

## Whithorn and district Business Association,

### ALL MACHARS GUIDE – FINAL REPORT FOR LEADER

The aim of this project was to publish a visitor guidebook which would

- Provide small businesses with access to markets outside the Machars, since most are micro businesses without funds for marketing; this was to be achieved using professional distribution companies with displays and pick up points throughout the South of Scotland, north of England and Northern Ireland
- Create a new look for the Machars, which would be attractive, professional and recognisable in the future
- Link all communities in the Machars, which have rarely, if ever, worked together, and thereby create a critical mass of attractions and businesses; this would increase the length of visits and attract greater visitor spend
- Provide a simple, easy-to-use guide for visitors, as an overview for the area, as an addition to the large numbers of individual leaflets and booklets available
- Create working relationships and links between Machars community groups, which has been lacking in the past and which could leave a legacy of networks to be used in future projects

This project has been a story of success, after initial setbacks and doubts: the project has come in under-budget and on time; by happy chance, 75,000 have been printed ( instead of the planned 60,000) and are being distributed, while remaining under the original budget estimate. Demand has been strong, and in some cases difficult to keep up with, particularly from the professional tourism industry – TIC's ( Tourist Information Centres ) have been exceptionally keen to have further supplies. The Machars "brand" and look has been very well received. Destination Dumfries and Galloway has requested permission for the use of the text from the booklet for the development of its new website and this has been supplied. Good relations have been established particularly with Isle of Whithorn and Wigtown, and there is pressure from Rhins of Galloway communities, with an interest in joining a 2012 publication.

- **How it All Began**

The Association was aware of the challenges facing local tourist providers during the recession and had also seen the Kirkcudbright 2010 booklet, which, we had been informed, was proving very popular with visitors to the Stewartry. We also recognised that the individual Machars settlements, being much smaller than Kirkcudbright, would do much better to team up and create a joint marketing publication, which had never been done before. In previous projects, we had experienced a good deal of the fragmentation which is inevitable where there are small communities, separated geographically and with fiercely held cultural identities; we hoped that some of these divisions could be overcome by a joint publication. It was also, we thought, to the visitor's benefit that a single publication should provide an overview for the Machars, because there exists a plethora of individual leaflets

for individual attractions, accommodation and settlements, but no single source of information. There was also no coherent central guide to events, except for an e mailed list provided by Machars Action monthly to a list of contacts; there was no single published guide. We knew from Machars Action, among others, that visitors did request a printed guide to the area, but that there was a gap in the market. An online or e mailed guide was considered less desirable, as there are still considerable gaps to the broadband connection in the area and still few venues where wi fi is accessible to the public. Two local Councillors, Graham Nicol and Sandra McDowall, were also supportive; one had previously been involved with the Machars Triangle marketing scheme.

- **Whom we contacted**

In April 2010, we began sending out letters to significant events organisers, visitor attractions and fellow business associations. Respondents were only asked to express interest, not to contribute money at this point, and were asked if they would like to join an organising group. Initial responses were positive. The main participants who attended initial meetings in June 2010 included Isle Futures, Isle Cinema, Whithorn Trust, Swallow Theatre, District of Wigtown Chamber of Commerce, Newton Stewart Rotary Club, Wigtown Community Festival, DGAA, as well as our own representatives. These representatives continued to attend group meetings during the early life of the project, to agree policy decisions and award contracts; they were also regularly updated by e mail.

- **Objectives**

We aimed to provide a professionally designed product, easily identifiable with the Machars, distributed outside the region to areas within driving distance, and to create a format which could be repeatable in future years. Any funds raised the first year would be ring-fenced for a second year's production. The creation of a logo or a "look" for the Machars was extensively discussed, especially one which could become recognisable in future years and associated with the area and with the annual publication. The aim of the text would be to provide a taster or introduction to the main Machars communities, with advertising associated with each village or town, enabling visitors then to have an informed view before picking up more detailed leaflets and publications once within the area. For most of the settlements, it was easy to pick an identifying theme, eg. Wigtown "Book Town", Whithorn "Cradle of Christianity", Garlieston, Home of the "Mulberry Harbour", Port William "Maxwell Country" and so on.

