



Responsible Tourism Strategy Quarterly Actions and Progress Report #7 October-November 2025

Introduction:

Following a year-long consultation, the all-agency South of Scotland's [Responsible Tourism Strategy](#) was launched on the 20th March 2024 at the SSDA's Annual Conference. Of the c200 businesses attending the launch: 97% said they supported the strategy (84% 'strongly' support). In other feedback at the end of the consultation process, 95% of business respondents said they saw themselves involved in the delivery of the strategy and 97% said they saw themselves benefiting from the strategy.

It is the collective responsibility of the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA), VisitScotland (VS), South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), Scottish Borders Council (SBC), Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC), and all in the South of Scotland, to deliver on this strategy: increasing our visitor economy by £1bn and supporting a further 6,000 jobs. To succeed, this strategy must be owned and delivered by every visitor economy business and community in the South of Scotland. It is our *collective* ambition. We therefore invite every businesses to get involved in the delivery: [joining the SSDA as members](#), being listed on the 'Scotland Starts Here' [website](#) and [app](#) (our consumer-facing brand), and actively being involved.

The SSDA, VS, SOSE, DGC and SBC can serve an enabling role, establishing the pre-conditions for success, but it is businesses themselves who will ultimately deliver the economic growth we collectively seek. And so we look to support, and get behind businesses, to really deliver on our ambition.

The Strategy has been endorsed by both the Regional Economic Partnership and the Convention of the South of Scotland, and hence it is also owned by, and will be supported by, a wider cast of public agencies including Historic Environment Scotland, Scotland Food & Drink, Forestry and Land Scotland, and the Scottish Government.

At the same time as the Strategy was launched, the first three-year [Action Plan](#) was published, with 122 actions across the four strands of the strategy; each with one or more lead agency responsible for delivery and a clear description of where we want to be by 2027.

We have committed to publishing brief quarterly progress reports for the next ten years, as well as more detailed annual reports and externally produced triennial reports, to ensure we continue to be transparent and accountable for delivering on the unprecedented ambition we have set for the South of Scotland's visitor economy.

This is the seventh quarterly report, covering October to December 2025 – [this and all previous reports can be read here](#). It gives a flavour of some of what we have done in the last three months to advance the strategy but is not exhaustive. We aim to keep these quarterly reports as brief as possible, to maximise the readership. Many of the topics from our first two quarterly reports are, of course, also included here as we continue to push forwards these projects.

[CLICK HERE](#) for further live info about the c60 projects the SSDA is delivering.

Delivery systems and progress tracking:

The five agencies (SSDA, VS, SOSE, DGC & SBC) have established systems to push forwards delivery of the Action Plan in a coordinated and coherent way. The responsible officers from these five organisations meet every week for two hours: the first hour is spent deep diving into a specific area of strategy delivery, often with key external agencies or other partners in attendance, the second hour is sharing key updates for that week. In this way, we ensure a high degree of collaboration and partnership working, as well as holding ourselves accountable for the delivery of all sections of the strategy.

Areas of delivery in this quarter included:

STRAND 1: Inspire Visitors to come to the South of Scotland

Seasonality marketing campaign [Ref: Action 1.1.i]:

The SSDA is running a further Seasonality marketing campaign for 2025/26. The campaign again includes a variety of marketing activities, including paid social media, new web content, press and PR. For 2025, the SSDA will adjust campaign planning and creative to align with learning from the 2024-25 campaign, as well as input from partners on previous campaign outcomes.

Businesses have been supported to get involved by: (1) feeding into the design of the campaign, (2) sharing the content, and (3) being inspired by the campaign to develop their off-season offering.

Two years into running seasonality promotions, the SSDA is seeing increased interest businesses in getting involved, with the two seasonal short break competitions receiving over 10,000 entries.

The campaign will also once again see a collaborative and partnership element, with plans still in discussion with VisitScotland and potential publishing partners.

Six 25-second video reels have been developed to target domestic markets within 2-4hrs drive of the South of Scotland. They juxtapose busy, stressed, urban, screen-based life with the South of Scotland's offering as a rural escape. They are unashamedly sensory and emotional: rather than aiming to reference lots of individual businesses, they sell the South as a destination for a seasonal escape which offers wellness and mindfulness.

[The videos can be previewed here](#)

So far, the 2025/2026 campaign is on track to deliver against its KPIs:

- Between October and December 2025, the campaign delivered just over 39,970 visits to Scotland Starts Here, against a goal of 45,000 visits for the entire campaign runtime.
- Out of these, 6,300 visits were to the seasonal competition, resulting in just under 3,000 competition entries. Despite this being lower than the goal of 5,000 entries, a new content structure and promotional approach resulted in higher quality entries overall, with almost no spam entries.

The campaign also once again saw a collaborative and partnership element, with Reach Media (Daily Record and Newcastle Chronicle), for winter as well as spring activity, with influencer and press visits now being planned for spring 2026.

Marketing Plan [Ref: Action 1.1.i]:

The SSDA has worked closely with VisitScotland to closely align and collaboratively develop the new marketing plan for the South of Scotland until 2027. This combines the learning and insights of both organisations, to help refine messaging about the South of Scotland to key audiences, and set out specific actions to:

- Increase top-of-mind awareness and visibility of the South of Scotland as a year-round rural holiday destination to domestic target audiences.
- Position the South of Scotland as a holiday destination of choice for key international markets with high growth potential
- Align activities and planning closely to national as well as local strategic partners, insights and trends

In this period key marketing work built on the increased interest in the SWC300, aligning with ongoing marketing themes by VisitScotland. The SSDA organising a press visit for the SWC300 with journalist Nick Harding writing for Practical Motorhome as well as Campervan Magazine.

The SSDA also worked closely with D&G Council to promote the newly launched Rhins Coast Path. Travel Writer Sarah Baxter was commissioned by 4 outlets, including [the Guardian](#) and The Telegraph to walk the new route. For the itinerary, the SSDA showcased the outdoors as well as key development areas in the Rhins – watersports in Stranraer, Biosphere experiences, nature and wildlife conservation, as well as key attractions.

The SSDA also put increased emphasis on public transport travel, celebrating the anniversary of the Borders Railway with the launch of new [train and bus itineraries](#). This was a direct result of discussions with transport providers in the region and VisitScotland to mark the anniversary of the route by using the Borders Explorer Ticket.

Further content was also developed with future opportunities for expansion being investigated on screen tourism: The SSDA and VisitScotland collaborated on press and media announcements for The Buccaneers, with dedicated film location content being developed on both Scotland Starts Here and the VisitScotland website.

Media and PR [Ref: Action 1.1.i]:

From October to December 2025, the SSDA had over 14 pieces of positive destination coverage in the media, reaching an estimated audience of 775 million. See sample coverage for [October](#), [November](#) and [December](#).

‘Scotland Starts Here’ visibility [Ref: Action 1.1.iv & 2.3.iv]:

The strategy partners have engaged with Transport Scotland around visitor signage across the South of Scotland and the opportunities for higher visibility of “Scotland Starts Here” branding at key access points. Both local authorities continue to explore options to progress activity further.

