Responsible Tourism Strategy
Quarterly Actions and Progress Report #9 Annual report April - June 2026

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 ninth quarterly report, covering April– June 2026 – 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

SSDA Summer marketing campaign [Ref: Action 1.1.i]:

In response to latest visitor number developments shared by VisitScotland and feedback from tourism businesses across the region, the SSDA launched its first ever summer promotional activity in June 2026. The SSDA made £10,000 available to promote summer activities and breaks in the South of Scotland to key demographics.

When developing the promotions, key consideration was given to the following items:

- Providing space for specific business highlights to inspire action in potential visitors
- Focusing on long-form content and storytelling to capitalise on developments in consumer behaviour and online search trends such as AI and GEO
- Taking into account business input from past LLDD meetings on what makes summer in the South of Scotland for content developments
- Adjusting tone of voice across channels to introduce a more irreverent, cheeky and fun approach to copy

Key topics and themes to be highlighted throughout the campaign include:

- Food and drink, including the new Of Land, Sea and Season foodie experience content on SSH
- Outdoor activities, including coasts and waters, family-friendly experiences to suit different price points and interests, and wild wellness experiences to align with VS insights and consumer trends
- Touring and touring routes, including the SWC300, tour guides, as well as slow travel approaches through walking, cycling and public transport
- Family breaks
- Accommodation highlights, such as coastal stays, and farm stays

The SSDA also implemented business outreach as part of the campaign, inviting businesses to share their own stories and recommendations to feed into blog posts.

In response to business feedback, the SSDA also created a brand-new section and functionality on Scotland Starts Here for special offers, which is now being integrated into the campaign and all promotional activity going forward.

In the interest of keeping the campaign activity flexible and being responsive to key developments, all activity is being managed in house. The focus lies on paid social media promotions, with press and media support pushing the

Of Land, Sea and Season activity and further developing press and media relationships for visits.

By end of June 2026, the campaign had delivered:

- A Reach across social media of 260k
- 15k additional website visits to Scotland Starts Here
- 8 organic campaign posts, achieving over 5k likes and over 1k saves – in line with some of the highest performing Seasonality Campaign posts of the previous year

Blogs included:

- Unmissable Waterfall Walks
- Summer Solstice South of Scotland
- Al-fresco dining South of Scotland
- Scotland's Best Beaches
- Coastal stays
- Top Tours in the South of Scotland

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

The SSDA has begun its planning for its 2026/27 Seasonality marketing campaign, assessing learnings from 2025/26 and how to integrate these with the plans for the South of Scotland Dark Sky Festival. Once again, the SSDA is adjusting campaign planning and creative to align with current developments, trends, as well as input from partners and members.

Marketing Plan [Ref: Action 1.1.i]:

The SSDA worked closely with VisitScotland to closely align and collaboratively develop the new marketing plan for the South of Scotland to 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

As part of this the SSDA and VS also work together closely on press and comms activities, pitching, planning and realising collaborative press and media trips.

For Q1 of 2026, this included the VS press team sharing contact details for the SSDA marketing team for press opportunities for the SSDA to take forward. As a result, the SSDA welcomed Canadian writer Bryan Dearsley of World Atlas and Luxury UK on his first trip of the South of Scotland.

This activity will be followed by further collaborative trips in Q2 and Q3 of 2026/27.

The SSDA also kept VS updated on plans for the first ever South of Scotland Dark Sky Festival, leading to advance pitches to national and international media through VS media trips to key markets such as the US.

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

From April to June 2026, the SSDA secured over 24 pieces of positive destination coverage in the media, reaching an estimated audience of 237 million.

The SSDA also saw an increase in direct, international outreach from press and media during Q1. This has resulted in the confirmation of a Swedish

whisky-themed trip and an Italian foodie themed press trip for Q3 of 2026/27.

See sample coverage books for April, May and June.

The SSDA secured a major global 1,500 word long-form piece on the Common Ridings in National Geographic:
The festival that honors Scotland's chaotic—and rebellious—history | National Geographic

National Geographic is now owned by Disney and has unrivalled global reach, especially into our target high-spending North American audience. Just in the US, Nat Geo has a print circulation of 2 million and a further 20 million digital readers. It is published in 30 different languages.

VisitScotland SSDA Media and PR [Ref: Action 1.1.i]:
Between 1 April and 30 June 2026, the VisitScotland Global PR team generated awareness of the South of Scotland's destinations, experiences and tourism businesses through strategic media outreach, campaigns and press trips. These activities enhanced the region's profile, amplified positive stories and supported responsible tourism promotion. The Global PR team:

- Generated 729 pieces of coverage featuring destinations across the South of Scotland, with a reach of 929.3 million globally. This includes 665 pieces of syndicated coverage, mostly from the World Cup press releases distributed via Newswires, which included a mention of the Scottish Borders and the Tour de France mega event messaging.
- Included locations across the South of Scotland within messaging across in-person pitches during media networking events in New York, Boston, Syndey, Brisbane, Auckland, London, Paris, Berlin and Amsterdam.
- Included products and experiences across the South of Scotland in 5 e-comms issued to 2000+ media contacts globally, across consumer, lifestyle, travel and travel trade media. Highlights mentioned included: Deep Time Trail in the Scottish Borders, Cow to Cone Walking Tour at Ernespie Farm Shop & Kitchen in Dumfries & Galloway, Stranraer Oyster Festival in Dumfries & Galloway, Wigtown Book Festival, The new Dark Sky Festival taking place in Dumfries & Galloway, Dark Space Planetarium in Kirkcudbright, Tour O The Borders and multiple mentions to the Scottish Borders ahead of the Tour de France Grand Départ 2027.
- Completed 6 press trips within the south of Scotland components across key markets including: A Dumfries spotlight with Robin McKelvie securing coverage for multiple UK publications. Two VisitScotland Connect fam trips covering travel trade product in the South of Scotland – with coverage secured in European and Australian publications.
  Recent coverage highlights include –
- UK – Following a successful press trip in April with key journalist Robin McKelvie, multiple commissions were secured spotlighing Dumfries and the surrounding area in The Herald and The National – mentions include: The Globe Inn, Annandale Distillery, Robert Burns Centre, Robert Burns House, Caerlaverock Castle, Dark Space Planetarium, Dark Art Distillery and Kirkcudbright.
- France – Following attendance on a VisitScotland Connect fam trip, a hosted travel trade journalist produced multiple in-depth articles covering travel trade product in the South of Scotland and Glasgow. Extensive exploration across Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway and Glasgow led to the inclusion of a variety of attractions including Gretna Green and Caerlaverock Castle and more, with details of their trade credentials for agents and advisors, coverage below:
- Grands espaces, ciel de velours et terre sauvage : l'Écosse nature dans toute sa splendeur - Tour H...

- Châteaux, fantômes et poètes maudits : l'Écosse dans toute son histoire - Tour Hebdo
- Germany - Supported a press trip, Dorte Nohrden, for Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA - Germany's largest independent news agency). The trip was Agritourism focused (Farm stay; Belted Galloways), and included mentions to Low Kirkbride Farm, Robert Burns Ellisland Museum & Farm, The Globe Inn - coverage secured in Ostdeutsche Algemeine.
- Italy – In collaboration with VisitBritain, we supported an Italian media visit for *Dove* magazine, showcasing the South of Scotland's cashmere heritage alongside the region's wider tourism offering. The published feature has provided valuable international exposure for the destination and local tourism businesses.
- Australia – Following on from the VisitScotland Connect fam trip (Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway), coverage was secured in Travel Weekly Australia - article showcases Ayrshire and the South of Scotland as an authentic, lesser-known destination for Australian travellers, spotlighting key tourism partners while highlighting castles, coastal experiences, whisky tourism and sustainable travel. travelweekly.com.au/scotlands-south-west-secret-castles-coastal-escapes-and-whisky-trails

VisitScotland social media channels featuring South of Scotland content for period from 1 April 2026 – 30 June 2026

- Impressions: 17.18m
- Engagements: 903.6k
- Video views: 5.17m
- Saves: 48.7k

VisitScotland partnership campaign "Channel 4 – Where to next?" featuring Dumfries and Galloway

- VisitScotland has completed all paid spend on the social branded content, and have now delivered a total of 7,446,014 views across all platforms and we are tracking in at 192.57% which is an over delivery of 3.5M views against all booked views including added value. The film has almost doubled guaranteed views with a total view count of 1,677,401 views and more than 7.5M minutes watched. We have a final average view duration of 7:32 minutes vs the benchmark of 3:30 minutes. Additionally, our average % viewed has delivered well above benchmark at 33.1% vs the benchmark of 24.68%.
- **Instagram**
  Instagram has now a final average engagement rate of 0.74% vs benchmark of 0.6%, generating more than 40K total engagements. Our latest and final asset performed very well with a total view count of 1M Views and 9K engagements. The best performing asset from views and total engagements was the second reel, with more than 2.2M views and 19K engagements.
- **AV YouTube Shorts / AV Facebook Reels**
  The final YouTube Shorts video has generated more than 4K views and our final Facebook reel has been one of our best performing generating more than 73K views and 410 engagements, this is the most views & engagement on a single asset on the platform. Channel 4 are delighted with the final delivery results for the social branded content, so much so that the content has become an internal case study for success in the travel sector

'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.

Dumfries & Galloway Council confirmed new signage would be installed in three key access locations – in both directions at Gretna Green and at Cairnryan. The SSDA led on the brief, creation and finalising of the design of

the road signs, which are now being provided to Transport Scotland for printing and installation.

The SSDA also continues to assess and action opportunities for local visibility through SSH branded collateral. An ask from local businesses as well as the travel trade was to create a South of Scotland map to make it easier to provide an overview of the entire region. As a result, the SSDA developed the first ever promotional map of the South of Scotland, which was launched in June 2026.

The map's main purpose for visitors is to drive more people to the SSH website and app, while giving an introduction to the region. It also enables businesses to easily point out all there is to do nearby, and visualises ease of access and connections to the travel trade to encourage longer stays and further visits to businesses.

Though the initial print run was capped at 10,000, with distribution agreed between travel trade partners, local businesses and SSDA partners, more than 30 towns and businesses across the South of Scotland expressed interest to act as hubs, with major organisations such as Historic Environment Scotland creating plans to showcase and distribute the maps at their events.

