



southern uplands partnership

*living land, living community*

# Nith Estuary Nature Based Tourism

October 2009 – July 2011

## Final Report

September 2011

This project is being part-financed by the Scottish Government and the European Community through the Dumfries & Galloway Leader 2007-2013 Programme and is supported by Scottish Natural Heritage, working with Scotland's people to care for our natural heritage.



# Nith Estuary Nature Based Tourism

## Final Report (October 2009 – July 2011)

### Background

The Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP) has been engaged in thinking and development of nature based tourism for several years. This has manifested itself through a variety of works which culminated in the report 'Generic Nature Based Tourism Cluster Development Plan' (Wood-Gee, Vyv; 03/2009).

The report formed the basis of funding bids to both LEADER Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Natural Heritage to pilot an approach to nature based tourism in the Nith Estuary National Scenic Area (NSA).

The project began with the advertisement for a part-time facilitator in July 2009 and ended two years later in July 2011.

### Funding

Source	Amount
LEADER Dumfries & Galloway	£22 000
Scottish Natural Heritage	£20 000
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	£2 000 (in-kind contribution)
<b>Total</b>	<b>£44 000</b> (incl in-kind contribution)

### Aims & Objectives

The aim of the project was to develop approaches to the use of the natural offer (wildlife and landscape setting) as a key economic resource through the attraction of more visitors to the area, who are encouraged to stay longer and spend more. Due to the year round strength of the offer it was hoped that the project would highlight ways in which the area could encourage increased visitor number in the traditionally quieter months, September - April.

The objectives of the project were to:

- identify and demonstrate ways of making individual businesses and attractions more viable through collaborative development;
- raise mutual awareness and appreciation within the pilot area of tourism opportunities linked to the local landscape and wildlife;
- establish links between visitor attractions, facilities, activities, local businesses, food and accommodation providers and other key partners;
- raise awareness amongst potential visitors of the attractions of the area;
- develop individual business opportunities and stronger products;
- develop more focused, cohesive and effective collaborative marketing;
- establish a self-sustaining *modus operandi* to ensure that local interests continue to collaborate in pursuit of the aims of the project after expiry of the initial facilitator funding;
- provide an example for other areas which may be interested in nature based tourism cluster development in future.

## **Delivery**

The Project Officer (PO) was employed by the SUP on a part-time basis from the lifetime of the project, September 2009 – September 2011. The initial two days a week contract was extended to three for a time in an effort to give the project impetus. To comply with budget restrictions this was reduced to one day a week before reverting to the original two.

A Steering Group consisting of representatives from Dumfries and Galloway Council (anna Johnson) and Scottish Natural Heritage (Beth Wilson) was established to oversee the work of the PO.

## **Promotion**

At the outset of the project, before LEADER funding was secured, there were a series of public meetings to promote the idea of the project and to identify key stakeholders. From the beginning of the project's LEADER funded phase the PO worked to promote the project throughout the initial target area through face to face meetings and attendance at various business and community meetings. All of these meetings were promoted in the local press

The LEADER project undertook no marketing of itself, rather it generated a region-wide marketing initiative called 'Wild Seasons'. This manifested itself as a web site, [www.wildseasons.co.uk](http://www.wildseasons.co.uk), and, since the project's conclusion, some additional printed materials.

All media acknowledged/s LEADER funding.

A 'launch' meeting was held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2009 and a report is attached at Appendix 1.

## **Experience**

From its inception the project sought to engage with all the businesses and groups in the Nith Estuary NSA but, it became clear quite early in the project's delivery that the initial target area did not offer sufficient scale in terms of business numbers and, perhaps more importantly, in its ability to develop and promote itself as a 'destination' within a regional, let alone a national or international, market. As a result it worked instead to make its approaches and ideas available to a wider range of stakeholders, representing a variety of scales and types across a wider geographic area. This included a range of businesses, charitable organisations and public agencies, themselves concerned and/or charged with the conservation and promotion of the natural resource of the region.

This broadening of the geographic scope of the project proved fortunate as the council had recently established a new Destination Marketing Organisation, Destination Dumfries and Galloway (DD&G), which gave the NBT initiative a strategic setting that it was able to utilise to good effect.

## **Industry Working Group**

Through the promotional activity a group of individuals, initially six in number, was recognised and brought together to discuss the opportunities presented by the nature 'offer' of the area and how the PO might most usefully assist in helping to realise these opportunities.