A total of 24 “Welcome to” signs have been approved to be upgraded by Dumfries and Galloway Council to include Scotland Starts Here branding. Priority will be given to signs on A and B class roads, with an estimated budget of £50,000 in the first half of the new financial year.

This matches earlier work by SBC with Scotland Starts Here on eight key entry points.

The SSDA is continuing a partnership with Caledonia Retail Park in Gretna (2.4m footfall), with empty units vinyl-wrapped in ‘Scotland Starts Here’ branding. We will track the number of QR code scans and, if successful, we will look at rolling this out in empty shopfronts across the region.

Sustained long-term financial commitment [Ref: Action 1.1.v]

A SOSE funding agreement has been reached for the SSDA for the year 2026-27 and there is active work underway to develop a sustainable model for post-2027.

Destination Tweed Project (Ref: Action Plan 1.2.iv & 1.5.iv):

The Shared Prosperity funded Tourism Business Engagement role continues. During this period work continued to engage with businesses to raise awareness and provide support to ensure businesses are ready.

A business engagement workshop in Moffat in October was well attended and explored what it means to be a trailhead town. At the other end of the trail, engagement continued with Berwick Town Council, the Chamber of Trade and Visit Berwick to raise awareness in the town and this resulted in a successful business engagement event with the Chamber of Trade in November. Also, in Berwick a new philanthropic Lions House Fund was launched with a specific focus on supporting activity around the River Tweed Trail. Businesses and start ups were also encouraged to apply for the First Tracks business incubator programme run by SOSE and DMBinS. In addition, businesses were supported to attend SSDA's travel trade workshops to assist businesses with travel distribution, specifically working with tour operators and online travel agents. The more businesses that are travel trade ready helps when taking the River Tweed Trail to tour operators.

The experiences and services along the trail were mapped to highlight what exists and what the opportunities are, and this will feed into encouraging the development of visitor experiences and the curation of itineraries for visitors.

Support was provided to Destination Tweed regarding the Tweed Stories project and the appointment of a consultant to develop an archive by encouraging residents and businesses along the trail to share their stories.

The Tourism Business Engagement role, embedded in SSDA, is funded until March 2026 and discussions are underway to explore next steps from April onwards.

Developing the region as a year-round destination [Ref: Action 1.2.iv]:

VisitScotland is partnering with Metro (part of the Mail Metro Media Group) to target its UK audience across its various publications and channels. An interactive map included in the Metro activity is an exciting feature that helps VisitScotland shine a spotlight on lesser-known regions. Users are able to filter and save their favourites, based on whether they want to enjoy foodie, adventure or relaxing experiences and craft their own personalised itineraries for their escape to Scotland. [Visit Scotland | Metro](#) Businesses featured include Galloway Activity Centre, Kitchen Coos and Ewes, The Spa at Cairndale Hotel, Globe Inn, Dumfries, Loch Arthur, Camphill, 7 Stanes, Glentress, The Spa at Schloss Roxburghe, Great Tapestry of Scotland, Borders Distillery and Cocoa Black.

VisitScotland social media metrics for the South of Scotland for the period are as follows –

- 6.94m Impressions
- 292.64k Engagements
- 1.74m Video Views
- 16.07k Saves

Developing a programme of support for businesses [Ref: Action 1.3.i]:

VisitScotland's "Scotland's New Experiences" event is a low-cost, entry-level workshop that connects Scottish suppliers, who are new to working

with travel trade, with Destination Management Companies (DMCs) who can help them access and sell to international markets. South of Scotland businesses participating in the recent events in December 2025 included Moffat Distillery and Dumfries Tours

VisitScotland ran travel distribution workshops in both Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway. Sessions attended by 15 participants provided businesses the latest insight on developing bookable experiences, working with travel trade and digital platform management.

Inspire the travel trade to the potential of the region (Ref : Action 1.3.i)

The SSDA delivered a programme for businesses support, comprising travel trade training, 1:1 bespoke support, and funding opportunities to help them promote to the travel trade.

The SSDA also conducted a travel trade training workshop in October for businesses in Dumfries and Galloway wishing to engage with the travel trade. Each business participated in a full-day session as a cohort of 10 and will subsequently have an individual session with White Stag Tourism to refine the product and experience for the production of the Travel Trade Tech Pack.

It has also supported 4 businesses with the revision of their travel trade offering.

Travel Trade representation [Ref: Action 1.3.iii]:

The SSDA prepared to attend January/February travel trade shows by reviewing presentations, documents and information for the follow-up with travel trade representatives.

VisitScotland Connect [Ref: Action 1.3.iv]

VisitScotland opened registration for [VisitScotland Connect 2026](#); their flagship travel-trade event, arrives in Glasgow on Wednesday 15 – Thursday

16 April 2026. Both SSDA and VisitScotland are working with businesses in region to encourage participation. Alongside the event there will be supported familiarisation trips into the region.

Leverage our credentials and designations – engaging with media [Ref: Action 1.4.1]:

VisitScotland supported 2 group press trips attended by 12 North American, European and Australian media – interests included screen tourism, LGBTQ travel, textiles and Robert Burns country)

VisitScotland regular communication bundles to 2000+global media contacts included focus on South of Scotland Thistle Award winners, Dumfries & Galloway as a Dark Skies Destination, Burns Night/Big Burns Supper and the Sam Heughan Galloway Distillery investment.

Coverage highlights include –

- Canada - Pink Ticket Travel — online coverage highlighting the Scottish Borders as a welcoming, friendly rural destination for LGBTQ travellers, shining a spotlight on local businesses including The Wedale Bookshop, Borderlands Food Tours and Alchemy Film & Arts . VisitScotland hosted press trip. <https://pintickettravel.com/2026/01/07/scottish-borders-lgbtq-travel/>
- UK – The Guardian - featuring Dumfries & Galloway, specifically showcasing the Rhins of Galloway Walking Route as a result of VisitScotland-hosted press trip [Hiking an unruly but beautiful new coast path in south-west Scotland | Scotland holidays | The Guardian](#)
- UK – The Telegraph - spotlighting the Scottish Borders as an October Half-Term holiday destination, featuring Forest Holidays. [The 15 best October half term holiday destinations | Telegraph Travel](#)
- France - We hosted a press visit in October from *Le Figaro Grands Reportages*, who travelled to the Scottish Borders and Edinburgh to research the history of tartan. This resulted in a beautifully illustrated

10-page feature published in November (print and online):
<https://www.lefigaro.fr/voyages/inspiration/voyage-d-automne-en-ecosse-au-fil-du-tartan-20251107>

- Germany - • *Reisereporter.de* — Dumfries & Galloway included in a round-up of hidden gem UK locations, with mentions of stargazing in Galloway Forest Park, hiking at Grey Mare's Tail, Kirkcudbright and Robert Burns links: [Urlaub in Großbritannien: Zu diesen Geheimtipps reisen die Einheimischen](#)
 - *Rheinische Post* — Scottish Borders featured as part of a wider touring piece (DFDS Amsterdam–Newcastle), including Borders Abbeys, Scott's View, Floors Castle. Appeared in print and online across regional titles: [Schottland erleben: Auf eigene Faust in die Highlands](#)

James Hutton Tercentenary [Ref: Action 1.4.ii]:

The SSDA has developed a partnership with the James Hutton Institute, Edinburgh Geological Society (EGS), Scottish Geology Trust (SGT), GeoWalks, Scottish Borders Council (SBC), South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), and VisitScotland, to [work together to support the James Hutton Tercentenary in June 2026 to maximise lasting benefit to the South of Scotland visitor economy](#).

