



## Responsible Tourism Strategy

### Quarterly Actions and Progress Report #5      April - June 2025

#### Introduction:

Following a year-long consultation, the all-agency South of Scotland's [Responsible Tourism Strategy](#) was launched on the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 fifth quarterly report, covering April to June 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 committed to running its Seasonality marketing campaign again in 2025/26. The campaign will once again include 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 campaign, as well as input from partners on previous campaign outcomes.

Two years into running seasonality promotions, the SSDA is seeing increased interest businesses in getting involved, with the new element from 2024 – a seasonal short break competition – already being requested again.

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

The 2024 campaign exceeded its targets, with: 68,000 additional web visits to campaign related pages, 4.2 million impressions on social media ads, 47 business included in autumn/winter publishing activity, 25 businesses and events included in social media ads. The competitions saw 9,800 entries, resulting in over 3,500 additional newsletter subscribers.

For 2025/26, businesses are once again 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.

The goal for 2025/26 is to build on successes from 2024 and 2023, narrowing in on key audiences and messages to make the most of the campaign budget. Content on SSH will once again be adjusted in line with learnings for Winter and Spring content.

#### **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 included VisitScotland's development of a new EV itinerary for the SWC300 for press and media, with the SSDA is developing a press trip and securing [strong national media coverage](#) online, in print and on national radio. [Route content](#) has also been updated on *Scotland Starts Here*, with VisitScotland linking out to the main route map and information. Web traffic to SWC300 related content on SSH has increased 200% on 2024. The SSDA is currently organising a press visit round the SWC300 with the Camper and Motorhome Magazine.

There is also close working on promoting the [Common Ridings](#) with new web content on SSH and press briefs being shared by the SSDA team to VS, VS linking to SSH content, and plans to target the North American market. Web traffic on the events has increased 56% on the previous year.

Further projects are currently being developed collaboratively on the North American market, ancestral ties, screen tourism and seasonality, with 6-weekly catchups and themed deep dives by both teams.

#### **TripAdvisor Partnership [Ref: Action 1.1.i & 1.2.iv]:**

VisitScotland and the SSDA ran a marketing campaign with TripAdvisor, designed to encourage a UK audience to choose the South of Scotland for their next break. This campaign generated an overall Economic Impact for the South of Scotland of £69k, and an average return on investment of £6.90 for every marketing £1 spent, through hotels, attractions, food and drink, retail and transportation bookings.

#### **ScotRail France Partnership [Ref: Action 1.1.i]:**

VisitScotland ScotRail France Partnership activity completed on 26 April. This included detailed itineraries, YouTube shorts, social media posts, and articles that encourage rail travel to and around Scotland. Activity included a focus on routes into the South of Scotland

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

From March to June 2025, the SSDA had over 32 pieces of positive destination coverage in the media, reaching an estimated audience of 75 million. See sample coverage for [April](#), [May](#) and [June](#).

The SSDA also organised its first press trip of 2025 and is in talks for several further trips and activities. Travel writer Robin McKelvie headed to Melrose in April, securing articles on the town in 9 outlets including The Telegraph and The National. Robin's coverage highlighted key walking and cycling routes, including the Borders Abbeys Way, Southern Upland Way and St Cuthberts Way, as well as a number of local businesses, including Trimontium Museum, Cedar Hus, Town House Hotel, and the Tweed Valley Blogger.

VisitScotland has helped to coordinate recent press activity including:

- [Germany](#): [Press trip in May](#) for BIKE Magazine at Glentress (in collaboration with Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland) –
- [Germany](#): press trip in June for KANU Magazine covering Tweed Valley Canoe Trail with Biggar Adventure (with support from DMBinS and Go Tweed Valley)
- [North America](#): AFAR (US print and digital magazine focused on experimental travel) featured Beirhope Farm and Kitchen Coos and Ewes in a feature on Scotland's Best Eco-Lodges and Sustainable Adventures at the end of March
- [Germany](#): Feature with focus on Agritourism was published in a number of regional newspapers, including Stuttgarter Nachrichten (both online and print) on the back of a press visit for freelancer Doerte Nohrden to Kitchen Coos and Ewes in D&G

**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](#).

**'Scotland Starts Here' visibility [Ref: Action 1.1.iv & 2.3.iv]:**

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.