Meetings with individual members of the 'Industry Working Group' (IWG) developed a format and 'agenda of activity' and a first 'round table' meeting of the group took place during early September 2010.

Members of the initial IWG were:

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds  
Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust  
Forestry Commission form Scotland  
Cream O'Galloway  
Dumfries and Galloway Council

DD&G were in regular attendance.

### **Wild Seasons**

The PO recognised at the project's early stages that existing events and interpretation of the natural offer within the region was generally very good, and felt that a coordinated and cohesive platform for promotion would be the most cost effective way of achieving many of the project's aims. Early discussions with various agencies, including the council, the Forestry Commission, WWT and the RSPB had encouraged this approach.

The results of these discussions were presented to the IWG, which then sought to develop an initiative around joint promotional activity. However, discussions regarding issues of quality control saw the group decide that this might be a contentious issue when, at the project's early stage, unity was more important. It was decided that the PO and the group would concentrate on a web based promotional initiative, to better promote existing events based activity and the development of a new commercial 'guiding' project. This led to the IWG, including the Project Manager of DD&G, developing the idea that became known as 'Wild Seasons'.

### **Wildlife Guides**

The PO suggested to the IWG the formation of a cluster of local 'experts' who would sell guiding services to visitors seeking a more 'intimate' experience with the natural offer of the target area. Experiences would include wildlife watching, nature based discovery walks and revealing 'special locations' where excellent views of land and sea-scapes might be had.

It was felt that the idea had considerable merit and this was borne out through informal discussions with various accommodation providers from across the region.

A number of potential guides were contacted in the spring of 2011 and a description of the service was jointly prepared. Initially it was planned to offer this as a printed leaflet for however, it was decided that a web based promotion would be a more cost effective solution. It was further decided that this should be closely allied to the Wild Seasons web site and is now promoted from it.

The cluster has met on a number of occasions and a core group is now looking into the possibility of constituting a more formal arrangement from which development work would be done, and to offer a more rigid business structure.

## **Flooders Trail**

Scottish Natural Heritage contacted the PO in the spring of 2011 and asked if the NBT project might be an appropriate mechanism through which to negotiate and create a new route across merseland in the Caerlaverock area.

It was thought that this might offer the project the chance to create an exemplar of how access to areas with a specific wildlife interest, in this case salt march (merse), could be created and promoted to encourage visitors to learn more of the natural offer in the area, and to be encouraged, through easier access, to visit other sites.

An initial walk of the route with SNH officers and representatives of both the estate and of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust revealed common interest in the idea, and agreed a route.

Negotiation with the various landowners was undertaken and confirmed the route. Approaches to the council seeking funding to augment investment in promotion and interpretation from the NBT project were successful and, with a known budget, contractors were sought and chosen. Ground works are due be finalised in early 2012.

Promotion of the new facility will be through the Wild Seasons web site, where a downloadable leaflet will be available. It is hoped that this is the first of several NBT routes that are designed and promoted as particularly good facilities for viewing the range of specialist wildlife the region has to offer.

## **Project Lessons**

Based on knowledge of the region, and an understanding of the potentials of NBT, the project designed an approach intended to deliver against a number of defined objectives.

It became clear early in the project's delivery that various assumptions regarding the target area were not complete, and that the planned approach was going to prove ineffective in achieving any form of impact, or provide any 'learning' for project partners and the wider tourism industry. These design and delivery challenges are detailed below. Where fitting the responses that were developed to ensure that the project achieved its objectives are noted.

### **Part-time working**

The PO was employed as a part-time worker, initially for two days a week. It was soon realised that this was insufficient time to build an early momentum and so, with agreement from the funding partners, the PO had a three month period of working for three days a week. This proved to be of some use and the project was able to move forward, however, it coincided with the 'target audience', i.e. tourism operators, gearing up for their busy period. This negated some of the impact of the extra hours that were made available. In order to re-balance budgets, at the end of this period of extra activity the PO had a brief time of working only one day a week. This proved to be counter-productive.

### **Location**

The area chosen for the project, the National Scenic Area (NSA) located on the Nith Estuary, provided a number of challenges.

The area is relatively small and it proved difficult to excite interest in it *per se* from local business, regional and national agencies and such general media as was

spoken to. Many recognised its inability to establish itself as a 'destination' in its own right. This was further compounded by the fact that, in many terms, it is the least 'scenic' of the three NSAs that sit on the northern Solway coast.