SSDA supported and promoted the James Hutton Crowdfunder to members and contacts and we are delighted that it is now fully funded beyond its original target and exciting new links have been made with the Geographical Society of America

By June 2026 we collectively aim to have:

- 1) A 'Deep Time Trail' to Siccar Point, with appropriate parking, signage and safe access.
- 2) A high-quality visitor offering with inspiring, immersive interpretation across physical signs and audio/digital story-telling.

- 3) Coordinated and impactful marketing which inspires people to visit Berwickshire, encouraging and supporting them to stay in the South of Scotland, exploring further and spending more.

Use of designation to pilot new ways of responsible business practice [Ref: Action1.4.3]

The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere features on recent episodes of the long-running BBC Radio Scotland show, *Out of Doors*. VisitScotland Working in collaboration with the Biosphere, approached the programme in the wake of the evaluation report on the success of Scotland's UNESCO Trail. Between 31% and 46% of visitors stated Scotland's UNESCO Trail was an important factor in their decision to visit a UNESCO site.

[Listen to the 29 November 2025 episode of Scotland Outdoors.](#)

[Listen to the 6 December 2025 episode of Scotland Outdoors.](#)

Scottish Dark Skies Observatory [Ref: Action 1.4.iv]:

The SSDA continues to support the development of the Scottish Dark Skies Observatory (SDSO) at Clatteringshaws in the Heart of the Galloway Forest Park. The SDSO have now submitted their planning permission, with new architects plans and the SSDA and DGC Tourism Officer have sent a letter of support with that application.

North American Market Building [Ref: Action 1.5.i]:

Addition to Product development: Work is underway with a number of key businesses in the region to develop a collaborative genealogy products to target the North American markets

The SSDA continues to coordinate work to increase the North American market, with five main areas of activity and joint working:

- 1) Destination marketing partnership: Have a coordinated and collaborative approach to reaching target audiences in North America, building on existing learning/activity, with a clear,

cohesive and compelling message about the South of Scotland which inspires increased booking.

- 2) Ancestry, history and heritage:** Have a coordinated approach to increasing genealogy tourism, providing information, itineraries, content and signposting to reach out to the Scottish-US diaspora with a clear product and a warm, welcoming messaging, inspiring them to 'come home' and rediscover their clan homelands.
- 3) Travel trade:** Engage, inform and inspire the international inbound travel trade, offering clear, bookable, long-range product which they can adopt, tailor and sell.
- 4) Product development:** Strengthen the South of Scotland's product/offering, in line with the priorities and expectations of the North American market, addressing the current gaps and issues in the destination.
- 5) Link to existing SSDA/SSH content and planned work:** Ensure that visitor economy businesses with a North American market are actively involved in the SSDA/*Scotland Starts Here* and are benefitting from the activity, content and support available.

There are exciting new media partnerships underway, with a major lifestyle journalist from the Hamptons visiting the region in Feb/March and National Geographic visiting in the summer to write a feature on the Common Ridings.

Galloway Distillery and Sam Heughan Partnership [Ref: Action 1.5.i]:

The SSDA and SOSE worked to secure the significant financial investment of Outlander actor, Sam Heughan: purchasing the Crafty Distillery to create the Galloway Distillery.

Proudly Dumfries and Galloway born and bred, Sam is absolutely committed to supporting community prosperity and economic regeneration in his home region.

With the establishment of a [Brand Home](#) for the hugely successful Sassenach brand and the acquisition of the local brand Hills & Harbour (where the Sassenach Gin was produced), Sam and his team will significantly develop and expand the visitor offering over the coming 12-14 months, such that it becomes a signature attraction for the South of Scotland with strong global interest.

[The SSDA has a strong working partnership with Sam](#) and his business partner Alex, and they are absolutely committed to using Sam's global profile to promote [Scotland Starts Here](#), including through a major US media tour early in 2026.

As a destination we will have use of significant media assets to help maximise the wider economic benefit of Sam's investment, associating the South of Scotland as the home of the [Sassenach brand](#). We are starting to put more [Sassenach Spirits](#) content on [Scotland Starts Here](#) to leverage Sam's brand and tap into his international reach, in support of the destination.

The SSDA recorded an [interview with Sam at the distillery launch](#), for B2B use, with this quickly receiving over 5,500 views.

There is no doubt that the Outlander effect, and Sam Heughan's personal brand within this, are hugely powerful tourism drivers.

While the Outlander effect is strongest amongst in-bound North American visitors, he also has a very strong following in Brazil, Australia, Mexico, China and across south-east Asia and Europe.

Sam currently has 4.4m followers on Instagram and 1.2m on Facebook. The Outlander books have over 50 million readers worldwide. It is reported that the term 'Outlander' is searched on google 2.63 million times per month, with 803,000 of those searches coming from the US alone.

Having Sam Heughan and his [Sassenach brand](#) officially based here in the South of Scotland is going to super-charge our North American market work. We are working with Sam and his business partner Alex to develop branded itineraries across D&G, in time for the Dec – March media tours which will offer millions £ of destination marketing to our key target markets.

Stranraer East Pier proposition [Ref: Action 1.5.i]:

The SSDA has developed a game-changing proposition for the East Pier of Stranraer: to develop a leading national visitor attraction of international significance in order to significantly increase the number of high-spending international visitors. A SOSE-funded pre-feasibility study has been completed and SOSE's infrastructure team are working with DGC, and engaging with the range of site owners and a wide range of other stakeholders, to identify funding sources and develop a strong case for a full feasibility study and technical survey which would be a necessary step to enable any redevelopment of the wider East Pier.

In this period the SSDA attended a roundtable meeting of all senior stakeholders in this space: advocating hard for urgent, coordinated action to avoid another 14 years lost.

The SSDA was also very active in objecting to a planning application from Manfreight to turn part of the East Pier into a lorry park, working in close partnership with Stranraer Development Trust (SDT) and other local community groups. The strongest possible objections were made but, sadly, planning permission was given (in a vote 8 to 7), which is hugely disappointing. This is in direct contradiction to the locally expressed views in the Stranraer Place Plan and potentially undermines £58m of public investment in the waterfront. The SSDA, SDT and other local groups have together written to all organisations and are chairing a meeting on the 30th July looking at next steps to urgently rebuild damaged confidence.