- **Funding**

The Whithorn and District Business Association had accumulated some funds from previous sales of its other publications and marketing wares, and also had close links with the Whithorn Photographic Group, which had earned funds from its contribution of local photographs to the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments' SCRAN project. The Business Association committed £2,600 of its funds and the Photographic Group £2,500. The in-kind contribution was to come principally from Whithorn and District Business Association and the Chamber of Commerce, Wigtown District.

- **LEADER contribution**

LEADER was asked for the full 50% of the project costs, estimated at £15,300; in the event, the application to LEADER was successful and a grant of £7,650 was agreed. Given that the project has now been completed under-budget, these figures have been revised to £12,825.12, with a total LEADER contribution of £6412.56

- **PROJECT START**

The project began in the autumn of 2010, with various group meetings and a call for

advertisers from the end of October 2010, with a deadline of November 30<sup>th</sup>. The designer was to be appointed and discussions held with him by January 2011; tenders for print to go out in December 2010. The advertisers were asked to provide copy by the end of January 2011, with proofs to be provided during March, printing before Easter 2011, and distribution beginning prior to Easter weekend, which fell on 23<sup>rd</sup> April.

The projected dates for printing and distribution were in fact achieved.

The end date of the project was July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011, though distribution will continue throughout the visitor season

- **HOW IT WORKED OUT**

Despite the initial enthusiasm for the project, expressed by events organisers, businesses and visitor attractions during April to June 2010, the call for advertisers during November 2010 resulted in far fewer actually committing themselves to advertising. By December, the group met to discuss options – indeed, actually considered whether to cancel the idea altogether – but the Business Association committee remained firmly behind the idea and a sustained campaign of visiting potential advertisers face-to-face, as well as a deluge of e mail reminders, letters to new potential recruits, and pressure applied by colleagues, Councillors and others began in earnest, despite the disruption of Christmas and New Year holidays. As a result of many hours' work, particularly foot work by Chairman Gill Bailey, the advertising began to come in and, though somewhat short of what was initially projected ( in particular, those we had considered “large” events or advertisers, taking smaller advertisements than anticipated ) we began to realise that the project could go ahead. The major difficulty we experienced was in the North Machars, where there was much less interest than we had anticipated. This was a considerable disappointment and as a result fewer rural businesses than targeted have actually participated in the project, fortunately, the Forestry Commission, Cinema, RSPB and numbers of other non-business organisations from the Newton Stewart area did support the initiative.

- **DELIVERY** The quotations for design work and distribution were circulated and voted on by the managing group, and the print job went out to formal tender. As a result, though some weeks later than planned, Wee Sleekit were appointed designers and met the group in February 2011, while the Free Press at Stranraer won the tender for the print job; distribution was to be carried out by Direct Distribution of Glasgow, who had offered a reduction in price if accepted by the end of January 2011. Before the beginning of March 2011, various designs had been proposed by Wee Sleekit, circulated to the managing group, and a particular design selected which we believed satisfied our requirement for repeatability, distinctiveness, characterisation of the region, and legibility for presentation within leaflet racks. The final total printed was expected to be 60,000 copies, of which 45,000 were to be palleted and sent to Glasgow by the Free Press, and 15,000 delivered to Whithorn for our own local distribution in Dumfries and Galloway. In fact, owing to printer error, a total of 60,000 copies were sent to Glasgow, a fact which we discovered a month later when asking the distributors about their progress; a further 15,000 were delivered to Whithorn for local distribution. As a result and after agreeing a supplementary distribution fee with the distributors for the extra 15,000 copies, a total of 75,000 copies will have been distributed during the life of this project. Although the professional distributors were distributing within Dumfries and Galloway, we also knew that there would be many local opportunities for distribution, as well as smaller venues, which the professional company would not tackle; we therefore took note of their list and began distributing to caravan parks, businesses, hotels and events to which they were not delivering. As of June 2011, of the 30 boxes ( 500 per box ) delivered to Whithorn and kindly stored for us by a Committee member, less than six remain. Some venues, such as caravan parks, have rapidly run out of stock and asked for more; the overall reception for the booklet was positive, including some