The area presented a significant challenge in terms of its geography. By definition it has a river running through it. This physical schism, compounded by the location and challenges presented by the town of Dumfries, lead to a lack of historical joint working and 'connected' thinking and approaches. There is no animosity but, conversely, no joint support or development structure. This is despite the excellent efforts of the council's NSA Officer and will require a longer term investment operating at a different level and with a different focus.

The lack of tourism businesses in the area proved to be a major hurdle and it was not possible to build a sufficiently large core of interested business owners. However, the concept caught the imagination of several businesses and agencies from outside the area and so, after discussion with project funders and partners, effort was invested in nurturing this. Businesses from within the initial area were included in this process.

### **Recognition of the core 'product'**

Whilst there is a general recognition of the 'nature based offer' within the target audience of the project, i.e. tourism operators, there is a surprising lack of knowledge of it. The project was, to some considerable extent, predicated on a belief that businesses are able to orientate, guide and introduce customers to the natural setting (landscape, wildlife, etc.). The reality is far from this and significant effort was spent on seeking ways of overcoming this, but there is a long way to go.

### **Time scales**

The process of recognising and engaging businesses and agencies that have a genuine understanding of, and commitment to the potentials of nature based tourism proved to be a much longer process than originally thought. However, once a committed group was brought together and focussed on opportunities the initiative began to take shape and gain momentum.

### **Visitor Monitoring Programme**

An attempt was made to establish a visitor monitoring programme with the assistance of the Scottish Agricultural College. The project was to ascertain to what extent visitors to the area came because of its natural offer, if so what in particular attracted them and how that offer might be made better. A copy of the project brief supplied by the PO to the SAC, and the agreed questionnaire is attached at Appendix 2.

This was undertaken as part of a Masters degree and initial work was very positive. However, the final outcome of the assignment has not been reported to the project, despite attempts to contact the student.

Despite the disappointment of the initial attempt to develop a monitoring programme those businesses and organisations that presently constitute the Wild Seasons group have now developed a visitor monitoring programme that was used during the first Wild Seasons campaign, Wild Autumn 2011. Discussions with DD&G began towards the end of the projects life to explore the possibilities and practicalities of including the information gathered through this within their overall monitoring plans. These discussions are on-going.

### **Learning Journeys**

The 'Learning Journeys' element of the project proved to be a difficult 'sell' to the businesses of the initial target area. Various strategies were tried to use this element of the project to increase understanding of the nature based offer of the area and how it might be used in developing business.

A planned series of evening events attracted no-one and an intended trip to the Solway Coast AONB was cancelled after several postponements due to illness and, finally, lack of sufficient interest.

Work was put into the planning of a trip to Finland, at the request of a Finnish LEADER area, as it was felt that it had much to offer in terms of the NBT focus within the area's tourism marketing. However, having gone a considerable way 'down the line' in seeking interest from businesses here and in developing the project to benefit them, staff within the Finnish partner changed and, as they were central to the project's development, we were unable to take the project further.

It was felt that, due to the time constraints on the project, funds would be better allocated to other initiatives within the overall project.

### **Funding out-turn**

As a result of the lack of local interest, the budget had to be significantly altered. There was no interest in the proposed learning journeys so these were dropped. The initial project envisaged using specialist nature-based tourism consultants to help develop the idea, but in the event this was not possible and this budget was used to buy additional staff time.

Overall we would have come in closer to the original budget if we had been able to have a project officer in post for the full two years, but as we included recruitment costs incurred in July 2009, the project had to finish in July 2011 rather than October. This obviously had a significant impact. The anticipated spend of the project was £44,000.00 – the actual spend upon completion of the project was £39,627.97, which was an under spend of £4,372.03.

## **Exit Strategy and Forward Plans**

Despite the need to rethink the project's geographic scope and general approach, it has developed into what has become a significant part of the region's planning for tourism development.

It has clustered a group of businesses and organisations within an initiative that continues to grow in influence and which has elicited much interest from other businesses, agencies and initiatives from within the region and beyond. As such, the project has gone a long way in achieving its express aim of:

".....developing approaches to the use of the natural offer (wildlife and landscape setting) as a key economic resource through the attraction of more visitors to the area, who are encouraged to stay longer and spend more".

In its application the LEADER issue that the project sought to address was 'A Wealthier and fairer Scotland'.

Throughout its delivery the project made strenuous efforts to ensure that any business or individual that was interested in its aims could become involved. On-going work to engage the wider tourism industry is seeking to ensure that all relevant businesses in the region are aware of its existence and are able to use its approach for their economic benefit.