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

SSDA showcased the South of Scotland at VisitScotland Connect25 with two days of face-to-face appointments in April in Aberdeen, as well as a networking evening. 271 buyers from 20 countries attended this VisitScotland event. Representation from the south included Annandale Distillery Group, Greta Green, The Cairndale Hotel & Spa, SCHLOSS Roxburghe, Lochcarron of Scotland, Abbotsford, Great Tapestry of Scotland and Scotland Shop. In addition some of the buyers participated in familiarisation trips to inspire new and extended Scotland programmes with itineraries including Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway.

The appointment diary for the two representatives was fully booked with requests from existing buyers as well as a record number of new supplier travel trade agent appointments from across the world wishing to learn more about the South of Scotland as a destination, and about the tourism offering of the travel trade ready businesses.

VisitScotland included over 12 businesses from the South of Scotland in their pre-event familiarisation trips for agents across Dumfries & Galloway and the Scottish Borders.

**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.

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.

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

The SSDA continues to support the development of the Scottish Dark Skies Observatory at Clatteringshaws in the Heart of the Galloway Forest Park. The adjoining house has not been purchased for the observatory and there is active work objecting to possible new light sources locally which could compromise the dark skies.

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

On the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2025 the SSDA hosted a major roundtable meeting bringing together the key South of Scotland businesses with a particularly strong existing or potential north American market/product advance this third growth strand: sharing experience and insights as to *current* trends in this market and exploring potential new collaborations to build this market.

By the end of the meeting there was increased confidence that, by working together, we can increase international visitors to the South of Scotland, with most businesses keen to be involved and actively offering support in some form.

Five areas of action and joint-working are now being developed:

- 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.

### **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 a 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.

The SSDA, DGC, SOSE and elected officials had a roundtable meeting looking at the East Pier on the 28<sup>th</sup> April.

The SSDA was 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 30<sup>th</sup> July looking at next steps to urgently rebuild damaged confidence.

### **Galloway National Park [Ref: 1.5.iii]:**

Following the news that the Galloway National Park will not go ahead, the SSDA has been in contact with the Cabinet Secretary to ask that it is involved in discussions about what else can be done in this space.

## **STRAND 2: Develop the Visitor Experience**

### **Thistle Awards [Ref: Action 2.1.ii]:**

A proactive and focused approach culminated in 134 applications for the 2025 South of Scotland Thistle Awards (SOSTA). All applications were judged by independent panel of industry experts and feedback highlighted that the quality of applications received from the South were excellent across the board.

On 8<sup>th</sup> 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 that 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,

Our strategic objectives for the awards are to get (a) more applicants, (b) more finalists and (c) more organisations engaging for the first time and all three objectives have been achieved.

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

The SSDA hosted and supported a number of major research projects funded by the Scottish Government through SOSE, looking at how we get local food on local plates. These research projects have now concluded and we will shortly be making the results public with, hopefully, a clear sense of next steps. This work builds on a major SSDA roundtable meeting with 30 key food and drink stakeholders from across the region on the 29<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **Burns Tourism [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:**

Work continues with the [12-month \(Sept '24 – Sept '25\) plan](#) and the 15 clear objectives identified including the ongoing funding and development work for Ellisland and the production of a Burns' Walking Audio guide for Dumfries. A meeting to prioritise the next steps took place in June 2025 with requests for partners to take leadership in identified projects. A meeting is to be held in September to agree actions required to keep the work moving forwards and a number of options to be proposed.

### **Common Ridings [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:**

In early 2025, we collaborated with the majority of Common Riding and Riding of the Marches committees to revitalise the Common Ridings presence on the Scotland Starts Here website. This work resulted in a dedicated section within the main site navigation, featuring an updated events listing, individual festival pages, and tailored visitor information.

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.

### **Equestrian Tourism [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:**

In partnership with South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), we delivered two Equestrian Tourism AcceleratE workshops, engaging a mix of new and established businesses. As a result, several product development concepts are now in motion, supported by follow-up business coaching sessions through SOSE.

To strengthen long-term growth, a suite of toolkits and visitor-facing guides are in development. We are also collaborating with the British Horse Society on a pilot Park & Ride scheme—designed to improve rider access and open

up participation to a broader range of rural businesses. Together, these efforts are laying strong foundations to position the South of Scotland as the UK's leading equestrian tourism destination.