venues, eg. Gatehouse of Fleet, accepting copies when – prior to seeing the product – they were dubious about accepting it. Kirkcudbright Tourist Information reported that they had run out of copies, as did Wigtown Spring Weekend; all these were rapidly re-supplied and these deliveries were achieved using volunteer labour from the Committee or contacts. Distribution will continue throughout the season, with significant events such as Wigtown Agricultural Show, the Whithorn Lecture and Wigtown Book Festival still to come in the later season. During June, we have been responding to urgent requests for new supplies at the rate of several demands per week; this accounts for the extra hours spent by volunteers in rapidly filling these orders. Anecdotal evidence from supply points such as tourist information centres and caravan parks suggest that a gap in the market has been met by this product : the common comment is:"This is just what we need".

- **MARKETING THE PRODUCT**

Press releases were made about the launch of the booklet and the Whithorn Trust hosted a launch event, at which advertisers and local businesses were invited to pick up copies during a four hour period, when other products created by the Association were also available. A digital download of the brochure is also available on [www.whithorn.info](http://www.whithorn.info) and was also made available to other management group members, including Wigtown Chamber of Commerce. An added incentive for browsers to pick up the booklet and read it is the hamper draw on the inside rear cover : a local provider of food hampers of local products offered us a hamper free of charge for a draw, to be held on St Andrew's Night, and we have begun receiving entries for this draw, from central Scotland up to Stirling and as far as Anglesey to the south. The motive was to capture postcodes of those who had been taking up the booklet and also, as there were questions about the area to answer to qualify for the draw, to ascertain that entrants had read and absorbed basic facts about the Machars and area, such as that the first Saint in Scotland founded a church at Whithorn or the inception of the Dark Skies park north of Newton Stewart. It was important for us that the product advertised in the draw was of local Galloway food products, thereby further showcasing local industry.

- **PARTICIPANTS AND BENEFICIARIES**

The aim was to benefit small businesses in scattered rural communities; though the final total of businesses benefiting is lower than planned, there was a higher number of charities and social enterprises benefiting than projected. For instance, we made contact with Catstrand and, in exchange for a free advertisement and circulation to their contacts, we offered them a free advertisement on a page with other arts-related activities. A further venture was to agree advertising with the Rhins Gardens Cluster, who now offer a passport with discounts to visitors to all their participating gardens; we were aware that many Machars visitors make the trip to the Rhins, particularly for the gardens, and that their events would contribute greatly to the Events Guide at the back of the booklet. This has now led to an approach from the South Rhins to see if we could further expand the booklet next year to include the Rhins; discussions ( and financial analysis) are under way to investigate this possibility. The not-for-profit organisations which participated included Whithorn Trust, DGAA, Swallow Theatre, Wigtown Book Festival, Newton Stewart Walking Festival; some farm-based businesses such as Ewe to You and farm accommodation businesses also participated. Some larger national charities participated, such as the RSPB and we have had a request from RSPB headquarters for fuller participation in a 2012 guide

One of the aims of the project was to bring disparate communities together and to establish better channels of communications and an awareness of the benefits of working in common. Relations with the Isle of Whithorn, via Isle Futures / Cinema and with Wigtown Chamber of Commerce have both improved and there are now personal connections which can be, and have been, used for other purposes and projects.

Since distributing the booklet, we have found that some business owners in areas we targeted without success are hoping to participate next year; for instance, the Gem Rock Museum and some caravan parks in the Glenluce area wish to join us in the next issue.