Through the establishment of this significant, region-wide initiative, now seen as integral to approaches to tourism development within the regional council and well as the regional destination marketing organisation, Destination Dumfries and Galloway, the project has been demonstrably successful in delivering against its chosen LEADER issue.

Detailed below are the project's stated objectives and the achievements / progress made against them.

### **Objective 1**

Identify and demonstrate ways of making individual businesses and attractions more viable through collaborative development.

#### **Achievement**

The clustering of businesses and nature based NGOs into a cohesive group with a clear aim of developing further the joint promotion of the region as a major nature based destination through the Wild Seasons initiative.

### **Objective 2**

Raise mutual awareness and appreciation within the pilot area of tourism opportunities linked to the local landscape and wildlife.

#### **Achievement**

Nature Based Tourism is mentioned in the recent Regional Tourism Strategy as a key driver of regional tourism growth and is seen by DD&G as a significant element within their plans. Wild Seasons is seen by DD&G as the focal point for NBT development.

### **Objective 3**

Establish links between visitor attractions, facilities, activities, local businesses, food and accommodation providers and other key partners.

#### Achievement

The Wild Seasons group represents a range of businesses and other agencies involved in NBT, and has plans to increase its membership.

### **Objective 4**

Raise awareness amongst potential visitors of the attractions of the area.

#### Achievement

The Wild Autumn campaign was the first collaborative effort aimed at raising awareness amongst visitors; Wild Seasons is seen as a key element in the on-going effort to raise the profile of the area as a NBT destination. The Wild Seasons web-site will be promoted through a Visit Scotland PR campaign during early 2012.

### **Objective 5**

Develop individual business opportunities and stronger products.

#### Achievement

The development of individual business opportunities is seen as central to the next stage of development of the Wild Seasons initiative, which itself has become the 'product' that will be 'sold' to potential visitors.

### **Objective 6**

Develop more focused, cohesive and effective collaborative marketing.

#### Achievement

With the recent merging of the Wildlife Festival of D&G Council's LBAP group with the Wild Spring campaign the Wild Seasons initiative is now the focus of all NBT promotion for D&G.

### **Objective 7**

Establish a self-sustaining *modus operandi* to ensure that local interests continue to collaborate in pursuit of the aims of the project after expiry of the initial facilitator funding

#### Achievement

At the end of the project the Wild Seasons group are seeking to constitute themselves to enable the initiative to seek funding as a stand alone organisation.

### **Objective 8**

Provide an example for other areas which may be interested in nature based tourism cluster development in future.

#### Achievement

Approaches have already been made to the project's host (the Southern Uplands Partnership) by Visit Scotland and local business groups to explore the potential of developing a similar approach to NBT development in the Scottish Borders region. Two meetings have been held with business and agency representation and Wild Seasons has been accepted as the model that will develop NBT in the area.

### **Mainstreaming and Future Activity**

As noted above, the approach that has been developed through the project has elicited much interest. In its early stages the project was not without its 'political' difficulties but approaches from various parts of the D&G Council have been made to explore ways in which the Wild Seasons initiative can be used to promote various elements of the work of the regional Local Biodiversity Action Planning (LBAP) group, specifically its Wildlife Festival, and to research ways in which the council's Countryside Events programme can be integrated and better promoted.

There is no doubt that the future of the initiative is an exciting one but, it is likely to require further investment before it will be able to 'stand alone'. To do this it has a little further to go to prove its worth to the industry and various of its support agents. Future funding requirements will centre on:

- On-going web site maintenance and development
- More trails revealing special natural features of the region
- Support of wildlife guiding service including possible 'formalisation' of the cluster into a constituted business.

The Wild Seasons group recognise the need to promote the opportunities of NBT to the wider industry and are working with SUP on the development of a series of events aimed at achieving this through the winter of 2011/12.

A PR campaign promoting the Wild Seasons web site and the events it promotes is planned in association with Visit Scotland. This will take place through early 2012 and will target a UK audience.

### **Conclusion**

The initial work of the PO, in trying to deliver the project as initially envisaged proved problematic. With the support and encouragement of officers from Scottish Natural Heritage, Dumfries and Galloway Council and the D&G LEADER programme, a new approach was developed that has proved to be highly effective and which has left an exciting legacy.

