



Responsible Tourism Strategy Quarterly Actions and Progress Report #6 July - September 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 sixth quarterly report, covering July to September 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 will 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 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.

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 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. Throughout August and September, the SSDA team developed a new campaign creative approach, further developing the previously successful messaging around rural escapes, peace and quiet, as well as escaping the stress of everyday life. This creative approach is being further developed with local expertise to create 6 to 8 campaign videos ads.

The campaign will also once again see a collaborative and partnership element, with agreements now in place with Reach Media (Daily Record and Newcastle Chronicle), and further discussions underway with VisitScotland.

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](#)

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 March to September 2025, the SSDA had over 43 pieces of positive destination coverage in the media, reaching an estimated audience of 81 million. See sample coverage for [July](#), [August](#) and [September](#).

The SSDA also organised and supported 3 press and influencer trips during this time period. Timmy Mallett returned to the South of Scotland, cycling from Dumfries to Berwick upon Tweed. Timmy continues to be a brilliant Scotland Starts Here ambassador, producing dozens of videos watched by tens of thousands of followers on his social channels. Journalist Nick Harding embarked on a deep dive into the SWC300, while writer Sarah Baxter tackled the new Rhins Coast Path.

‘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]

As part of its efforts to implement the South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy 2024–2034, Dumfries and Galloway Council have launched an early engagement process to explore the introduction of a visitor levy. This initiative aims to generate sustainable funding to support tourism infrastructure, environmental protection, and enhanced visitor experiences. The Council is conducting a series of [online surveys](#) targeting citizens, businesses, and visitors, alongside hosting webinars and in-person events to gather broad stakeholder input. Detailed guidance from VisitScotland and FAQs have been published to inform the public, and an independent report will be produced based on the feedback. Councillors will review the findings in spring 2026 to decide whether to proceed with a formal consultation.

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

The delivery of the River Tweed Trail project by Scottish Borders Council is now fully underway as part of the Destination Tweed programme which is being delivered by Tweed Forum. The second drawdown of funding from the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal took place in the first quarter of Financial Year 2025-26, complementing the drawdown of funding from other match funders, primarily South of Scotland Enterprise and Sustrans. 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.

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

Following the success of the spring VisitScotland *Days Out* campaign, VisitScotland built on the momentum with a *Summer Breaks* campaign in partnership with News UK and Bauer Radio. Running from late May through to early July, the activity encouraged Scots to extend their adventures with overnight stays and discover great-value experiences a break in Scotland has to offer. Activity included inspiring online articles on The Times and Scottish Sun websites, a four-page cover wrap in The Times Alba travel section, display adverts on

thescottishsun.co.uk and thetimes.co.uk and sponsored stories on The Sun and The Times Meta accounts.

VisitScotland social content featuring the South of Scotland in this ¼ has generated 3.76m views, 16.38k saves and 186.02k engagements.

South of Scotland inspirational content has featured across the following –

- [Borders Historic Route – South Scotland road trip | VisitScotland](#) – brand new web page for the driving route
- [12 Delicious Bakeries To Try in Scotland | VisitScotland](#) – Twelve Triangles, Melrose
- [12 Peaceful Places in Scotland to Boost Your Wellbeing | VisitScotland](#) - Kagyu Samye Ling, Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park
- [13 Historic Castles near Edinburgh | VisitScotland](#) – Drumlanrig Castle, Caerlaverock Castle, Thirlestane Castle, Floors Castle
- [9 Family-Friendly Adventure Holidays in Scotland | VisitScotland](#) – Tweed Valley – Glentress and Peebles, Dumfries & Loch Ken,
- [9 Family Fun Things to do in Scotland in September | VisitScotland](#) – Wigtown Book Festival, Stranraer Oyster Festival, Kelso Folk Festival,
- [11 Off-the-Beaten-Track Holiday Destinations in Scotland | VisitScotland](#) – Berwickshire, Dumfries & Galloway

In September VisitScotland unveiled a multi-million-pound marketing push designed to strengthen Scotland's visitor economy by encouraging travel across all seasons and regions.

Supported by £2 million in additional funding from the Scottish Government, the marketing activity will target both international and domestic audiences, with a renewed focus on inspiring UK visitors to explore more of Scotland throughout the year. Creation of content focussed on the South of Scotland will be delivered as part of this activity over the autumn/winter.

VisitScotland has launched its new [VisitScotland Asset Library](#). The visual library makes it easier than ever to find and download the best of Scotland, one breathtaking shot at a time.

That means faster search, easier navigation, and beautiful high-res content at your fingertips. Whether you're after Scottish wildlife in action, lively city scenes, or our vibrant events and festivals scene - it's all here, and easier to find than ever before.