The SSDA is now monitoring distribution and will assess reprints and potential map sponsorship opportunities throughout 2026/27.

Sustained long-term financial commitment [Ref: Action 1.1.v]
A SOSE funding agreement has been reached for the SSDA for the year 2026-27 and there is active work underway to develop a longer-term sustainable model for post-2027.

DGC - Visitor Levy [Ref: Action 1.1.v]
We want to develop a genuinely sustainable funding model to achieve this collective good and will think innovatively, but practically, about how to achieve this.

At a meeting of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 9 June 2026, councillors engaged in a full and balanced debate, informed by early engagement which highlighted a range of views on a proposed visitor levy, including concerns from parts of the tourism sector.

"Ultimately, a decision was made to stop all work at this point and not advance a scheme.

"While further work on a Visitor Levy will not progress at this time, the need to support the visitor economy and invest in local infrastructure remains.

"It will be for elected members to determine whether this issue is revisited in future. Our current focus is on working with businesses and communities to support sustainable tourism across Dumfries and Galloway

River Tweed Trail Business Engagement (Ref: Action Plan 1.2.iv & 1.5.iv):
The Tourism Business Engagement role continues having secured funding from Scottish Borders Council for a further year (2026- 27). During this period, work continued to engage with businesses to raise awareness and provide support to ensure businesses are ready. Further funding will be required beyond March 2027 for the role to continue.

Specifically, activity was focused on attendance at VisitScotland Connect in April – Scotland's flagship B2B event. Meetings were held with around 40 tour operators over the two days and provided an opportunity to showcase the route and the attractions along it for the first time. This

activity will be built upon in advance of the Trail being launched during 2028.

A resource has been developed for businesses providing them Top 5 Tips. These tips focus on getting found online easily, making booking a breeze, pricing for value, teaming up with partners and working smarter not harder.

Planning is underway for a workshop to be held in Coldstream in October. This will be a practical workshop exploring opportunities for local businesses, community organisations and new enterprises along the Trail.

Dark Skies Festival [Ref: Action 1.2.iv]:
As part of the Dark Skies Network, the SSDA has developed ambitious plans for a South of Scotland Dark Skies Festival (nine days in October) which will formally launch what we will call the South of Scotland Dark Skies Season (October to March).

From 9th –18th October, businesses and organisations across Dumfries & Galloway and the Scottish Borders would host their own events — from very small, low-key activities through to larger programmed experiences. The date has moved from the original proposal to include as much of the October holidays as possible and two weekends, hopefully maximising the opportunity for businesses.

All events will be badged as part of the Dark Sky Festival, with the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA), through its consumer-facing platform Scotland Starts Here, coordinating promotion, PR and a central listings page. To support businesses and spread recognition of the event there is an asset pack and image bank all available on SSDAlliance.com

Events could be anything that suits your business or community, for example:

- Stargazing sessions or night walks
- Dark Sky suppers or themed menus
- Storytelling, music or folklore evenings
- Photography workshops Wellness activities under the stars
- Family-friendly craft or learning sessions
- Music in the dark/silent disco

There has been remarkably high levels of business interest, with 20 events listed and many more in development as well as many businesses that can't hold events listing on our new special offers pages to enable them to tap into the potential of the festival. A press release is planned to support visitor planning and booking for the festival period with VisitScotland keen to promote the event to their audience.

Inspire the travel trade to the potential of the region (Ref : Action 1.3.i)
The SSDA actively represented the region at VS Connect26, meeting with over 78 domestic and international buyers. Discussions focused heavily on expanding South of Scotland products and experiences within the North American market, as well as driving interest in the River Tweed Trail. Key networking was further enhanced through attendance at the Gala Dinner.

During the first quarter, SSDA directly engaged with 6 key tour operators to support regional itinerary development and facilitate strategic introductions to local businesses.

Utilise the expertise of VisitScotland in supporting tourism businesses to develop bookable experiences to new and existing markets through activity including VisitScotland Connect [Ref: Action 1.3.4]:

- VisitScotland Connect 2026, the flagship travel trade event brought together 286 Scottish businesses to meet 330 global buyers with over 10000 scheduled meetings.
- 14 businesses from the South of Scotland participated across the 2 days of meetings with a further 9 national partner agencies profiling experiences in the region
- VisitScotland also ran a 'taster' VisitScotland Connect Travel Distribution workshop for businesses early in their travel distribution pipeline that was attended by 9 South of Scotland businesses

Leverage our credentials and designations [Ref: Action 1.4.i]:
While the details remain confidential, in this period the SSDA secured one a major global accolade for the region, from one of the world's most prestigious sources.

This will be announced in October 2026.

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

All funding was successfully secured for the Deep Time Trail, as well as planning permission.

A partnership with the Geological Society of America has been brokered, and they travelled to Scotland for the June Tercentenary.

The trail was fully developed and delivered, with an audio guide, in time for its launch in June at the James Hutton Tercentenary, with significant media coverage. It is already a well valued part of the visitor offering in Berwickshire.