With developments ongoing because of the activity and influence of the NBT cluster, the project can rightly claim to have established a major driver within the region's future tourism development that is seen as a model for areas well beyond its original boundary.

## **Appendix 1**

# Nith Estuary Nature Tourism Project

## A Note of the inaugural meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2009

An inaugural meeting for the Nith Estuary Nature Tourism Project was held at the Caerlaverock Wetland Centre of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust on the afternoon of 25<sup>th</sup> November 2009. Sincere thanks are offered to the WWT for their support and hospitality.

The aim of the meeting was to introduce the project and its recently appointed Officer to an audience of interested individuals comprising statutory agencies, NGOs and business enterprises operating in and around the target area (a list of attendees is attached at Appendix 1). Additionally, the audience were asked to take part in short, focus groups each with specific tasks. It is planned that the results will be used to assist the Officer in better defining his approach and methodology over the coming months.

Presentation: Nature Based Tourism – Meanings and Issues

The Officer, John Sellers, made a short presentation which provided a brief analysis of 'Nature Based Tourism', raised various issues and ideas and, using examples sought to highlight some lessons that have been learned whilst pursuing similar initiatives.

Key points from the presentation were:

### NATURE TOURISM: WHAT IS IT?

- Wildlife Tourism
- Rural Tourism
- Farm Tourism
- Adventure Tourism
- Ecotourism
- Cycling Tourism
- Walking Tourism
- Geo-tourism
- Forest Tourism
- Green Tourism
- Equine Tourism
- Responsible Tourism
- Sustainable Tourism
- Coastal Tourism
- Heritage Tourism
- Activity Tourism
- Naturist Tourism!

“Natural area tourism is tourism in natural settings..... nature-based tourism occurs in natural settings with the added emphasis of fostering understanding and conservation of the natural environment” Newsome et al 2002

Activities include: Wildlife/bird watching, Cycling, Walking, Horse Riding, Heritage, Organised Trails, Resorts, Forest Parks & Nature Reserves, Camping, (Golf?), Footpaths/Bridleways, Fishing, Quads, Painting, Writing, etc.

But also Passive: Rest and relaxation, viewing the scenery, picnics, etc.

- NATURE BASED TOURISM - Some Lessons to Date (from the Cashel Forest, Loch Lomond and the New Forest, Hampshire)
- Clearly identify destination, Unique Selling Points (USPs) & relationship to nearby areas/attractions
- Develop partnerships between tourism, environmental and community interests.
- Improve and maintain internal environmental practices.
- Stimulate community involvement throughout.
- Encourage all stakeholders to engage in planning process and liaison between tourism enterprises, government bodies and environmental planners.
- View visitor transportation issues as part of an integral network and create alternatives to the car.
- Implement sustainable, responsible tourism policies and integrate into local, regional and national govt. strategies.
- Provide clear and concise interpretative information and information on transport and visitor impact to tourists.
- Consider carefully Limits of Acceptable Change & Carrying Capacity esp. fragile vs robust areas, community benefits & user pays issue.
- Foster long term commitment and continuity of actors and strong leadership.
- Review and monitor strategies and impacts

## **Group work**

The audience were asked allocate themselves into 3 groups, each one being briefed to consider a specific topic.

1. What I would need to become involved is.....?

This group were asked to view the prospect of becoming actively engaged in the project from the perspective of a business within the area; the Officer suggested that the group viewed it as the creation of a 'headline job description' for his post.

2. Would joint marketing be worthwhile?

Joint marketing is often seen as the panacea for tourism initiatives. This group were asked to consider just what that might mean in practice and in terms of pooling resources such as marketing spend, visitor database information and visitor 'signposting'. They were further asked to think about what the target of any marketing initiative might be, 'do we want/could we cope with more visitors or do we just want those that are here to spend more?'

3. Our 'product': What's our USP and what/where are the gaps?

The area is widely held as being very attractive and as having significant potential to better 'sell' itself to potential visitors; however, its attractiveness in itself is no guarantee of bringing in more visitors and will not encourage an increased number of stays or spend. This group were asked to start to think about what constitutes 'the Nith product'; just what is it that could be used to bring more people into the area as well as being self critical regarding the gaps in provision that would encourage visitors to come and stay, to stay longer and spend more locally if and when they arrive.

Refreshments were provided after this session and then appointed individuals were asked to make brief presentations of the thoughts of each group (the results of these are attached at Appendix 2, 1-3). Discussion was encouraged so that a full understanding of points, ideas and issues was reached and that a general consensus on future actions was established.