**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.

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

An application to SBC for Shared Prosperity Funding to continue the Tourism Business Engagement role until March 2026 was pending for much of this quarter. In the meantime, bridging funding was provided to allow Neen Kelly to continue in the role. During this period work continued to engage with businesses to raise awareness and provide support to ensure businesses are ready. An audit of bookable Food and Drink experiences along the route

was undertaken that identified gaps in the offer and the potential to turn products into experiences. Planning for the coming year took place and identified the need to undertake specific activity to engage businesses at the trailhead in Moffat and work is underway with Visit Moffat and the Town Council. At the other end of the Trail, there is also engagement with Berwick Town Council, the Chamber of Trade and Visit Berwick to explore opportunities to develop the end of Trail offer to ensure visitors linger longer when they complete the route. Further outreach included attendance at a Coldstream Community Council meeting to raise awareness and start the process of identifying opportunities for the town. Support has been provided to a bike hire operator who intends to offer end to end bike hire and was looking for businesses at both ends of the trail to partner with. Work got underway to identify potential itineraries along the route e.g. themed or different durations. This is at early stages and will develop over time and will be useful to take to businesses for them to consider how they might utilise when the Trail is launched.

**Investing and Supporting Events [Ref: Action 2.4.iii]:**

Women's Tour of Britain

In partnership with Scottish Borders Council, EventScotland secured the Lloyd's Tour of Britain Women cycling event held in June.

Stage 3 of the 2025 Women's Tour of Britain brought high drama and historic firsts to the Scottish Borders, marking the race's debut north of the border—and it did not disappoint.

The route looped around the Eildon Hills, offering a mix of scenic beauty and tactical challenges, similar to the men's route in 2024. Riders tackled five Queen of the Mountain climbs, the stage was a showcase of grit, talent, and unpredictable weather, with the Scottish Borders delivering a memorable chapter in the race's history.

A total of 19 teams competed representing a diverse mix of cycling talent from across the globe with 110 riders starting the race. It was the largest field in the event's history, with riders from over 10 countries, including New Zealand, USA, France, Netherlands, and Poland.

There were activities in both Kelso and Melrose. The event villages were supported by SBC sports development with a mix of activities, exhibitors and come and try sessions.

#### World Skiffie:

In addition, EventScotland funding will also support World Skiffie Championships in Stranraer in July and the 'Wee Touro' element of Tour O the Borders in September.

#### Golf

The Schloss Roxburgh Golf Course will host the Challenge Tour Cup 31st July to 3rd August, the Challenge Tour has announced a global schedule for the 2025 Road to Mallorca with a total prize fund of €9million. The 2025 schedule will consist of 29 tournaments staged across three continents in 18 different countries.

Peebles Golf Club will host the Scottish Boys Under-16s Open Championship (8-10 July).

Cardrona Hotel has been chosen as the host venue for the British Blind Golf Open with participants from Scotland, England, Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Austria and Spain (July 7 and July 9).

#### **Events [Ref: Action 2.4.iv]:**

Recognising that events are a catalyst for bring 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 a significant collaborations were highly successful over this quarter including Spring Fling, Borders Book Festival, DunsPlayFest and The Galloch. A new Flagship page has been created and the monthly events blog on Scotland Starts Here continues to be promoted strongly.

#### **Connecting existing, or encouraging new, events to create themed festivals [Ref: Action 2.4.vi]:**

#### Music Development:

The Scottish Borders continues to grow as a vibrant destination for live music, with flagship events like Edge Fest evolving year on year. Now attracting over 5,000 attendees, Edge Fest has become a cornerstone of the region's cultural calendar, showcasing local talent alongside national acts and contributing significantly to the local economy.

In parallel, the Floors Castle music programme is expanding into a year-round offering, bringing high-quality performances to one of the region's most iconic venues. This development supports both cultural tourism and community engagement, reinforcing the Borders' reputation as a hub for diverse and accessible music experiences.

#### Community Funding:

Scottish Borders Council has been committed to nurturing a thriving events economy by empowering local communities through targeted funding support. Two key funds are available:

The Community Festival and Events Fund provides grants to support locally led festivals and celebrations that bring people together, enhance community spirit, and contribute to the cultural vibrancy of the region. The Community Cycling Fund supports events that promote active travel, cycling participation, and healthy lifestyles, while also encouraging tourism and environmental awareness.



These funds are designed to be accessible, inclusive, and impactful—enabling communities across the Borders to deliver events that reflect local identity, foster pride of place, and stimulate economic activity.