Scottish Dark Skies Observatory [Ref: Action 1.4.iv]:
The SSDA continues to support the development of the Scottish Dark Skies Observatory (SDSO) at Clatteringshaws in the Heart of the Galloway Forest Park. With the SSDA's support, the SDSO secured planning permission and construction will soon start.

SSDA North American Market Building [Ref: Action 1.5.i]:
Addition to Product development: Work is underway with a number of key businesses in the region to develop a collaborative genealogy products to target the North American markets

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

1) Destination marketing partnership: Have a coordinated and collaborative approach to reaching target audiences in North America, building on existing learning/activity, with a clear, cohesive and compelling message about the South of Scotland which inspires increased booking.
2) Ancestry, history and heritage: Have a coordinated approach to increasing genealogy tourism, providing information, itineraries, content and signposting to reach out to the Scottish-US diaspora with a clear product and a warm, welcoming messaging, inspiring them to 'come home' and rediscover their clan homelands.
3) Travel trade: Engage, inform and inspire the international inbound travel trade, offering clear, bookable, long-range product which they can adopt, tailor and sell.
4) Product development: Strengthen the South of Scotland's product/offering, in line with the priorities and expectations of the

North American market, addressing the current gaps and issues in the destination.

5) Link to existing SSDA/SSH content and planned work: Ensure that visitor economy businesses with a North American market are actively involved in the SSDA/*Scotland Starts Here* and are benefitting from the activity, content and support available.

The SSDA secured a major global 1,500 word long-form piece on the Common Ridings in National Geographic:
The festival that honors Scotland's chaotic—and rebellious—history | National Geographic

National Geographic is now owned by Disney and has unrivalled global reach, especially into our target high-spending North American audience. Just in the US, Nat Geo has a print circulation of 2 million and a further 20 million digital readers. It is published in 30 different languages.

SSDA - Sam Heughan Partnership [Ref: Action 1.5.i]:
The SSDA is continuing to work in close partnership with Sam Heughan and 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.

There are eight main SSDA partnerships with Sam Heughan to support the destination:
- At the SSDA's proposal, Sam was the Grand Marshall at Tartan Week in New York, parading down 6th avenue in front of thousands.
- Sam spoke at the SSDA's Annual Conference
- Sam accepted the SSDA's invitation to speak at the 2026 Borders Book Festival, resulting in record-breaking numbers.
- Sam accepted the SSDA's invitation to speak at the 2026 Stranraer Oyster Festival.
- Sam accepted the invitation to speak at the Wigtown Book Festival 2026
- The SSDA supported the Galloway Ride-Out to show off the destination to local and global market
- The SSDA is brokering a major partnership with Edinburgh Airport which will see the official 'Welcome to Scotland' sign at International Arrivals 1 encouraging international arrivals to come to the South of Scotland.
- The SSDA is working with Sam to explore bringing his My Peak Challenge global gathering to the South of Scotland.

Other major projects are underway but are confidential at this time.

SSDA 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.

In this period the SSDA officially launched the proposition to the media, with Sam Heughan's support, securing excellent coverage in The Times, the BBC, the Scotsman and others.

The SSDA will have a launch information event in Stranraer on the eve of the Oyster Festival.

In this period, the National Trust for Scotland approached the SSDA and has become a formal supporter of the proposition.

STRAND 2: Develop the Visitor Experience

Thistle Awards [Ref: Action 2.1.ii]:
The SSDA was active through April-June 2026 encouraging and supporting South of Scotland businesses to apply for a Thistle Award.

In total, 134 nominations and 102 applications were received – which covered all 15 categories. Applications are now being reviewed by a panel of judges which continues to be managed by the VS Thistle Team. The results and finalists are announced next in the second quarter.

Thanks to the SSDA's outreach work, the South has exceeded other comparable regions, which have seen a significant down-turn in the number of applications.

Food and Drink [Ref: Action 2.1.v]:
The SSDA continued to deliver its major new piece Year of Food Experiences - branded 'Of Land, Sea and Seasons: Food experiences to savour', with significant media coverage around the four seasons of 2026/27:

- A taste of **Spring**
- A culinary journey through **Summer**
- Celebrating **Autumn** flavours
- Savouring **Winter** comforts

Burns Tourism [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:
The SSDA is continuing to lead the coordination of the Burns Tourism Partnership as part of its continuing delivery of its most recent 12-month action plan, with 15 clear objectives identified including the ongoing funding and development work for Ellisland and the production of a Burns' Walking Audio guide for Dumfries.

Having secure two years of funding from the UK Government, via the Dumfries Town Board, we were able to recruit for a Project Officer to significantly scale-up this collaboration and promotion work. The recruitment took place over this period, with an appointment successfully made.

A further major project 'In the Footsteps of Burns' project has been developed by the SSDA which will build partnerships with potentially thousands of Burns and Caledonia groups around the world, attracting high-spending north American visitors. This second project has been supported by Sam Heughan.

Common Ridings [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:
Building on the previous work with committees, the Common Riding pages on *Scotland Starts Here* have been further developed and we are adding as more visitor information and location information to make these community events as accessible as possible and encourage longer stays in the region.

In collaboration with Eventful Riders, we are adding new images and videos to each page at the end of the season. There is a day of filming planned capturing a spectators view of one of the ride outs.