The meeting closed positively with the audience encouraging the Officer to work at being the catalyst for joint efforts, to advocate and campaign on the area's behalf and to secure any available funds for joint projects.

## Appendix 1: List of attendees

# Nith Estuary Nature Tourism Project

25<sup>th</sup> November 2009

Name	Representing
Tom Florey	Caerlaverock Estate (Smiths Gore)
Jamie Blacket	Arbigland Estate
Stewart Robertson	SGRPID
Valerie Bennett	Historic Scotland
Pam Mindy	Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
Ann McLatchie	Glencaple Shop
Jim McLatchie	Glencaple Shop
Mike Harris	Criffel Coaches
Angus Fordyce	Cavens Country House Hotel
Callum Murray	RSPB
Dave Fairlamb	RSPB
John McMyn	Kirkbean Community Council
Elizabeth Tindal	D&G Council
Robbie Cowan	Caerlaverock Estate
Rob Vallance	Savings Bank Museum
Bill Thomson	Ruthwell Community Council
Helen Fenby	Cream O'Galloway/Wild Scotland
J D Murray	Conheath Holiday Cottages
Tom Henry	D&G Council
Brian Morrell	Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

## Appendix 2 (1): Bullet points and notes from focus groups

# Nith Estuary Nature Tourism Project

25<sup>th</sup> November 2009

What I would need to become involved is.....?

This group were asked to view the prospect of becoming actively engaged in the project from the perspective of a business within the area; the Officer suggested that the group view it as the creation of a 'headline job description' for his post.

- Ensure links to the emerging Destination Development Organisation (Destination D&G) are made, and through this links to wider strategies
- Research the possibility of a Visitor Centre(s)
- Seek/advocate for a Nith estuary 'champion'
- Use statistics at RSPB, WWT and Visit Scotland to get a better understanding of the potential market sector we need to aim at
- Promote the area to/through press and wider media
- **KEY POINT:** Provide communication between all key players and plan for succession

## Appendix 2 (2): Bullet points and notes from focus groups

# Nith Estuary Nature Tourism Project

25<sup>th</sup> November 2009

Would joint marketing be worthwhile?

Joint marketing is often seen as the panacea for tourism initiatives. This group were asked to consider just what that might mean in practice and in terms of pooling resources such as marketing spend, visitor database information and visitor 'signposting'. They were further asked to think about what the target of any marketing initiative might be, 'do we want/could we cope with more visitors or do we just want those that are here to spend more?'

- It was agreed that joint marketing is a MUST! More organisations involved mean more opportunities for joint marketing.
- We need to be confident that all involved are offering a consistently high quality product.
- Before starting any marketing, the target audience must be determined.
- From a visitor's perspective, the product includes access to information, transport links, accommodation, restaurants etc, attractions and tour operators.
- Need to maximise the potentials of 'free marketing'; e.g. the media are always searching for stories and 'word of mouth' networks are very effective.
- It was noted that there might be the possibility of funds via the Rural Payments Agency, though only for a constituted group.
- Discussion was had about the possibility of contributions from 'members' of the group. It was thought that this might be realistic but all would need a very clear view of what was going to 'happen'.

## Appendix 2 (3): Bullet points and notes from focus groups

# Nith Estuary Nature Tourism Project

25<sup>th</sup> November 2009

Our 'product': What's our USP and what/where are the gaps?  
The area is widely held as being very attractive and as having significant potential to better 'sell' itself to potential visitors; however, its attractiveness in itself will be no guarantee of bringing in more people into the area as well as being self critical regarding the gaps in provision that would encourage visitors to stay, stay longer and spend more locally if and when they arrive.

### USP:

- Quiet
- Peaceful
- Unspoiled
- Variation in scenery
- 'Wildness' - perception of wildness but very accessible
- Can do 'different things at different times', i.e. a year round destination
- Have best of everything – 'QUALITY PRODUCT'
  - 2 good golf courses (Southernness and Powfoot)
  - good birdwatching (Mersehead and Caerlaverock)
  - 2 of the '7 Stanes' mountain bike trails and all the others are easily accessible
  - Caerlaverock Castle and Sweetheart Abbey
  - John Paul Jones and Savings Bank Museum
  - scenery – coast/hills/woodland/Criffel
- No big mass market tourism - good
  - wildlife – spectacle of geese, ospreys, red kites,
  - red squirrels, natterjack toads
  - wildlife – nowhere else in world (?)
- Accommodation: smaller bed and breakfasts, farm based – usually people prepared to pay more
- Nith area easily accessible from M6/M74. Can 'catch' visitors and send to rest of region.
  - From east bank → visit west → Colvend coast → Galloway
- Nith Estuary can act as 'hook' for rest of region