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

Scottish Borders Council and Transport Scotland are working together to plan the formal tenth anniversary celebrations of the existing Edinburgh-Tweedbank line.

The SSDA is working closely with the Campaign for Borders Rail to develop advocacy work to use the tenth anniversary to build all-party political support for the completion of the line to Carlisle.

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

- DGC/Business Gateway are continuing to run a Tourism EV Charger of up to £3,000 for any tourism or hospitality business to put in an EV charger funded by the UK government Levelling Up programme with 50 chargers being installed so far across the region at accommodation and hospitality venues

- 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.

#### **SOSE investments [Ref: Action 2.7]:**

##### SOSE's 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Reaching its 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

Inward investment:

SOSE continue to work with a record number of inward investment enquiries across a range of sectors, including the visitor economy. Work continues to develop [www.investinsouthofscotland.com](http://www.investinsouthofscotland.com)

**Inward investment - Center Parcs [Ref: Action 2.7.i-iv]:**

The SSDA has met with Center Parcs as they developed their planning application for the proposed holiday village near Hawick. A goodwill partnership was proposed as part of these discussions and informed by the SSDA's consultation of local visitor economy businesses.

It is agreed that the new Center Parcs (if planning is given) will include a Heritage Hub to inform and inspire visitors about the Scottish Borders. The SSDA, SOSE and SBC are on this working group and the SSDA has submitted formal proposals for this.

SOSE has welcomed Center Parcs' planning submission and has helped shape the proposal which aligns with our vision for a thriving and sustainable South of Scotland and could be one of the most transformative projects ever in the South of Scotland. SOSE will continue to collaborate with Center Parcs as the project progresses.

### **STRAND 3: Support Businesses to Succeed:**

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

The SSDA has launched its [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.

#### **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, in this period 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 1693 licences. Scottish Borders Council has received 1,208 applications so far, with 1,189 issued and none refused (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.

#### **D&G Business Support Funding [Ref: 3.1.iv]:**

Business Gateway Dumfries and Galloway have launched a range of targeted financial support to enhance the region's economy. The **Enterprise Seed Fund 2025** offers up to £3,000 to assist start-up businesses with 50% of eligible capital costs, including equipment, digital tools, and premises improvements. The **Climate Resilience and Net Zero Grant** supports existing businesses with up to £3,000 for investments in sustainable infrastructure, such as renewable energy systems and waste reduction technologies, promoting environmental responsibility. Additionally, the **Business Growth Grant** provides between £5,000 and £20,000 to businesses under three years old, covering up to 50% of project costs for initiatives such as capital expansion, digital development, workforce training, and international marketing.

#### **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.

**Data Insights [Ref: Action 3.4]:**

The latest independent STEAM results were shared in November 2024 by the SSDA and the Deputy First Minister. These showed the South of Scotland visitor economy grew by 20% (150m) in the last year, with a 14% increase in jobs. 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](#)). VisitScotland released figures in June for domestic visit numbers and its annual international performance. It has also released its role of tourism study which found 95% of Scottish residents view tourism as a crucial industry for the national economy

VisitScotland has published latest research and insight on the following

- Domestic Day visits
- Domestic Overnight Tourism
- Scottish Residents views on the role of tourism
- International Tourism Performance
- Domestic Sentiment Tracker

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

### **Scottish Outdoor Access Code [Ref: Action 4.1.i]:**

VisitScotland content team has created a new guide based on the Scottish Outdoor Access Code 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.

### **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.

### **Southern Upland Way [Ref: Action 4.1.iii]:**

Recognising the route's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, DGC have worked with SBC to divide the Southern Upland Way into three marches to make it more accessible and achievable for walkers to complete a march. Sculptures have been erected at the beginning and end of the DGC marches to give a sense of occasion and allow an opportunity for social media. SBC are examining the opportunity to implement sculptures in the Borders

### **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.

### **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 Newcastleton.

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

The SSDA, with the two councils, is starting a new piece of work to significantly strengthen 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.

### **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 compliments 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 using 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.

#### **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.

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### **Contacts:**

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

- **SSDA:** David Hope-Jones, CEO [davidhj@ssdalliance.com]
- **VisitScotland:** Gordon Smith, Destination Development Director - South of Scotland, [gordon.smith@visitscotland.com]
- **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!**