The Place Programme (Ref: Action 1.5.iv)

The Place Programme will direct £7.2m of capital funding from the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal to four priority towns in the Scottish Borders from 2027-2030. Each town will receive up to £1.8m. This investment in our towns will help to ensure their long-term sustainability and deliver growth, underpinned by a 'whole town' approach and delivered through coordinated 'Place Plans' led by our communities and stakeholders.

The four priority towns are Eyemouth, Galashiels, Jedburgh and Hawick. All four towns have now developed Place Plans with the support of consultants funded through the UK Shared Prosperity fund and Council officers. The Place Plans bring together a wealth of community engagement and culminate in a Town Vision and outline a list of aspirational community projects.

STRAND 2: Develop the Visitor Experience

Thistle Awards [Ref: Action 2.1.ii]:

On 8th July SSDA announced the finalists in the 2025 South of Scotland Thistle Awards (the regional phase), timed to go live at the same time in all regions of Scotland. The headline results:

- There are 28% more finalists than ever before (44, compared to 30 in 2024 and 32 in 2023)
- 46% more individual businesses are finalists than last year (41, compared to 26) - [i.e. fewer businesses receiving multiple awards]
- For the first time ever, all 15 categories have finalists
- 64% of finalists (28 of the 44) have not been finalists before,

The 2025 South of Scotland Thistle Awards took place on 2nd October 2025, supported by Caledonia Park and held at GG's Yard, Laggan in Gatehouse of Fleet. The sold-out celebration brought together more than 180 finalists, partners and supporters for an evening of live entertainment, fine dining and making new connections.

At the National Thistle Award in November this year we celebrated as five South of Scotland businesses took home the coveted Scottish Thistle Award trophy, making the South the equal highest scoring region.

The South of Scotland Thistle Awards have proven a remarkable success, with 350 businesses engaging this programme and a seven-fold increase in the number of national awards achieved, taking the South from reliably the worst performing region to regularly the best performing.

Food and Drink [Ref: Action 2.1.v]:

The SSDA hosted, supported and has now published a number of major research projects funded by the Scottish Government through SOSE, looking at how we get local food on local plates. [READ REPORTS HERE](#). This work builds on a major SSDA roundtable meeting with 30 key food and drink stakeholders from across the region on the 29th August, from which a [clear plan](#) has been agreed as to how we will continue to support and develop our destination's food and drink offering.

The SSDA has commissioned a major new piece of work to further develop the South of Scotland's food and drink offering, with three components:

- a) [Driving B2B Engagement](#): Pro-actively reaching out to ensure as many businesses as possible benefit from the 2025 research, reports and toolkit.
- b) [Funding collaborations](#): Encouraging relevant collaborations to engage the new SOSE/Scottish Government fund, specifically focusing on fostering business partnerships across the Scottish Borders.
- c) ['Year of Food Experiences'](#): Making 2026 the Year of Food Experiences, developing a package of content for four seasonal campaigns, starting in Spring 2026, celebrating South of Scotland food experiences for each of these seasons.

Burns Tourism [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:

The SSDA is continuing to lead the coordination of the Burns Tourism Partnership as part of its continuing delivery of its most recent [12-month action plan](#), with 15 clear objectives identified including the ongoing funding and development work for Ellisland and the production of a Burns' Walking Audio guide for Dumfries.

Together, two major funding applications have been made by the SSDA in partnership with DGC to the Dumfries Town Board: one for a coordinator to

scale-up this collaboration and promotion work, and the other for a major ‘In the Footsteps of Burns’ project which would build partnerships with potentially thousands of Burns and Caledonia groups around the world, attracting high-spending north American visitors.

Common Ridings [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:

After the success of the new [Common Riding pages on Scotland Starts Here](#), work continues to ensure all common ridings are featured on the pages with visitor information to make these community events as accessible as possible and encourage longer stays in the region.

Each event now benefits from refreshed imagery, detailed descriptions of the key ride-outs, and insider tips on the best viewing spots—helping to showcase what makes each festival unique. This renewed focus has led to a noticeable increase in website traffic and growing media and travel trade interest, reinforcing the Common Ridings’ importance within the South of Scotland’s visitor experience.

A press trip with the National Geographic and VisitScotland has been secured for the 2026 Common Ridings and will include the importance of the genealogy links as well as the historic spectacle of the events themselves.

Fishing visitor information [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:

The SSDA has developed an [ambitious programme of work](#) to create a one-stop-shop fishing information hub for visitors on the existing *Scotland Starts Here* website and app: this will be the most complete and user-friendly single online source of information about all forms of fishing in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway.

In this way, the SSDA will make it easier to inspire more people to visit the South of Scotland, especially higher-spending, longer-staying visitors. This in turn supports local businesses, creates jobs and sustains economic

prosperity. The SSDA will look to do this in responsible and sensitive ways, working with key organisations (commercial, community and conservation) to provide appropriate information: for example, on bio-security (net cleaning etc to guard against invasive non-native species), promoting local guides, and ensuring beginners and family groups are appropriately signposted.

The SSDA has reached out to the top 50 fishing businesses and stakeholders in the South of Scotland, sharing the plans, inviting their input and hosting a webinar discussing next steps. There has been strong support from all who have fed in and the SSDA is now 80% of the way through writing the copy for these significant new sections of *Scotland Starts Here*, with information about all fishing opportunities in the South of Scotland.

Destination Tweed /Tweed Trail [Ref: Action 2.2i & ii]:

Shared Prosperity Funding was secured from Scottish Borders Council to continue the Tourism Business Engagement role until March 2026, embedded in the SSDA. During this period work continued to engage with businesses to raise awareness and provide support to ensure businesses are ready. Planning for a business engagement workshop in Moffat in October was undertaken. At the other end of the trail engagement continued with Berwick Town Council, the Chamber of Trade and Visit Berwick to raise awareness in the town and resulted in an event with the Chamber of Trade being planned for November.

An audit of ‘hero’ experiences was undertaken to identify what the must see/do experiences are/could be along the route and where opportunities exist to encourage business development and online bookability. In addition, businesses were encouraged to attend SSDA’s travel trade workshops to assist businesses with travel distribution, specifically working with tour operators and online travel agents.

Work was undertaken to better understand issues faced by non-serviced accommodation operators and single night bookings. With certain stretches of the trail with little accommodation and often what is available is non-serviced it is important that businesses are supported and encouraged to consider offering single night bookings to those doing the Trail. As a result, a toolkit providing insights and tips has been developed and shared with businesses.

Support was provided to Destination Tweed regarding the Tweed Stories project and the appointment of a consultant to develop an archive by encouraging residents along the trail to share their stories. Further joint working with Destination Tweed also took place around the development of visitor segmentation in advance of the route launch.

Events [Ref: Action 2.4.v]

D&G Council:

Applications to the Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC) Major Events Fund for the 2026/27 financial year opened during November and December 2025, attracting strong interest from across the region. The fund received a diverse range of high-quality applications spanning sporting, cultural and arts-based events, reflecting the breadth and ambition of the local events sector. All submissions are currently being assessed by the Dumfries and Galloway Events Partnership, with their recommendations scheduled to be presented to councillors for consideration at the relevant committee in February 2026.