## GAPS:

- Lack of accommodation in Caerlaverock
  - Lack of lower cost accommodation
  - Last few years seen increase in number of tourers and vans
  - Need for campsite/touring van/camper site
- Transport is a big issue
  - Volume of traffic is already a problem for residents.
  - Getting in and out of Dumfries becoming issue → choose when to travel and advise tourists accordingly
  - Southern by-pass will link two sides of Nith and open up area, a good thing
  - Public transport needs to be developed/encouraged (at WWT reduced entrance rates if arrive by bike/public transport)
  - Most visitors come by car and want to be independent and see lots of things.
  - 'Mountain goat' type bus – like in Lake District?
- Furthest away point from airport on mainland Scotland(?) – therefore misses 'high end' tourism
- Increase in number of tourists – expect/manage divided opinion between economically active and non active residents
- Dumfries: how to 'bring in' to wider initiative
- Discussion also concerned the weather and if the area could be seen/promoted as 'family friendly'
  - Mrs Murray – “not enough for families”, but Calum (RSPB) stated that stats show 25% visitors are under 25 years old. Action point: research needed into existing statistics and present findings to wider group.

## **Appendix 2**

**A Call to Assist in the Development of a Visitor Monitoring Programme  
with the Nature Based Tourism Cluster Project  
Nith Estuary National Scenic Area  
Dumfries & Galloway**

**Background**

The landscape qualities of the Nith Estuary were identified by the then Countryside Commission for Scotland and it was designated as a 'National Scenic Area' (NSA) in 1978.

Whilst the area provides an array of tourism facilities it is widely held that it does not receive the number of visitors it might, nor encourage them to spend significantly in the area. Two major studies within the past 5 years have shown that there is considerable potential to use the natural resources of the area to further develop tourism and other commercial activity. Consequently the Scottish government, through SNH and LEADER Dumfries and Galloway, have funded a project to assist businesses within the area to take better commercial advantage of their natural setting; it is called the 'Nith Estuary Tourism Cluster Project'.

The project aims to bring local business interests together to work with each other, to learn from other areas and to make a more co-ordinated and coherent case to potential investors and visitors alike. It is hoped that the project will act as a successful pilot and that a proven approach can be developed and extended to other areas in the future.

**Initial Approach**

Two approaches are being used initially to bring businesses in the area together.

A series of workshops will, in the first instance, be facilitated discussions that will give the businesses the opportunity to get to know each other better and then to explore areas of common interest. It is hoped that this will then encourage the development of joint projects and approaches that will begin the process of creating the 'Nith Estuary Nature Tourism Area'.

Joint visits will focus on the local and the wider scene, including an international element. Initial work will get the businesses to focus on their immediate area, looking for the good and the bad and working together to develop common approaches to 'product' development, marketing, etc. We shall then look further afield within the UK to other areas who are developing similar approaches but who are somewhat 'further down the line'. Lastly we will seek to develop an on-going relationship with an international partner in an area that is seen as a destination because of its strong natural resource and which takes quantifiable advantage of it.

It is hoped that through these two core activities a group of businesses will commit themselves to working with the project to create an 'Area

Development Programme' that will be the blueprint for long term coordinated action and the project's on-going legacy.

### **A Monitoring Programme**

The requirement to monitor, 'measure' and evaluate the effects of the project and subsequently, and more importantly, the success or otherwise of on-going efforts to promote and develop the area as a 'nature destination', are key to efforts being successful in securing on-going investment from all sectors.

Any monitoring programme has to capture both quantitative and, perhaps more importantly, qualitative information in such a way as to be usable by, in the first instance, the businesses and facility managers in the area. It must provide them with the information in a usable form so that:

- success is quickly revealed to public and private investors
- marketing can be revised and finessed in a timely manner
- product development is well informed
- quality issues are highlighted early.

The programme must create a method of data gathering that is robust but easy to implement and manage. Businesses are busy and run by individuals who don't necessarily have the skills, competencies or motivations to engage meaningfully with what is often seen as an academic paper exercise. So, whilst some input can be expected the programme must be in many ways self-driven by being attractive and fun or, maybe, utterly benign to engage with on the part of the visitor, business owner and facility manager alike.