Our new AI-powered search lets you use everyday language rather than using strict keywords or filters. It's ideal for generating ideas and exploring broad themes to instantly surface the most relevant free-to-use images and videos for marketing and promotional activity

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

In collaboration with SSDA, VisitScotland has developed 2 workshop days to support tourism businesses with travel distribution. Sessions planned for Scottish Borders on 4 November and in Dumfries and Galloway on 25 November will provide solutions to growing business at quieter times of the year and an introduction to online bookings systems and online travel agents. [Training and Events | VisitScotland Business Support](#)

Inspire the travel trade to the potential of the region (Ref : Action 1.3.1)

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 September for businesses in the Scottish Borders wishing to engage with the travel trade. Each business participated in a full-day session as a cohort of 6 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.

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

The SSDA represented the destination at a number of key expos, including the UKInbound 'Inspire' one-day event in London in September, where the representative met with buyers from the UK, having both a domestic and international reach.

Inspire the travel trade to the potential of the region
VisitScotland Connect [Ref: Action 1.3.4]

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 comms update to global PR leads included featured updates on Tiny Home Borders Hillside Hawick, Heart of Hawick, Robert Burns Centre Film Theatre Dumfries, Halloween Haunts destination spotlight Dumfries & Galloway, Halloween Fun Day at Traquair House, Borders Railway Anniversary.

VisitScotland hosted a press trip in September with Pink Ticket Travel (NA LGBTQ outlet). Itinerary included Borderlands Food Tour, Paxton House, Abbotsford, Mary Queen of Scots Visitor Centre, The Borders Distillery, Alchemy Arts & Film, Melrose Abbey, St Abbs Head and Capon Treehouse and Philipburn Hotel.

A VisitScotland US group press trip focussing on film tourism will visit Drumlanrig as part of wider itinerary in October – Commissions include Cosmopolitan, AFAR and Town & Country. Le Figaro Grands Reportages (France) will visit in October developing a 10 page article on history of

tartan and textiles in Scottish Borders. In November a VisitScotland/VisitBritain Australian group press trip will include visits to Gretna, Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere, Kitchen Coos and Ewes and Murray Arms Hotel.

Coverage has also been picked up in –

- [Stranraer in Schottland: Wie sich eine Stadt zum Austern-Hotspot gewandelt hat - WELT](#) (DE) – feature in Stranraer Oyster Festival on the back of 2024 press trip
- Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (DE) – included a note about the new Tweed Valley Words Trail on the back of comms bundle
- [7 Reiseziele für den Herbst](#) (DE) – round-up of autumn destinations, features Wigtown Book Festival as one of the reasons to visit Scotland in autumn

VisitScotland joined key partners to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Borders Railway. Activity included the commissioning of a new photoshoot of Borders Railway related to the visitor economy and collaboration with SSDA in the creation and promotion of new public transport itineraries linked to the railway. Email marketing content containing Borders Railway promotion performed strongly in key international markets.

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](#).

In this period the SSDA convened and chaired a number of key stakeholder meetings and helped launch the [official crowdfunder](#), which is already half

way to reaching its target. It has also helped broker a link with the Geological 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.

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 19th 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.

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 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, with the Stranraer Development Trust (SDT) and Creative Stranraer convened and chaired a roundtable meeting of all the senior stakeholders, including Council heads, local MSPs, MPs and Councillors, on the 30th July in Stranraer.

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]:

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 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 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.

The 2025 South of Scotland Thistle Awards is taking place on 2nd October 2025.

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.

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 was held in September to agree actions required to keep the work moving forwards and a number of options to be proposed.

The SSDA, with DGC and others, are applying for funding to continue this work and there are hugely ambitious plans for a physical ‘In the footsteps of Burns’ trail, leveraging the North American markets.

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.

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:

Over the past three months, Dumfries and Galloway has hosted a vibrant mix of cultural and seasonal events. The Stranraer Oyster Festival (12–14 Sept) was a standout, celebrating Loch Ryan’s native oysters with celebrity chef demos, shucking championships, and a bustling artisan market. Literary lovers flocked to the Wigtown Book Festival (26 Sept–5 Oct), which featured over 200 events including author talks, wild swimming, and a pop-up sauna.

As the autumn months take grip on the landscape the Wild Goose Festival will showcase the annual migration of barnacle geese from Svalbard to the Solway estuary. A completely unique experience to Dumfries and Galloway for anyone visiting the region.

Our continued support of these events will grow our local economy, attract new and repeat visitors to our region and build a resilient and inclusive visitor economy.