Scottish Borders Council:

Scottish Borders Council continues to support the events sector and deliver against the Scottish Borders Event Strategy Plan. The plan targets support towards strategic events which have regional economic impact, are sustainable and work towards the delivery of net zero. Recent updates include:

Tour of Britain Women 2025:

British Cycling reported in October 2025 that the June Tour of Britain Women's race starting and finishing in Kelso generated £5.3m event impact for the Scottish Borders, staying an average of 2.17 nights and spending £298. It was reported 50% event attendees travelled over 50 miles to attend.

National Scottish Thistle Awards Scottish Borders Council won the 'Outstanding Sporting Event' category at the Scottish Thistle Awards for the Tour of Britain Men's 2024 Scottish Borders stage, recognising the region's success in hosting major cycling events and boosting tourism. This national award celebrated the successful opening stage held entirely in the Borders, bringing significant economic impact and showcasing the area as a premier destination for cycling.

Tour O The Borders 2025:

An independent assessment of the 2025 Tour O the Borders cycling event has estimated it contributed more than £755,000 to the Borders' economy. Over 2,200 people participated in the event and a post event survey, returned by half of the participants found that 91% of them had come from outside the local area and had stayed overnight.

Tour de France – Grand Depart 2027:

Officers have worked with partners to secure the majority of Stage one of the Tour de France in the Scottish Borders in July 2027. As the largest free to spectate sporting event in the world, the race is expected to have a major significant social and economic impact creating local business opportunities, boosting tourism, hospitality, retail through increased visitors, spending, and media exposure promoting the area globally as a cycling destination.

VisitScotland:

Through EventScotland supported funding, VisitScotland has invested in and provided strategic events advice to Wigtown Book Festival, Tour O The Borders and Stranraer Skiffeworlds.

SSDA:

Recognising that events are a catalyst for bringing repeat and new visitors to our region, an invitation was sent to the top 50 events in the South of Scotland to collaborate with a reciprocal marketing arrangement between Scotland Starts Here and individual events.

The response was warmly received and significant collaborations were highly successful over this quarter including: [Frontier 300](#), [BVAC Classic Festival of Motoring](#), [Rockin' the Port](#), [Borders Book Festival](#), [Kirkcudbright Jazz Festival](#), [Newton Stewart and Minigaff Music and Dance Festival](#), [RSAC Scottish Rally](#), [Border Union Agricultural Show](#), [The Lowland Gathering](#), [Galloway Country Fair](#) and [Wigtown Shindy](#).

A new [Flagship page](#) has been created and the monthly events blog on Scotland Starts Here continues to be promoted strongly.

The SSDA had a major involvement in leading mediation between Tour of the Borders, the region's signature cycling sportif and local businesses who had concerns and frustrations about road closures. Through this, all businesses were listened to and a significant number of mediations agreed, including several thousand pounds donated to local causes. The event had a record number of participants in 2025 and a record amount raised for charity/local causes.

Attracting external investment to create increased capacity and quality
[Ref: Action 2.5.v]:

Galashiels Hotel Development

£400,000 has been allocated from the Community Regeneration Partnership for the feasibility and design work for potential hotel site in

Galashiels. Scottish Borders Council are continuing efforts to secure a follow-up meeting with the hotel operator and will provide an update once discussions progress.

Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund [Ref: Action 2.6.1]

Scottish Borders Council were awarded funding from Visit Scotland to support the development of a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development plan and have appointed SLR Consultancy to take this forward.

The SSDA hosted an online survey and ran industry dialogue sessions in seven Locally Led Destination Development meetings across the Scottish Borders, to collect the views of the sector, through November and December 2025.

Following internal and business consultation, site visits and desktop analysis, the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development plan is in early draft development. Key sites have been identified and concepts developed in line with the RTIF objectives.

Scottish Borders Rail [Ref: Action 2.6.i]:

In April of this year Turner & Townsend was appointed as the senior project manager tasked with undertaking the business case and feasibility work associated with the proposed extension of the Borders Railway from Tweedbank to Carlisle.

This appointment followed written agreement from UK Government and Scottish Government to fund up to £10 million for business case and feasibility work associated with the assessment of the benefits and challenges associated with extending the line beyond Tweedbank. Initial work around the business case process has been commenced along with a review of previous work, governance arrangements and discussions with our key partners and stakeholders including, Scottish Government,

Transport Scotland, Department for Transport and Campaign for Borders Rail.

Scottish Borders Council and Transport Scotland led with the development of two events marking the tenth anniversary of the Borders Rail, in September 2025.

The SSDA is working closely with the Campaign for Borders Rail (CBR) to develop advocacy work to use the tenth anniversary to build all-party political support for the completion of the line to Carlisle. The SSDA and CBR wrote to all seven Party Leaders of the seven parties competing in the May 2026 Holyrood election, asking for explicit manifesto commitments to continue and complete the complete the line. Through this period they met with a number of the Party Leaders and received strong cross party support. They are in the process of agreeing manifesto commitments.

EV Charging Network [Ref: Action 2.6.vi & 4.2.ii]:

The Scottish Government has awarded £6.3m to group of eight local authorities to improve public charging infrastructure for electric vehicles in the south of Scotland.

The funding will support the installation of 1,770 additional public charge points across the region, with the councils working in partnership with the private sector.

The South of Scotland Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund project is being led by City of Edinburgh Council and includes Clackmannanshire, Dumfries & Galloway, Falkirk, Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders and West Lothian Councils.

This is the final award from the Scottish Government's £30m Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund.

- The SSDA is continuing a [corporate partnership with Raw Charging](#) which will allow larger businesses with higher footfall the chance to have EV chargers installed free of charge.

Public Toilets [Ref: Action 2.6.vii]

The SSDA is continuing to develop work supporting public toilets and applied for CLLD Scottish Borders funding for strategic and saleable work to find a long-term solution for public toilets. This was successful at the first stage but, disappointingly, not at the second.

The SSDA is continuing to work with Scottish Borders Council and Go Tweed Valley to find investment necessary for a serious strategic solution to the challenge of public toilets.

Inward Investment (Ref: Action 2.7):

Dumfries and Galloway Council: Early Engagement on Visitor Levy (Ref: Action 2.7)

Dumfries and Galloway Council carried out Early Engagement on the potential introduction of a visitor levy through regional drop in sessions, South of Scotland Destination Alliance area meetings and targeted discussions with key industry organisations, alongside webinars involving community councils, SSDA networks, event organisers, third sector groups and elected members. To complement this, an independent research programme by 56 Degree Insight gathered views from businesses, residents and visitors through three surveys, receiving 274 business responses, 797 citizen responses (including 13 community organisations) and 581 visitor responses from local, national and international participants. Surveys were promoted widely online, with hard-copy options available, and fieldwork ran from 29 September to 21 November 2025, generating 1,651 valid responses following robust data quality checks. A full report will be presented to Full Council in early summer.