Whilst the recording and evaluation of experiences is challenging it has to be central to the approach taken here; simple head-counts and the like will not provide the information required to develop both the approach and the products of businesses nor the natural resource that the area is looking to major on.

### **Our Requirement**

This is a significant piece of work, both in terms of its development as well as its roll-out and on-going monitoring and evaluation. It is intended that it will be a model for the 'measurement' of nature based tourism fit for introduction in a number of areas. As such, we are looking for an academic partner with an experience of nature tourism to work with us in the process.

We expect that individuals working on the project will have a genuine knowledge of nature tourism and that an experience of visitor monitoring and survey work must be present within / regularly and easily available to anyone / team working on the project.

### **More Information**

Contact	John Sellers
Organisation	Southern Uplands Partnership

Address	c/o RSPB Mersehead Southwick Dumfries DG2 8AH
Telephone	0044 (0) 7527 818515
E-mail	<a href="mailto:johnsellers@sup.org.uk">johnsellers@sup.org.uk</a>

Q1. What is the reason for your visit? Please tick the most appropriate box

Holiday		Visiting Friends/relatives		Business		Resident/ Local	
---------	--	----------------------------	--	----------	--	--------------------	--

Q2. Please circle the length of your visit:      3 days or fewer      3 to 5 days      6 days or more

Q3. Of the following list, which type of nature attraction or site do you most like to visit?

Please rank from 1-5, with 1 as most preferred and 5 as least preferred

Bird or wildlife watching site	
Landscape / gardens / heritage	
Farm site or farm stay	
Forest / woodlands	
Nature/ hiking paths	

Q4. The statements below list some expectations people may have of nature tourism visitor sites before they visit. Please indicate to what extent each expectation is important in making your choice

<i>Expectation</i>	<i>1. Very Important</i>	<i>2. Somewhat Important</i>	<i>3. Somewhat unimportant</i>	<i>4. Not important</i>	<i>5. Not considered</i>
Close to home					
Value for money					
Food, lodging nearby					
Near other visitor sites					
Ease of access					
Learn something new					
Seeing wildlife					
Uncrowded site					

Q5. How often do you visit nature attractions? Please tick the most appropriate box

First time visit	
Once a year or less	
2-3 times a year	
4-5 times a year	
6 or more times a year	

Q6. What facilities /services do you most like to find when you visit a nature tourism site or attraction? Please tick all that apply

Information	Gift Shop	Rangers/Staff	Interpretation
Toilets	Parking	Child activities	Public transport
Guided Tours	Viewing platform	Place to sit	On-site accommodation
Cafe/Coffee Shop	Directions	Sign posting	Posted opening hours
Special events	Pet area	Litter bins	Good views

Q7. What nature site or attraction in the Dumfries & Galloway area have you visited most recently?

Please indicate:

---

Q8. How would you rate your experience of the above visit? Please indicate below

	1. Very Satisfied	2. Somewhat satisfied	3. Satisfied	4. Somewhat Dissatisfied	5. Very Dissatisfied
Over-all impression					
Value for money					
Facilities / services offered					
Site appeared as described					
Close to other sites					
Easy to find					
Able to see wildlife					
Site felt uncrowded					
Safety/site security					

Q8a. Please add any other observations or comments about your visit:

Q9. How did you access this site? Please circle appropriate choice

Personal vehicle    Public Transport    Walk/Hike    Bicycle    Other

Q10. How do you learn about the sites you visit?    Q11. How far are you prepared to travel for a visit?

Please circle yes or no for each choice

Please tick closest range

Method	Yes/ No
Travel books	Y / N
Leaflets / brochures	Y / N
Newspapers	Y / N
Television	Y / N
Visitor Information Centre	Y / N
Internet	Y / N
Travel magazines	Y / N
Friends/Referrals	Y / N
Travel Agents	Y / N
Tour Groups	Y / N
Other	Y / N

0-10 miles	
11-20 miles	
21-50 miles	
51-75 miles	
76 miles or more	

Q12. Please tick your age range

18 years of age & under	
19- 35	
36-45	
46-59	
60 and over	

Q13

Please circle:    Male / Female

Your time and assistance are greatly appreciated.

To thank you for participating, responders are eligible for a prize draw for a food hamper of locally sourced products in early 2011. If you choose, please provide e-mail OR contact details for notification:

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact phone: \_\_\_\_\_