support for the completion of the Borders Railway to Carlisle by, with others, making the positive case for the benefit to the visitor economy.
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Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use the tenth anniversary of the existing line (Sept 2025) to help tell the story of the positive impact the line has had on the visitor economy and to make public and political case for completing the line to Carlisle. - Work with Center Parcs to make the positive case as to the economic and environmental benefits of continuing to Hawick, given the £400m Center Parcs investment which will attract hundreds of thousands of new visitors to the area. - Look to secure all-party manifesto commitments for the May Holyrood election.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Campaign for Scottish Borders Rail - SSDA members - Scottish Borders Council - Local MPs and MSPs - Center Parcs - VisitScotland - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear SSDA role in the tenth anniversary of the existing line. - Partnership with Center Parcs. - Political commitments in the May 2026 Holyrood election to completing the line.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	2.6

Visitor Management:

Objective:	Visitor management issues are quickly identified through systems to listen to businesses and community representatives at a local level, with the SSDA flagging issues with partner agencies and co-designing efficient, effective and timely mitigations.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Twice yearly Locally Led Destination Development meetings, to listen to local businesses, asking about any hot spots or local issues and discussing what interventions would be most locally appropriate. - Responding quickly and effectively to all concerns raised by the public with the SSDA, meeting with the individuals wherever possible to really understand the nature of the concerns and what mitigations would help. - Sharing issues with the four partner agencies (SBC, DGC, SOSE, VS) in weekly Tuesday afternoon meetings. - Integrating issues identified locally into the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans for each council and, where appropriate, supporting Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) applications to address these issues. - Specific focus on the South West Coastal 300 driving route, ensuring we have collectively learned all possible lessons from the NC500 and that this route continues to be welcomed by local communities and businesses, making changes to the route as required and ensuring we always promote responsible and slow travel on the route.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - VisitScotland - Dumfries and Galloway Council - Scottish Borders Council - South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	N/A – needs-led work.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	4.5

STRAND FIVE: Organisational Development:

Sustainable funding:

Objective:	Develop a genuinely sustainable funding model for the SSDA as the official destination management and marketing organisation to ensure the South of Scotland delivers on the Responsible Tourism Strategy.
Approach:	Board and CEO Income Generation Working Group which meets weekly, developing nine possible sources of income: (i) SOSE funding for delivery of Responsible Tourism Strategy (ii) Other public sector funding, including from Councils (iii) Membership income (iv) Corporate sponsorship (v) Event sponsorship (vi) Commercial partnership (vii) Commercialisation (viii) Renewable energy partnerships (ix) Visitor levy
In partnership with:	- SSDA members - SSDA supporters, sponsors and partners - Commercial partners
Target:	By November 2025 the SSDA has a clear sustainable funding plan.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	3.1

Focus on outcomes and efficiency:

Objective:	SSDA able to operate at a reduced budget by ensuring that all internal systems and processes are as efficient, economical and effective as possible, with a constant, strict focus on outcomes and delivery.
Approach:	- Review and revise all internal systems on an annual basis. - Review and revise, if necessary, all supplier contracts and agreements on an annual basis with the aim to reduce costs. - Continue to have a strictly outcomes focused organisational culture, rather than a process focus. - Regularly report to partners, members and the public on what we have <i>achieved</i> , to maintain this culture. - Make clear to external partners the SSDA does not have spare capacity to sit on groups which do not directly lead to tangible outcomes which drive the visitor economy. - Empower all staff to deliver on the objectives they are responsible for and support them to make appropriate decisions about how best to use their time to best achieve measurable results.
Target:	Increased efficiency of operation.
Staff lead:	[Outcomes-focus culture] David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive [Processes] Morag Anderson, Admin, Finances & Travel Trade
RTS Ref:	3.1

Membership growth:

Objective:	SSDA membership continues to grow, with the SSDA the largest destination management and marketing organisation in Scotland, and with increasing financial contributions from SSDA Members.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the visibility of the SSDA and <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>. - Be clear about the work the SSDA does, the efficiency of its operation and the impact it has: highlighting how it is demonstrably delivering against businesses' priorities. - Continue to offer free 'Basic' membership but make clear the significant, and cost-effective, benefits of paid membership. - Strengthen the member value proposition of enhanced (Partner or Bespoke) membership.
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Membership to exceed 1,000 before June 2027. - Annual 15% growth in membership income.
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent Sarah Macdonald, Development Agent Morag Anderson, Admin, Finances & Travel Trade David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	3.1

B2B Social Media:

Objective:	The SSDA is seen by industry as an essential network to be a part of - delivering remarkable impact for investment and supporting a destination brand, <i>Scotland Starts Here</i> , owned by all and benefitting all.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A fun, dynamic and engaging tone to B2B communications which businesses identify with and want to be involved in and associated with. - Share relevant opportunities, insights, and success stories that support business growth. - Promote regional campaigns (e.g. <i>Scotland Starts Here</i>) and how businesses can get involved. - Celebrate local businesses, partnerships, and innovation within the visitor economy. - Align messaging with seasonal priorities, national campaigns, and funding windows. - A monthly content calendar delivering consistent, high-quality posts across LinkedIn and Facebook
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SSDA members - Visit Scotland - Scottish Borders Council - D&G Council - SOSE
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased business engagement rates, measured through shares, saves, and click-throughs. - Stronger awareness of SSDA services and more businesses accessing support, resources, or membership.
Staff lead:	Gowan Miller, Development Agent Vanessa Wegstein, Marketing Manager
RTS Ref:	3.1 & 3.2

Fair Work:

Objective:	The SSDA continues to operate as a Fair Work employer.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Maintain Fair Work credentials.- Ensure all staff are respected, supported and listened to.- Regularly track, and act on, staff satisfaction levels.- Pay the living wage. SSDA is registered with the Living Wage Foundation.- Support staff through challenging times by offering appropriate, family-friendly flexibility.
Target:	Maintain Fair Work credentials
Staff lead:	Morag Anderson, Admin, Finances & Travel Trade
RTS Ref:	3.3

Responsible Tourism Strategy delivery and reporting:

Objective:	The Responsible Tourism Strategy is advanced as planned and its 2024-27 Action Plan is delivered in full.
Approach:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ensure SSDA Business Plan is clearly aligned to Responsible Tourism Strategy.- Hold the SSDA and partner agencies accountable for delivery of the Strategy.- SSDA CEO to meet relevant heads of VS, SOSE, SBC and DGC each week, to drive forwards delivery of the Action Plan- Co-author quarterly update reports to publicly share what has been achieved that quarter against the Strategy.- Co-author annual reports with clear Red, Amber, Green ratings for all 22 action areas, agreed with all partner agencies, to track Strategy delivery.- Sit on the Regional Economic Partnership and, where appropriate, attend the Convention of the South of Scotland, to ensure there remains all-agency commitment to delivering the Responsible Tourism Strategy, that that this strategy in turn fits into the Regional Economic Strategy.
In partnership with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- SSDA members- VisitScotland- Dumfries and Galloway Council- Scottish Borders Council- South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE)
Target:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Weekly Five Partner meetings.- Quarterly public Impact Reports.- Annual reports with Red, Amber, Green trackers.- Triennial independently conducted assessment of progress made.
Staff lead:	David Hope-Jones, Chief Executive
RTS Ref:	All