Working with the consultant on the SBC funded economic impact assessment of the Common Ridings by supporting distribution of their surveys and putting them in contact with key stakeholders across the region.

Luxury horse-drawn carriage trips [Ref: Action 2.2.i]:
The SSDA provided specialist support to a carriage driving operator specialising in luxury bespoke carriage driving experiences to predominantly North American guests.

We provided logistical support as well contacts, routes and accommodation options. The operator stated his High Net Worth guests were delighted with the Scottish Borders and his for tours for next year have almost sold out without any promotion.

We are now working with them to support future delivery, including looking at possible expansion into D&G.

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.

This major new section has been completed in draft and is available online. The SSDA is consulting partners before its formal launch and promotion.

Events - *D&G Council:* **[Ref: Action 2.4.v]**
The South of Scotland hosted a diverse programme of high-profile events that made a significant contribution to the regional visitor economy. Established cultural events such as the Dumfries & Galloway Arts Festival and Spring Fling Open Studios attracted visitors from across Scotland and beyond, generating spending across accommodation providers, hospitality businesses, retail outlets and local attractions. These events not only showcased the region's vibrant cultural offer and creative talent but also encouraged visitors to explore rural communities and extend their stays, delivering valuable economic benefits to local businesses.

The quarter also saw the continued growth of the region's reputation as a destination for outdoor and sporting events. The Gralloch, the UK's premier UCI Gravel World Series event, brought thousands of competitors, spectators and support teams to Dumfries and Galloway, providing a significant boost to the local economy while promoting the area's world-class cycling and outdoor tourism assets. In addition, the inaugural South of Scotland Outdoor Festival, held at Drumlanrig Castle Estate, successfully celebrated the region's exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities, attracting participants and visitors to a wide range of activities. Together, these events strengthened the South of Scotland's appeal as a destination for culture, sport and adventure tourism, helping to drive visitor numbers, increase economic activity and support employment across the region.

Tour de France – SSDA: **[Ref: Action 2.4.v]**
The SSDA with VS co-runs the Destination Short Life Working Group for Tour de France preparations, also hosting the Industry Engagement Meetings.

In this period, the SSDA delivered a PR photo op around the 'one year to go' milestone, which secured national pick up, and the SSDA developed strategic objectives and work flows for the Tour de France to maximise visitor spend and legacy benefit.

Events - *D&G Council:* **[Ref: Action 2.4.v]**
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 de France – Grand Depart 2027
A series of community roadshows took place in Innerleithen, Galashiels, Melrose, Hawick and Newcastleton to explore how local communities, businesses and organisations can maximise the opportunities presented by the Tour de France event. Discussions focused on increasing visitor spend, supporting local businesses, developing community celebrations and volunteer programmes, enhancing destination promotion, encouraging cycling participation and creating a long-term economic, tourism and active travel legacy for the Borders. Residents and businesses were also invited to the public information sessions to learn more about the route, likely impacts, opportunities to get involved and the anticipated benefits of hosting one of the world's largest sporting events.

Tour of Britian
Hosting the Tour of Britain Men 2026 Final Stage 5 in Earlston in September presents a significant opportunity to safely deliver a major sporting event while maximising economic impact and enhancing the profile of the Scottish Borders as a visitor destination.

Community Festivals and Small Events Fund
Successful funding application have been received by Scottish Snorkel Festival, Sundials Festival and Innerleithen Open Studios to support their events

Community Cycling Fund
Successful funding application have been received by Wee Touro and Trans Caledonia to support their events.

Strategic Events Fund
The Strategic Events Fund continues to provide financial support for the creation and delivery of high-quality regional events across the Scottish Borders:

World Sheepdog Trials 2026
The World Sheepdog Trials have been awarded £25,000 from the Strategic Events Fund. The event takes place 16–20 September 2026 at Huntington Farm, Lauder. It brings top handlers and dogs from around the world. This major rural sporting event is regarded as the most prestigious global competition in sheepdog trialling and is expected to attract over 300 elite dogs and handlers from 34 countries, drawing more than 30,000 visitors and generating an estimated £10 million economic boost for the region.

Borders Book Festival 2026
The festival has been awarded £25,000 from the Strategic Events Fund. It will run from 11–14 June 2026 in the gardens and orchard of Harmony House in Melrose. With an offering of over 100 events including a dedicated Family Book Festival with children's authors and free activities the festival is known for attracting significant visitor numbers and therefore increasing spend in the local area.

Hawick Reivers Festival

A grant of £5000 has been awarded for the 2026 festival which will be used to cover essential operational costs such as insurance, venue and equipment hire, marketing, and event infrastructure enabling the delivery of a high-quality and largely free community festival. The organisers emphasise using local suppliers, ensuring that a large share of the grant spend directly supports the Hawick economy.

Common Ridings - Economic and Social Impact Assessment

A report has been commissioned to assess and to fully understand the scale of the economic contribution and the breadth of their social value, along with their community impacts. Currently a tender exercise is underway to appoint a consultant to deliver this piece of work. The report will assess and focus on local festivals in the Scottish Borders that feature a horse cavalcade element. The findings from this study will provide Common Riding committees with robust, evidence-based data to support future applications for external funding and to strengthen the long term sustainability of these events.