Center Parcs (Ref: Action 2.7.4):

Center Parcs Scottish Borders was granted full planning permission on 8th December. The £450 million investment will bring 700 lodges and apartments to the site near Hawick with an anticipated opening date of summer 2029. The project is expected to support 750-800 jobs during construction and create 1200 permanent year round jobs.

Community Led Local Development Fund (Ref: Action 2.7.1):

The 2025/26 allocation for Scottish Borders to support community –led development was £472,427 which has now been allocated to 23 projects. Many of those projects enhance the visitor economy by improving services, economy growth and net zero aspirations. The full list of projects can be viewed on the Council Website: Community Led Local Development Fund (CLLD) | Local Action Group | Scottish Borders Council

VisitScotland:

VisitScotland continues to provide strategic advice and support to Scottish Government related to Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal projects including Final Business Case submission work related to Stranraer Marina and Star of Caledonia.

SSDA:

The [SSDA issued a submission in the Center Parcs planning application](#), welcoming the proposed Center Parcs Scottish Borders holiday village and supporting the planning application – in line with its members' views.

The SSDA made clear believe this development is of major strategic importance: it aligns directly with the region's ambitions for sustainable growth and represents precisely the type of high-profile, inward investment our Strategy seeks to attract.

The SSDA stated that not only did it support this investment but also set out practical proposals to ensure Center Parcs is fully integrated into the existing

destination ecosystem and that the widest possible number of local businesses and communities share in the benefits.

To maximise the benefits and minimise potential disruption, the SSDA recommended:

1. Sustained local business engagement, with Center Parcs as an active partner in the regional network.
2. Alignment with the *Scotland Starts Here* brand, to ensure the South of Scotland is promoted as a destination consistently.
3. Collaborative workforce development, to address current gaps and prepare for 1,200 new jobs.
4. Creation of a Nature & Heritage Hub, to inspire visitors to explore the wider region.
5. In-lodge destination exposure via visitor information and local storytelling.
6. Commitment to local suppliers, especially in food and drink.
7. Advocacy for Borders Railway completion as a sustainable transport solution.

The CEO of Center Parcs Uk will speak at the SSDA Annual Conference on the 11th March.

SOSE investments [Ref: Action 2.7]:

SOSE's 5th Anniversary

Reaching its 5th anniversary South of Scotland Enterprise, as Scotland's newest enterprise agency, has invested over £23m into enterprises and community groups across the South of Scotland related to the visitor economy plus very significant additional sums into both Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere and the SSDA with two-year financial support offered to both.

SOSE celebrated its anniversary with a visit by the First Minister, John Swinney to the award-winning Trimontium Museum in Melrose and to Durty Brewing in Innerleithen. The First Minister was keen to come into region and see some of the visitor economy enterprises SOSE has supported.

Rocks and Wheels

SOSE is actively supporting one of the largest community developments in region, which has had substantial support from SOSE and a wide range of other funders, as it moves into its delivery phase. It will bring significant activity, accommodation and hospitality experiences to Dalbeattie and surrounding area.

Community pubs

Community pubs supported by SOSE investment are now up, running and trading in both Wigtown and Morebattle providing community assets and facilities to support the visitor economy in rural areas with a sparsity of it.

SOSE business and community support.

SOSE community, business and infrastructure colleagues continue to support a significant and growing number of enterprises involved in the visitor economy across the region and, via Business Gateway, in the Scottish Borders.

Mountain Bike Innovation Centre:

SOSE has now lodged exciting new plans for the Mountain Bike Innovation Centre at Innerleithen.

If consented, along with the significant investment from SOSE, working with partners SBC and Edinburgh Napier University this will draw in £19m investment from UK Government as part of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, adding £138m gross value added to the regional economy and 400 jobs over 10 years. It involves significant investment in the Tweed

Valley Adventure Bike Park, support the visitor economy and amplify our region's bike and cycling credentials.

Agritourism & Agritourism Monitor Farms:

Significant activity with Scottish Agritourism including some productive on-farm visits both in-region and across Scotland with high engagement with SA members from South of Scotland. Currently working to maximise the impact from next year's International Agritourism Conference.

As part of National Scottish Agritourism Implementation Board SOSE is working with Scottish Government and Scottish Ministers to meet the strategy, particularly by growing the number of members in region and with a focus on increasing the diversity of the offer – particularly into on-farm food and retail.

Cycling:

South of Scotland Cycling Partnership Annual Review shows the continued success of the region worth of its UCI designation with a range of successful activity delivered by a host of partners across the region.

As part of this over 30 businesses were supported by SOSE's cycling infrastructure fund and SOSE continues to support a range of bike and cycling initiatives across the South.

STRAND 3: Support Businesses to Succeed:

SSDA Business Plan [Ref: Action 3.1.i]:

The SSDA is continuing to deliver its ambitious [2025-27 Business Plan](#), which is closely aligned to the Responsible Tourism Strategy. The Business Plan is essentially the SSDA's programme of work for the next couple of years as a DMMO: 58 projects clearly delineated, each with a one-sentence strategic objective (the *why*), a handful of bullets around our approach (the *how*), details as to who we're partnering with on this, the targets, the Strategy reference, and the SSDA staff member leading.

The easiest way to skim it is to look over the contents page on pp5-6 which has hyperlinks to the relevant section. Or, even easier, there is an [interactive mind-map version](#) of the business plan here, which the SSDA will keep up to date with live updates for all 58 projects over the coming two years.

Representation in the Scottish Parliament [Ref: Action 3.1.i]:

On the invitation of the Scottish Parliament, on the 3rd September 2025 the [SSDA CEO gave evidence to the Economy and Fair Work Committee](#), alongside the CEOs of STA, UKHospitality and the Loch Lomond National Park. The SSDA was the only regional voice in this evidence session.

The SSDA used the opportunity to set out our stall for the South, as the part of Scotland with strong partnerships, real collaboration and a clear strategy which we are demonstrably delivering on. David also highlighted the very real challenges which SSDA members face, especially on profitability, VAT, costs of employment, energy, etc (emphasising these are not unique to the south). As always, the points raised by the SSDA came directly from listening to Members through meetings, correspondence and surveys.

Planning support [Ref: Action 3.1.ii]:

The SSDA continues to support visitor economy planning applications, issuing letters of support and offering in-person representation at Committees where appropriate. For example, the SSDA made direct Committee representations supporting the Rutherford holiday lodge application in the Scottish Borders and objecting to the Manfreight application for a Lorry Park on the Stranraer water front.

Short Term Lets [Ref: Action 3.1.ii]:

SBC and DGC are continuing to support businesses to apply for Short Term Let licences where required, supported by the SSDA, SOSE and VS. D&G Council has issued 1,731 licenses in total (a net increase of 52 this quarter). Scottish Borders Council has received 1,282 applications in total so far (74 in this quarter), with 1,189 issued in total (74 in this quarter). (see [Public register](#)).

Developing a coordinated programme of business support [Ref: 3.1.iv]:

VisitScotland has launched its new Business Support Hub [VisitScotland Business Support Hub](#) | VisitScotland Business Support The Business Support Hub is a central resource hub for the tourism and events industry with valuable, actionable insights in a user-friendly structure. The website is packed with tailored tourism and events advice and support. It hosts tools and resources to help businesses, with steps to start, improve and grow your tourism or events business in a sustainable way.