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

The Women’s Tour of Britain event took place in June, with a similar route to the men’s event last September, with a start and finish in Kelso. It was once again an extremely popular event with significant media coverage. This was the first time the event has taken place in Scotland with a world class professional line up of a record breaking 19 teams. A full economic impact study is underway from British Cycling and this will be reported in due course.

Tour O The Borders 2025

The return of the ‘Tour O The Borders’ to the Scottish Borders and into Dumfries and Galloway in September has seen an exceptional response this year, with over 2,200 riders taking part. This strong uptake reflects the event’s enduring popularity and its reputation as one of Scotland’s premier closed-road cycling sportive. A full independent Economic and Social Impact study has been commissioned by the Council on the 2025 event.

Tour of Britain Men’s Scottish Thistle Awards

The Tour of Britain Men’s Borders stage (2024) has been shortlisted as a finalist in the prestigious Thistle Awards for Outstanding Sporting Events. This recognition highlights the region’s growing reputation for hosting world-class cycling events and celebrates the collaborative efforts of local partners, communities, and volunteers who helped deliver an unforgettable experience. Being named among Scotland’s top sporting events is a testament to the Borders’ commitment to excellence in event delivery.

10th Anniversary Borders Railway Celebrations

Scottish Borders Council will mark 10th anniversary of the Borders Railway with a celebratory event at Tempest Brewery on Tuesday 9th September, bringing together partners and stakeholders and members local communities to reflect on a decade of connectivity and regional growth.

World Sheep Dog Trials

The Scottish Borders has been selected to host the World Sheep Dog Trials in September 2026. This is a prestigious international event that will bring competitors and spectators from across the globe to our area. This major rural sporting occasion will showcase the region's agricultural heritage and scenic landscape.

Strategic Events Fund

The Strategic Events Fund continues to financially support the development and delivery of high-quality regional events across the Scottish Borders. The next funding round closed at the end of August for events taking place between January and March 2026. Event organisers were encouraged to apply early and ensure that their proposals aligned with the fund's objectives of enhancing regional impact, community engagement, and visitor appeal.

VisitScotland:

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

SSDA:

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 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 a the hotel operator and will provide an update once discussions progress.

Timber Transport Safety: [Ref: Action 2.6]:

The SSDA again made representation about safety concerns regarding the speed and manner with which timber transport vehicles are driven, especially on the A708 between Selkirk and Moffat, following an incident in which a visitor to the area was forced off the road by such a vehicle. There have been significant numbers of local businesses and community groups which have raised these concerns with the SSDA.

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. Consultation will soon begin with council departments and industry stakeholders. Discussion will also be held at SSDA's LLD meetings in the autumn.

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.

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.

- 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.

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):

Scottish Borders Council:

Community Led Local Development Fund 2025/26 The Community Led Local Development Fund (CLLD) is a Scottish Government funding programme, administered on behalf of the Local Action Group (LAG) by Scottish Borders Council. The LAG consists of volunteers from the local community and other key organisations. For this financial year 2025/26 the Local Action Group (LAG) was awarded a total of £472,427.14 to support community-led development across the Scottish Borders. This funding was split between Capital (£343,059.64) and Revenue (£129,637.50).

To date, the LAG has approved 15 projects under the Capital Development Fund, resulting in a remaining balance of £81,777.84. A further round of applications has been scored, and projects are currently undergoing review by LAG members to allocate the remainder of the funds. In addition, 3 projects have been approved under the Supporting Innovation Fund, which is now fully allocated. A list of the approved projects will be published on the Council's website in the near future

VisitScotland:

VisitScotland submitted a response to the Scottish Borders planning application related to the proposed development of Center Parcs. In light of the assessment of supporting documentation to the planning application and the identification of alignment to strategic objectives, VisitScotland is supportive of the Center Parcs Scotland Ltd. proposals. The submission advises that there is need for a coordinated regional and national response to wider infrastructure opportunities and challenges including those related to transport, staff housing and workforce skills and development.

The VisitScotland Board held their July meeting at the Great Tapestry of Scotland. The meeting agenda included a presentation from Gordon Smith, Destination Development Director to highlight the opportunities and challenges for the visitor economy across the South the Scotland. Specific focus was provided on the key investments that will impact the visitor economy. In the spirit of partnership there were welcome contributions from Karen Jackson, SOSE, Sam Smith, Scottish Borders Council and David Hope-Jones from South of Scotland Destination Alliance.

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.

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.

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

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.

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 had 1,720 applications, issued 1,679 licenses and only refused 7. 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.

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.

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 Newcastleton.

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 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.

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 in 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 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.

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.

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Contacts:

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

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- **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!