

SELKIRK AND THE VALLEYS TEAM 2024

TOURISM SUBGROUP

June 2024

The Selkirk and the Valleys Team is a voluntary, community-led group tasked with building on the existing strengths of the town and surrounding valleys, to support, regenerate and improve the economic, social and cultural vitality of our historic market town and surrounding amenities to the benefit of its residents, businesses, and visitors.

The team is made up of five small subgroups each dedicated to driving forward the proposals and suggestions fed through to them from the various public consultations that have taken place over the past 18 months. And it is vital that the local community and businesses continue to be at the heart of our plans to regenerate and transform the area.

Selkirk and the Valleys, one of the oldest Royal Burghs in the country is a significant historical area which has witnessed many important events in the history of Scotland. It is easily accessible from the Central Belt and North of England, has many features of interest and has an unrivalled quality of lush landscape and built heritage. Through initial consultation and team planning, tourism has been identified as a key theme to support the area's future economic growth and sustainability and the potential we have here is huge.

We have much to offer throughout our area and in order to ensure that we can entice visitors and offer a first class tourist experience, we need to ensure that we market all of the wonderful amenities, attractions etc. in an appropriate manner and provide information which will make the visitor experience one to remember and one to be repeated.

A variety of ideas exist to make this happen including, for example, better connectivity between attractions, better car parking facilities, establishing an annual calendar of events etc. and these ideas need to be developed and refined into a deliverable action plan.

The Selkirk and the Valleys tourism group have met over the last few months and following planning workshops with SCOTO (Scottish Community Tourism) have identified several areas/topics which we believe need further consideration, investment and marketing in order to put Selkirk and the Valleys on the tourism map. The full SCOTO report can be viewed here <insert link>

Our core areas for development are:

1. Working Together

Selkirk and the Valleys have not traditionally been marketed together, in fact they have almost become quite disassociated with one another and at times in competition for visitors. However there have been some past successful collaborations such as the Walking Festival in 2019 and we now believe we have a golden opportunity as Selkirk, Ettrick and Yarrow Valleys and the Ale Water Valley to come together as one town and country group and present a new and dynamic representation of the area to visitors and become a thriving tourism destination – a destination that has grown responsibly with its community's interests in mind.

This group will include representatives from each area and ensure a good spread of tourism and hospitality business and services. The key aims are for us to facilitate collaboration and information sharing between businesses, coordinate plans and marketing activity for the benefit of the town and surrounding valleys and with a strong, unified message capitalise on our unique selling points and increase visitor numbers.

We also hope to secure funding for a Tourism Development Officer role who will be responsible for leading day to day activity, liaising with businesses throughout the area, producing visitor information and marketing materials.

2. Developing our Tourism Story

We will create a new tourism brand for Selkirk and the Valleys that will be the first stage of telling our story to visitors. This will include a logo and set of key messages, unique selling points that sum up what makes us stand out from other areas in the Scottish Borders and beyond.

These will be used to promote the area through a variety of marketing initiatives including a new visitor-friendly website and social media channels. Local businesses will be invited to use the brand and share 'assets' or materials that we create in their own marketing activity, e.g. window stickers, posters, leaflets and online content.

The tourism group will work closely with the bigger destination organisations such as the South of Scotland Destination Alliance, VisitScotland and the tourism/ events team at Scottish Borders Council to ensure Selkirk and the Valleys are included in all relevant marketing activity, media visits etc

3. Improve Visitor Information

Our Selkirk and the Valleys tourism offer has been greatly underplayed over the years and we do not promote the high quality mix of heritage attractions and recreational opportunities in and around the town effectively enough. The challenge is to coordinate this rich offer and promote Selkirk and the surrounding area as a whole day/multi day destination.

This can be solved in part by collating comprehensive information about all our existing businesses and activities, for example cycle and walking routes, opening hours for coffee shops, history and heritage landmarks and stories. We know lots of these exist but many are now out of date and aren't as inclusive or as wide-reaching as they should be. Following our initial information gathering we will develop a production plan for new, improved and comprehensive visitor guides, building out the successful Welcome to Selkirk booklet with lots of inspiration and information for things to do and how to get the most out of a trip to Selkirk and the Valleys.

These will be promoted via our own website, social channels, by local businesses and through out-of-area marketing activity but in addition we would like to establish a Visitor Information Hub in the centre of the town.

There's nothing visitors like more than being able to chat to locals about things to do, personal recommendations on places to eat, visitor attractions etc and now that VisitScotland is closing

all of their icentres, there's nowhere like this to help signpost visitors into businesses. Initially this may be us using part of an existing business or pop-up shop space but in time we'd like to secure funding for a dedicated space, information boards, signage etc. This will be fundamental in helping develop our tourism strategy.

4. Increase Visitor Numbers

If our tourism and hospitality businesses are to flourish and help contribute to the wider economy and well-being of Selkirk and the Valleys, we need to attract more visitors that stay for longer.

We will develop a programme of festivals and events e.g. Common Riding, Scott's Selkirk, Selkirk 7s as well as smaller community interest activities such as the cinema, live music nights in the pubs and hotels, and where appropriate use these to attract more visitors.

Perhaps one of our greatest challenges is with accommodation for visitors – we must offer a varied and attractive array of accommodation offers and we recognise the need to improve on what is currently available. As a tourism group we would like to explore some new opportunities such as:

- Victoria Park Campsite and Swimming Pool - potential for development and improvement of our local Victoria Park campsite and swimming pool facilities, making this a first class base for people to explore the fantastic environment and activities on our door step.
- Sustainable and environmentally friendly Motorhome Aires and stopover points in the surrounding valleys at suitable locations would also be a huge benefit, not only in attracting visitors, but at the same time prevent damage from vehicles parking up for stopovers in unsuitable rural locations irresponsibly and inappropriately, which is an increasing problem all over the country due to the huge increase in tourers following the COVID pandemic.
- A bunkhouse to offer cheap affordable accommodation to the numerous walkers, cyclists etc. that pass through.