Events - *VisitScotland:* **[Ref: Action 2.4.v]**

- VisitScotland is currently in the of process of providing strategic support to both local authorities as they review next steps in events strategy planning.
- VisitScotland manages the National Events Fund with assessment of submission for Round 56 underway and applications being welcomed for Round 57 with a deadline of 5 October 2026.
- Through National Events Funding, VisitScotland supported The Gralloch, 15-17 May 2026 and Borders Book Festival ,11-14 June 2026 and will fund World Sheep Dog Trials, 16-20 September
- In partnership with Scottish Borders Council, VisitScotland has helped to secure Tour of Britain – men's edition to the region on 6 September 2026.
- VisitScotland supported 'year to go' comms and marketing for Tour de France -Grand Depart and will work with SSDA and SBC in relevant workstreams to support destination readiness and promotion.

Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund [Ref: Action 2.6.1]

Dumfries and Galloway Council:

After completing an audit of existing coastal gateway car park and countryside sites, DGC submitted 3 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) development grants applications to Visit Scotland in early 2026 for a number of coastal gateway sites comprising, Port Logan, Ardwell, New England Bay and The Dhoon near Kirkcudbright. The Council has been successful in being awarded £60,000 by Visit Scotland to develop designs to RIBA stage 4 detailed technical design for infrastructure improvements. Consultants will be appointed and the design works are due for completion in September 2026. The above coastal gateway sites are part of the wider Solway Coast and Marine Project (SCAMP) which is a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) Landscape Connections programme. Other prioritised coastal gateway sites will also have infrastructure improvements developed in preparation for a stage 2 delivery application to the NLHF in 2027. In addition, the site designs will be developed in parallel to the design development for the proposed North Solway coast path which incorporates the existing core path coast network with the aim to create a continuous coastal route from Gretna to Cairnryan.

Scottish Borders Council:

The Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan for the Scottish Borders has now been completed. A number of key locations have been identified where interventions could be made to enhance the visitor experience and relieve pressure on communities. The plan also aims to manage tourism sustainably to ensure growth is within the capacity of the destination. The council will apply to the VisitScotland Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

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

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 the Party Leaders or their lead manifesto writers, receiving strong cross party support. Four of the six parties competing in the May Holyrood election included references to completing the line in their manifestos.

Since the election, the SSDA is meeting with MSPs to maintain the all-party support.

Innerleithen Mountain Bike Innovation Centre [Ref:2.6.iii]

The project is progressing on time and on budget, with the groundworks and drainage works already completed by contractor Morrison Construction. The steel frame is now being erected and progressing towards a planned opening in Spring 2027.

Public Toilets [Ref: Action 2.6.vii]

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):

Center Parcs (Ref: Action 2.7.4):

All agencies are working together to support the £400m investment which will secure 1,200 jobs and more than double overnight visitors to the Scottish Borders.

The First Minister joined Centre Parcs Chief Executive Colin McKinley, the SSDA, SOSE, SBC and others to plant the firs trees of the new holiday village.

A £30m investment in infrastructure has been secured from the Scottish Government.

Centre Parcs CCO Raj Singh-Dehal spoke at the SSDA's Annual Conference in March 2026 to brief and engaging the wider visitor economy.

A formal Programme Board has been established to support the delivery of Center Parcs Scottish Borders, with Visit Scotland and the SSDA leading in developing a Visitor Economy Integration Plan.

SOSE investments [Ref: Action 2.7]:

Rocks and Wheels
Work of the £7.8m investment in the Rocks and Wheels campus in Dalbeattie progressing well with project support for 3 years secured from Government via our Communities Team. Ahead of opening a UCI Pump Track World Qualifier event has been secured for the pump track there. This is a rare UK qualifier enhancing South of Scotland's designation and destination as a Bike Region. The pump track will open just ahead of the UCI event in June.

SOSE Cultural colleagues are working to support Creative Coathanger who are working to develop a range of branding, copywriting and visual media training and support focussed of assisting tourism and hospitality industry clients.
SOSE's film specialists are working in partnership with VS, Screen Scotland, Disney and the producers Alan Carr's Castle project to maximise the potential publicity and international reach of the filming.

Work continues to support the significant ambitions of Robert Burn's Ellisland recreation as The Home of Auld Lang Syne. Great publicity came out of NY and Tartan week this month with notable prominence for South of Scotland, inevitable given presence of Sam Heughan but notable all three, Ellisland, Galloway Distillery and the innovative Scotland Shop have SOSE support.

Mountain Bike Innovation Centre:
The significant SOSE investment in Mountain Bike Innovation Centre and associated facilities is now at construction phase.

Agritourism:
SOSE continues to support the work of Scottish Agriculture to being an international focus on all of Scotland with the first International Agritourism Conference coming to Scotland in June. A number of South of Scotland businesses are presenting or part of the extended programme of familiarisation visits.

Annan harbour project:
SOSE confirmed investments in several major projects including £1.2m investment and ongoing infrastructure and other support in the notable Annan harbour project which is now underway. As well as revitalisation and recognising the port's significant history the £15.6m development will include café, visitor hub, events space and a leisure lagoon and maritime heritage centre.