Support and collaboration [Ref Action: 3.1.iv]:

VisitScotland's Tourism Business Support Hub launched earlier in 2025 continues to develop new supportive content. A new email programme is now up and running with the majority of businesses receiving information and advice on improving their digital channels. New content focuses on how to showcase your business, the importance of imagery, and how SEO is changing. More detail [VisitScotland Business Support Hub](#) | [VisitScotland Business Support](#)

Locally Led Destination Development meetings: [Ref: Action 3.2.i & iii]:

As part of the SSDA's [Locally Led Destination Development](#) work, the South of Scotland is divided into 14 different areas. The SSDA meets businesses in each area every 6-months. Full minutes from all meetings, and collated details of all business priorities and what is being done against these, can be found on the [SSDA website](#).

The SSDA has also met with/formalised partnerships with groups including Visit Kelso, Go Tweed Valley, Stranraer Development Trust and others in this period.

In this period the SSDA, hosted meetings in all 14 LLDD areas, with 260 businesses attending. Of those that gave feedback, 100% said attending these meetings had been genuinely useful for their business.

Example LLDD feedback in the last week:

- *“Great stuff here and great to network.”*
- *“Great to meet local people and see what SSDA are doing to support the industry”*
- *“I found it very interesting and it was good to see such a strong support for tourism businesses”*
- *“A brilliant way to promote the feeling of a local business community.”*
- *“Good to get this update, it keeps me in touch with the industry. Well worth the time every six months.”*
- *“A great networking event. Lots of information about important issues and things that are in development. This is a way to plan for the future.”*
- *“Really useful getting immediate, targeted, relevant advice and lots of ideas of what to do next to promote our activities.*
- *“What you do is brilliant! Thank you!”*

The SSDA has now conducted five series of LLDD meetings, with 70 meetings in total, and over 900 attending businesses.

Regional Economic Partnership [Ref: Action 3.2.v]:

VS, the SSDA, SBC, DGC and SOSE are all actively represented on the REP, as well as Strategic Action Groups including on Transport and the Convention of the South of Scotland. This allows us to represent tourism at the centre of economic planning.

Workforce development [Ref: Action 3.3.i-viii]:

It was agreed with the Deputy First Minister at the Convention of the South of Scotland (COSS) in November 2025, that the SSDA would consult industry to collate information about workforce challenges and skill gaps which will give tangible recommendations and create an annual measure to be able to assess progress. The SSDA undertook this work and has developed a [MAJOR REPORT](#) which all relevant agencies (SDS, SOSE, VS, Springboard, DYC, both councils, both colleges, etc) have been actively involved in.

The SSDA made a funding application to the Scottish Borders Local Employability Partnership for work to address longstanding workforce issues, based on the needs of local businesses and the views of all key agencies. This was unfortunately not successful and the SSDA is now going back to the Deputy First Minister, SDS, SOSE and others to look at next steps.

Through the summer of 2025 the SSDA has been invited to present the results of its research in this area to myriad national and regional groups, including Ministerial advisory groups and Parliamentary Committees, such as:

- Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group
- Tourism and Hospitality Skills Group
- Scottish Parliament's Economy and Fair Work Committee
- Convention of the South of Scotland
- South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership
- South of Scotland Education and Skills Strategic Co-ordination Group

The SSDA is continuing to work with partners to secure investment and support to deliver on the challenges and priorities identified by business.

Data Insights [Ref: Action 3.4]:

The latest independent STEAM results were shared in September 2024 show that in the first two years of delivery of the Responsible Tourism Strategy there has been:

- 33% growth in the visitor economy (£250m increase)
- 14% increase in jobs (1,933 increase)

The SSDA has collated all known data and made this [publicly available](#) for businesses in one place on its website. It has also conducted a survey of businesses, asking what data businesses want and need ([see results](#)).

STRAND 4: Act responsibly for long-term collective benefit:

Rural Transport Infrastructure fund [Ref: Action 4.1.i]:

A project was submitted by Dumfries and Galloway Council to the Visit Scotland's Rural Transport Infrastructure fund to upgrade several coastal car parks to improve safety, signage, and facilities for visitors, particularly motorhome users. It included clearer overnight parking zones, refurbished toilets, and a new free waste disposal site near the A75 to reduce environmental impact and support responsible tourism. The project was not approved for RTIF funding.

Funding was secured by Scottish Borders Council and the SSDA from VisitScotland for the Scottish Borders to develop a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan. Scottish Borders Council recruited a consultant to support this work and the SSDA has been assisting with business engagement.

The SSDA has run an online survey and is using its eight Scottish Borders Locally Led Destination Development meetings to collect information from businesses in support of the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan.

Rhins Coastal Path [Ref: Action 4.1.iii]:

The SSDA and D&G Council are working closely together on the media around the launch of the Rhins Coastal Path. Journalist visits have been arranged to walk the new route, with coverage in The Telegraph, The Guardian, Walk Magazine and Country File Magazine.

The SSDA organised and funded the visit of journalist Sarah Baxter to walk the path, with excellent coverage in four major national newspapers, including [The Guardian](#).

7Stanes Master planning [Ref: Action 4.1.iii]:

The SSDA is working with FLS on the continuing 7Stanes master planning process, especially around Dalbeattie and Newcastle.

The SSDA has co-organised a visit to all the 7 Stanes in seven days, by Tracy Moseley, one of the most decorated female mountain bikers. This will result in significant national and international coverage.

Paths and Trails [Ref: Action 4.1.iii]:

Consultation on the draft Active Travel Strategy for the Scottish Borders closed on 31st August. An update will be issued with all comments and findings have been analysed.

A new Active Travel Campaign RIDONKULOUS was launched with a pilot taking place in Hawick. The name RIDONKULOUS ties in with the campaign's by-line: 'No more RIDONKULOUS car trips', meaning to reduce short car journeys by choosing active modes of transport, such as walking, wheeling, or cycling, whenever possible. The campaign launched on 25 August 2025, and the Cabinet Secretary for Transport Fiona Hyslop joined the Active Travel Team at Trinity Primary School on 26 August to be part of the activities.

Paths and Trails [Ref: Action 4.1.iii]:

The SSDA, with the two councils, is starting a new piece of work to significantly strength the digital information available on Scotland Starts Here (website and app) about paths and trails, for walking, cycling and equestrian use. This will make it much easier to find trails near you, and to better connect these with business offerings.