- **BUDGET**

The final cost of the project was £12, 825.12, of which £10,492 were print, design and distribution costs

We had no concerns on the major element of the budget – viz. the print costs, which comprised the lion's share of the cost – as this in fact worked out at £7000, as against a forecast of £7750. There was some cost overrun on photography, as we had discovered that VisitScotland were charging for several images picked by the designers, and, though we did agree to pay for two, we decided to replace some others with images we could source ourselves in order to avoid any substantial cost overrun. The distribution company made a special offer of £1000 if accepted in January. There was also some slight increase on the design budget, as the designer charged for a site visit; we did, however, feel that as they also undertook – at no extra charge - to carry out layout and formatting for those advertisers ( the majority) who were not technically able to design their own advertisements, we received good value for money from Wee Sleekit, and that their design is a major component in the appeal of the booklet covers.

- **ANALYSIS**

Initially, the project looked like an up-hill task, despite promising indications at the start, and we found the failure to respond by advertisers in November quite daunting. Perseverance and some bold thinking by Whithorn and District Business Association Committee, as well as some intensive campaigning for advertising, has led to success and a feeling of achievement by the Committee. The reaction of advertisers and those being supplied has made the project feel like a success, and indications of further interest, eg. from the Rhins, RSPB and Gem Rock Museum, show that there is support for a further year's publication. The fact that there is now a product to show potential advertisers and proof that the Committee was able to carry out and complete a major project may help ease the recruitment of advertisers in the coming year. Some discussion needs to be held with regard to print runs and distribution for 2012, as well as about the best time to contact advertisers : early autumn is generally too early, as the season is still active, whereas Christmas is too late. A properly conducted campaign during November is likely to produce results, but will require better monitoring for warning signs and early intervention if expected advertisers and levels of commitment do not come in. We have also found that using our local contacts for distribution has saved time and money : we managed to get the local grocer, who was delivering to Wigtown, to rush a box of booklets to the Wigtown Spring Weekend just in time for Friday evening; likewise, GC books at Bladnoch delivered to their home town of Kirkcudbright, to the TIC, in time for the May Bank Holiday, and also offered to carry out door to door distribution there, in tandem with their Book Town leaflet deliveries; the Whithorn Trust has dropped booklets for us at their own leaflet exchange meetings and on other trips. Using local contacts, friends and know-how has proved cost effective, environmentally friendly, and has economised on our time. Lastly, we have found that few advertisers are computer-literate enough to compose advertisements to the designer's specifications and this is an area where we have to look at time and costs involved; Wee Sleekit undertook the work this time, but we cannot be sure of this in the future.

- **THE FUTURE**

The plan is to republish the Guide for 2012, reusing the design elements which we will have

on electronic file for reuse, and possibly expanding more fully to the Rhins of Galloway. Distribution and print run size will all have to be examined in the light of our financial position, as well as any possible increase in page numbers due to new advertisers. The committee do consider, however, that the project is worth continuing and developing, that the Machars needs to increase its profile in hard financial times, and that, without this guide, there would not be a substitute either generated by market forces or led by another community organisation willing to include the whole of the Machars.

- **LEADER outcomes : Develop a Diverse and Dynamic Business Base**

We believe that the project has contributed to developing a diverse and dynamic business base

1. By creating a network of local business and social enterprises in touch with each other
2. By small communities taking the initiative to market themselves
3. By combining together government institutions, such as Historic Scotland and Forestry Commission, farm enterprises, local business associations, social enterprises, small charities and large national charities, all with a common interest in tourism in Galloway

## **CONCLUSION**

Given the level of demand for this booklet, once published, it is clear that the booklet had answered a felt need and a gap within the market, and that the absence of this local guide in future years would be sorely felt. Given the pent-up demand for this product, it is in many ways surprising that larger organisations have not taken the idea of area-specific guides forward before. Much of the appreciation for the booklet has had to do with its attractive design and professional look; without this grant, it is clear that the Business Association could not have afforded to reach this level of professionalism. The Association would like to express its thanks to LEADER for the opportunity for testing out its idea that an area-wide marketing strategy would be of benefit to businesses and small communities and answer demand by visitors and tourism professionals, and that a new look for the Machars would best showcase all that it has to offer. We believe that the outcome has, after all the vicissitudes of the journey, justified that view : Thank You.