Center Parcs:

SOSE has worked with Scottish Government to secure a substantial capital sum of up to £30m that will deliver vital enabling infrastructure at Center Parcs.

SOSE colleagues working to support Center Parcs' construction and procurement stages have now agreed a range of specific work streams with a range of agencies and partners to enable progress to be made at pace now the site is live.

SOSE supported a number of South of Scotland hospitality businesses to go on an off-season learning journey to Cornwall to see innovative food and drink enterprises to help inspire our hospitality sector.

SOSE infrastructure and business development specialists continue to offer specialist advice and funding support to a growing number of

community and commercial enterprises with five new tourism/hospitality projects starting engagement in last week.

SOSE has working with Scottish Government, Scottish Agritourism and HIE to grant fund a significant number of rural businesses via the £1,000,000 Agritourism Infrastructure Fund. Beneficiaries will be advised post-election.

To date over 200 tourism and hospitality enterprises have been support with SOSE grant funding of around £30 with further grant support for ongoing projects being progressed.

SOSE's Communities Team are undertaking a significant project supporting a range of enterprises in the Machar's including Wigtown Festival Company, Whithorn Trust and the support to buy the Wigtown Ploughman community pub and restaurant. This cluster approach has significant tourism and hospitality focus.

The SOSE-led Small Producers Pilot Fund is supporting 32 small producers across Scotland with £377,000 of funding with 15 of those in the SOSE area. This will increase regional food resilience and improve supply chains for local produce into the local hospitality market too.

SOSE and Scottish Borders Council market the 1,000th client to be supported by their partnership on Business Gateway Scottish Borders. The 100th was The Scottish Cheese Academy offering certified cheese education, hospitality training and cultural tourism experiences based around excellent Scottish Cheese.

SOSE hosted 160 entrepreneurs to celebrate International Women's Day 2026 at Smiths Gretna Green, a number were from the tourism and hospitality sector. Kate Forbes as DFM visited Great Tapestry of Scotland to meet SOSE CEO Jane Morrison-Ross to recognise success of Pathways project which encourages entrepreneurship in women where grants of £1,000 to explore business ideas have led to over 100 business being created and hundreds more enquiries.

SOSE has invested in historic buildings at Barwhillanty Estate to provide more much-needed accommodation in addition to existing support to create a new year-round sustainable events venue which completes this month and launches with a series of events including Mr Pooks Supper clubs adding significant variety close to Castle Douglas Food Town.

A number of grants to tourism and hospitality sector enterprises have been made in recent months and details will appear on SOSE's website in due course.

STRAND 3: Support Businesses to Succeed:

SSDA Business Plan [Ref: Action 3.1.i]:
The SSDA is continuing to deliver its ambitious 2025-27 Business Plan, which is closely aligned to the Responsible Tourism Strategy. The Business Plan is essentially the SSDA's programme of work for the next couple of years as a DMMO: 58 projects clearly delineated, each with a one-sentence strategic objective (the *why)*, a handful of bullets around our approach (the *how*), details as to who we're partnering with on this, the targets, the Strategy reference, and the SSDA staff member leading.

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

In April 2026, the SSDA published a detailed Mid-Term Review with an update briefing on where we are against all 58 projects at this, the half-way point in the two-year period. For each project the SSDA gives a summary of what its done, what this has achieved, what they will do next and which team member is responsible.

Each project is rated as:

- GREEN – Good, tangible progress achieved and are on track to deliver by 2027
- YELLOW – Some progress has been made and are confident that, with the right priorities in 2026/27, will achieve plans
- AMBER – Little progress has been made so far and may need to make changes to our plans
- RED – No real progress made and have real concerns will not achieve by 2027. Major changes are required or need to stop this work.

SSDA Representing the industry [Ref: Action 3.1.i]:
The SSDA represented the industry by writing to, briefing and meeting with all South of Scotland MSPs, MPs and Cllrs. It also specifically briefed D&G Cllrs in advance of a Notice of Motion full council debate about the challenges facing tourism and hospitality.

Visit Scotland - Developing a programme of support for businesses [Ref: Action 1.3.1]:

- VisitScotland Business Support Hub offering a wider range of support and advice to tourism and events businesses continues to provide opportunities for South of Scotland Businesses
- VisitScotland released a series of Business Essentials and Bitesize Webinars across a variety of topics including – 'Understanding Travel Distribution' and individual market updates for North America, Australia, China, Europe

SSDA Annual Conference [Ref: Action 3.1.i]:
On the 11th of March 2026, more than 200 South of Scotland tourism business leaders came together for the fifth annual conference of the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA). The day was a chance for businesses to network, share their experience, build new collaborations and -together- map out the next chapter of tourism in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway.

There was a fantastic line-up of inspiring and informing speakers.

Vicki Miller, CEO of VisitScotland, spoke of her own experience growing up in the region, highlighting the many strengths of the South of Scotland's visitor economy and giving a national overview.

Raj Singh-Dehal, Chief Corporate Officer of Centre Parcs UK, briefed businesses on plans for Centre Parcs Scottish Borders, which has now

secured planning permission. This £400m investment will create 700 jobs through the construction phase and 1,200 permanent jobs once open, attracting 350,000 visitors, spread evenly through the year. This will, single-handedly, more than double the number of overnight visitors to the Scottish Borders.