Eyemouth Masterplan (Ref: Action 4.1.iv):

The Eyemouth Harbour Masterplan proposes a £250 million investment in infrastructure, outlines a long-term vision to transform Eyemouth into a key hub for offshore wind, marine industries, and sustainable coastal growth. The masterplan, led by Eyemouth Harbour Trust and supported by SBC and SOSE, was launched August and aims to help generate economic growth and jobs for the area, with the key proposals including:

- A new multi-use deep water port facility with 700m of deep-water berthing, with two hectares of flexible quayside laydown and operational space. With a new breakwater, the existing harbour will be significantly more sheltered.
- Infrastructure improvements within the existing harbour such as new pontoons, refurbishment of the Harbour Building, repair or replacement of the Sluice Gate and enhancing inspection and maintenance regimes to futureproof the Inner Harbour and Gunsgreen Basin.
- Looking to the future, innovation, transition to net zero and digitalisation are priorities for Eyemouth Harbour Trust, making the facility attractive and fit for purpose to serve the needs of existing and new harbour users.

Investing in sustainable marine and coastal tourism [Ref: Action 4.1.iv]:

Solway Coast and Marine Landscape Connections Project (SCAMP Landscape Connections):

Scotland's 210-mile Solway Coast offers a spectacular diversity of stunning scenery. Now it is set to be supported by £8 million as the first project to secure funding through The National Lottery Heritage Fund's £150million Landscape Connections initiative. Thanks to National Lottery players, Solway Coast and Marine Landscape Connections Project (SCAMP Landscape Connections) will receive £1.4million of investment to shape plans which will unlock further National Lottery funding of up to

£6.4million and act as an exemplar project in attracting further green finance.

Berwickshire Marine reserve

A new snorkel trail is being launched later this month during the Eyemouth Herring Queen Festival. The trail highlights 5 prime snorkelling spots between St Abbs and Eyemouth, it is designed to highlight the rich marine's biodiversity of the reserve and is part of the Scottish Wildlife's Trusts Living Seas programme.

Coldingham Bay

Access has been reinstated by See the Change to the beach as part of the beach wheelchair project ensuring inclusivity for all with mobility problems.

Berwickshire Coastal path

The coastal path has now been surveyed by SBC and all identified repairs have been completed. The path is a stunning 30-mile trail that hugs the dramatic eastern coastline of the Scottish Borders, famous for its cliffs, wildlife hotspots and geological wonders such as Siccar Point.

The path will form the route for a new event taking place in July - Castle to Castle starting at Bamburgh Castle and finishing at Edinburgh Castle blending history, endurance and scenery.

The Scottish Crown Estate Coastal Communities Fund 2025-2026

Funding is available to support community projects in coastal areas in the Scottish Borders. Cockburnspath, Cove, Coldingham, St Abbs, Eyemouth and Burnmouth are all eligible to apply for funds.

has approximately £130k available to allocate to projects in the 2025-2026 financial year. Projects looking to be considered for funding should adopt a place-based approach Funding available for community projects in coastal areas.

E-bike Hire Initiative [Ref: Action 4.4.3.ii]

Ettrick and Yarrow is supporting a new initiative promoting e-bike hire in the region, this complements the expansion of several ongoing projects. In Eyemouth See the Change is increasing its fleet of e-bikes while Teri Bikes in Hawick is also expanding its offering. There is growing evidence these services are being used by tourists visiting the area.

Natural Capital Innovation Zone [Ref: Action 4.1]:

SOSE continues to explore how our innovative designation of a Natural Capital Innovation Zone, the first, can be used to support and enhance our visitor economy.

Providing a framework to support and encourage tourism businesses on a journey to Net Zero [Ref: Action 4.2.5]

VisitScotland has launched detail of a Climate Action Accelerator programme that will help businesses across Scotland harness the many benefits that can arise from thinking positively and proactively about reducing emissions, working collaboratively with business leads and the communities they represent for long-lasting impact. A range of cohorts will be available in 2026. [Free Climate Action Accelerator programme launch - News | VisitScotland.org](#)

Tweed Trail Canoe trail [Ref: Action 4.4.i]

Strong national and international media coverage has generated huge interest not just in the trail itself but also the wider area, evidence suggests the canoe trail is attracting a strong audience.

Biggar Adventure, the main operator on the river, guided a total of 450 paddlers in 2024, paddling sections or the entirety of the trail, visitors either camped along the route or stayed in Innerleithen (with sites such as Traquair and Tweedside Caravan Park benefitting.

Many individuals and groups have sought advice on paddling the trail themselves, while organisations such as the Venture Trust and schools such as the Morrison Academy also enjoyed dedicated trips along the river. Other guiding outfits have also expressed interest in running trips in 2025, most enquiries are from overseas including Americans, Australians and families from Israel, Germany and Sweden.

Destination Tweed's new Literary Trail – Tweed Valley Words

The trail highlights the literary heritage of the Tweed Valley, guiding visitors to landmarks and locations that celebrate the writers inspired by the River Tweed and its communities

E-bike Accessibility Fund' [Ref: Action 4.4]

Scottish Borders Council's project 'Ebike Accessibility Fund' was selected as a finalist in the Cycling for All category, which recognises projects that:

- Increase access to cycling for underrepresented groups
- Foster community engagement and wellbeing
- Demonstrate measurable social impact

The Ebike Accessibility Fund stood out for its commitment to making cycling more inclusive—especially through electric bikes, which can empower people with mobility challenges, longer commutes, or limited access to traditional bikes.

Being named a finalist in the UCI Cycling for All & Sustainability Awards is a major recognition and demonstrates a project's impact on inclusive and sustainable cycling.

Visitor Management [Ref Action: 4.5.1]

VisitScotland content team has created a new guide based on the [10 Scottish Outdoor Access Code Tips | VisitScotland](#) to help visitors enjoy Scotland's stunning landscapes responsibly. The 10 Scottish Outdoor Access Code Tips has been translated into five languages (Dutch, French, German, Italian, and Spanish) and gives top tips to visitors on how to

behave responsibly and safely across the countryside, whether they be walking or cycling, driving or camping.

It aims to capture visitors at the planning stage of their trip.

Motorhome visitor experience [Ref: Action 4.6.3]:

An Invitation to Pay (ITP) parking proposal has been brought forward for consideration by members as part of the budget consolidation process completing in February 2026. The Council currently offers free parking across all car parks and picnic areas, and ITP is being explored as a way to

raise visitor-generated income and better manage overnight motorhome parking in locations where it creates tensions with local communities. The ITP model, based on voluntary contributions rather than enforced charges, has worked well in the Highlands and has already been adopted locally by the Caerlaverock Community Association and NatureScot. Some sites, including New England Bay, would require investment to create safe parking areas, supported by seasonal parking officers to manage overnight stays.

Contacts:

Key contacts for those responsible for delivering the Responsible Tourism Strategy:

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- **Scottish Borders Council**: Jane Warcup, Economic Development Officer [jwarcup@scotborders.gov.uk]
- **Dumfries & Galloway Council**: John King, Economic Development Officer Food and Drink and Tourism [john.king@dumgal.gov.uk]
- **SOSE**: Mark Rowley, Strategy Manager – Tourism [mark.rowley@sose.scot]

We hope you enjoyed this update. We are, together, committed to increasing our visitor economy by £1bn. We will achieve this by being the most active, engaged, strategic and united destination in Scotland. If you haven't already, [join the SSDA](#) and get involved!