Of those who gave feedback:

- 58% rated the day as "excellent", 35% as "good" and 6% as "average", 0% rated it as "not great" or "bad"
- 76% said the SSDA was "extremely useful", 24% said "quite useful", 0% said "not very useful" or "not useful at all"

Feedback included:

- "It wasn't just a 'sit down and listen' conference but one that got everyone involved. Topics were great and varied and speakers were very insightful (and funny!). It was my first time attending an SSDA conference and I look forward to attending another!"
- "The speakers in attendance were great, the choice of breakout sessions was VERY good (and actually very well handled). The SSDA team are really the stars - such enthusiasm!"
- "I really liked the venue, I thought it had a lovely, community feel about it. The range of breakout sessions was great, as were the speakers"
- "I enjoyed the breakout sessions, I thought they were more useful than previous years. I really enjoyed the data session and found that to be the most useful."
- "It was welcoming and friendly atmosphere and really involving everyone at all levels of business. Can we do the workshops from the afternoon at another time? I wanted to do them all!"

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.

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 issued 150 STL licences in this quarter (36 new and 114 renewals), with a total of 1,743 licensed active short term lets.

As of 30th June 2026, Scottish Borders Council public register shows 1,393 applications have been received to date, with 1,311 granted and none refused. 36 are pending determination and 46 have expired/superseded due to renewal.

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.

After the very successful round of February 2026 meeting, plans have been made for in-person meetings in all 14 areas in Oct-Dec 2026, with dates soon to be published.

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 was 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. It hosted a major meeting of all organisations in April 2026, with updates on progress.

The SSDA also spoke at the Regional Economic Partnership about the need to build soft skills amongst those entering work in the visitor economy.

Data Insights [Ref: Action 3.4]:
The most recent 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).

Both SBC and DGC have been working with the independent agency to develop the 2025 STEAM data which will likely be published late summer/early autumn 2026.

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]:
The SSDA, with the two councils, is starting a new piece of work to significantly strength the digital information available on Scotland Starts Here (website and app) about paths and trails, for walking, cycling and equestrian use.

A major new walking section to Scotland Starts Here has been developed and launched, pages on:

- History and heritage walks
- Coastal and riverside walks
- Accessible and family friendly paths
- Town trails
- Hill walks
- Nature and wildlife walks
- Long distance routes
- All walking routes

With inspiration pages on:

- Walks with rewards
- Scenic waterfall walks
- 10 spectacular coastal walks
- 7 walks from hostels
- Six climbs in the South of Scotland

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.

Net Zero [Ref: Action 4.2]:
The South of Scotland has been chosen as one of four regions to participate in the new VisitScotland Sustainable Destination Development Programme. The year-long pilot activity will provide a comprehensive programme of support, specialist guidance, and practical tools enabling the destination to deliver faster and more robust progress on their sustainable tourism journey.

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.

Providing a framework to support and encourage tourism businesses on a journey to Net Zero [Ref: Action 4.2.5]
VisitScotland has launched detail of a Climate Action Accelerator programme that will help businesses across Scotland harness the many benefits that can arise from thinking positively and proactively about reducing emissions, working collaboratively with business leads and the communities they represent for long-lasting impact**.** A range of cohorts will

be available in 2026. Free Climate Action Accelerator programme launch - News | VisitScotland.org

Tweed Trail Canoe trail [Ref: Action 4.4.i]
Strong national and international media coverage has generated huge interest not just in the trail itself but also the wider area, evidence suggests the canoe trail is attracting a strong audience. Biggar Adventure, the main operator on the river, guided a total of 450 paddlers in 2024, paddling sections or the entirety of the trail, visitors either camped along the route or stayed in Innerleithen (with sites such as Traquair and Tweedside Caravan Park benefitting.

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

Destination Tweed's new Literary Trail – Tweed Valley Words
The trail highlights the literary heritage of the Tweed Valley, guiding visitors to landmarks and locations that celebrate the writers inspired by the River Tweed and its communities

E-bike Accessibility Fund' [Ref: Action 4.4]
Scottish Borders Council's project 'Ebike Accessibility Fund' was selected as a finalist in the Cycling for All category, which recognises projects that:
· Increase access to cycling for underrepresented groups
· Foster community engagement and wellbeing
· Demonstrate measurable social impact
The Ebike Accessibility Fund stood out for its commitment to making cycling more inclusive—especially through electric bikes, which can empower people with mobility challenges, longer commutes, or limited access to traditional bikes.
Being named a finalist in the UCI Cycling for All & Sustainability Awards is a major recognition and demonstrates a project's impact on inclusive and sustainable cycling.

Visitor Management [Ref Action: 4.5.1]
VisitScotland content team has created a new guide based on the 10 Scottish Outdoor Access Code Tips | VisitScotland to help visitors enjoy Scotland's stunning landscapes responsibly. The 10 Scottish Outdoor Access Code Tips has been translated into five languages (Dutch, French, German, Italian, and Spanish) and gives top tips to visitors on how to behave responsibly and safely across the countryside, whether they be walking or cycling, driving or camping.
It aims to capture visitors at the planning stage of their trip.

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!