

# **Nith Estuary National Scenic Area Nature Based Tourism**

## **Year One Report**

### **Introduction**

The first year of the Nith Estuary Nature Based Tourism (NENBT) project has been a challenging start to what is now becoming an increasingly successful initiative.

The project started approximately 3 months late and, whilst the Project Officer (PO) was initially employed for 2 days a week, he was soon asked to work 3 in an effort to ensure that spending profiles were brought back into line with those presented in the initial applications for funding. This proved to be fortuitous as it had proved difficult to excite commitment from within the local business community, though interest was certainly expressed in the concept and the extra impetus afforded through increased hours worked was very beneficial.

However, having initiated interest and having secured initial commitment to work alongside the project from a small group of local businesses, the fact that the PO was then required to reduce hours had a slowing effect on the delivery of the emerging programme. With the PO now full-time within the host organisation, the Southern Uplands Partnership, it is expected that a 5 day week presence will have a positive effect on the project's delivery.

### **Project Promotion**

An initial meeting was held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2009 with the aim of introducing the project and its recently appointed PO to an audience of interested individuals comprising statutory agencies, NGOs and business enterprises operating in and around the target area. A full report is contained at Appendix 1.

The PO has continued to promote the project through face to face meetings and attendance at various business and community meetings.

### **Project Activity**

#### **Visitor Monitoring**

A visitor monitoring programme, designed to ascertain both qualitative and quantitative information, is being developed by the Scottish Agricultural College in consultation with the PO.

A set of initial meetings has been planned for late August during which an outline approach will be described and views sought from the industry. Final development will then take place with aim of beginning 'on the ground' works, including training of local businesses, during the autumn of 2010. It is intended that what will be developed is an approach that will be replicable in other areas.

A copy of the initial briefing document presented to the SAC is at Appendix 2.

### Learning Journeys

It is hoped that, through a series of 'Learning Journeys', the potential of the area and various approaches to its development as a nature based destination will be revealed to local businesses.

A series of evening events, through which local 'experts' will seek to make the tourism industry of the area more aware of the natural offer of the area along with its management, is planned to begin in September.

A trip to meet and discuss areas of common interest with the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Team in Cumbria is programmed to take place in mid-September. It is planned that this will forge links to an area with obvious connections and mutual interests that has been managing both the conservation of an area as well as promoting its potentials as a tourist destination for something over 10 years.

In an attempt to develop the theme of learning from others with more experience of the development and marketing of a destination rich in nature it is planned to visit an example overseas where several countries have significant experience of successful initiatives that have made a huge difference to the economy of an area.

We have recently been contacted by a potential Finnish partner organisation with much experience and success in this and it is hoped to present an application for LEADER support for an exchange visit to take place later this year to the LEADER Local Action Group October.

A copy of the call for partners that was put out through the LEADER network in early Summer 2010 can be found at Appendix 3.

### Industry Working Group

Meetings have been had with individual members of an emerging 'Industry Working Group' from which a format and 'agenda of activity' has been developed. The first formal meeting of the group will take place during early September 2010 with joint marketing seen as a priority for the winter season.

Work early on in the project's existence revealed much excellent material already available that promotes an excellent array of activity and, by and large, a well managed resource. It is hoped that, through a joint approach that is widely held, the need to replicate effort and expense will be removed. The development of a combined 'portal', both web-based and for 'hard copy' material, has been mentioned as a 'start-point' for these discussions.

# **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

<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
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**

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## **APPENDIX 3**

**Nature Based Tourism  
Business Cluster Development Project  
Nith Estuary  
Dumfries & Galloway Region  
Scotland, UK**

**A call through the LEADER network for Trans-national Partners**

**Background**

The River Nith is located in the Dumfries and Galloway region of south west Scotland and flows into the Solway Firth (estuary). The Solway was itself the focus for centuries of often violent border disputes between England and Scotland, as a result the area has a rich historical and cultural past. The Nith estuary has a diverse landscape ranging from moor and mountain to sea marsh and sand beaches, all within a very compact area. The area is home to internationally important wildlife habitats, historic buildings, nationally significant museum collections, various visitor attractions, pretty villages, rich woodlands and is backed by the ever changing sea-scapes of the Solway Firth. There are a number of tourism providers offering a range of accommodation and visitor facilities.

The landscape qualities of the Nith Estuary were identified by the Countryside Commission for Scotland (now part of Scottish Natural Heritage: SNH) and, in 1978, it was designated as a 'National Scenic Area' (NSA). The purpose of the NSA designation is to highlight the national importance of the landscape character and the scenic qualities of an area, with the intention that special care should be taken to conserve and enhance it.

**The Challenge**

Whilst the area has a national designation and offers an array of tourism facilities its businesses have not traditionally operated in a co-ordinated manner and so are unable to attract the number of visitors they might.

Two major studies within the past 5 years have shown that there is significant potential to use the natural resources around the Nith Estuary NSA to assist the development of 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 so that the approach can be extended to other areas in the future.

**Our Approach**

Two core approaches are being used to bring businesses in the area together. Through a series of workshops and visits businesses in the area will be offered the chance to work together in learning more about each other, about what the area offers and of its potentials and to develop the area as a discreet destination based on its natural resource.

The 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'.

The 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 Long-Term Working Partnership**

We are seeking partners for the period 2010 – 2013 that can offer us the chance to learn from their experience of working together in 'packaging' an area. Experience of this within the context of a 'nature destination' would be a real advantage. In return we can offer the chance to visit and learn about an 'undiscovered' area of the UK, to assist us in developing it as a recognisable destination, to examine the management and development approaches being taken to develop the area whilst seeking to ensure that impacts are managed and sustainable and to promote both areas to a wider audience.

The outline aims of the project will be:

1. To recognise and learn from good practice, specifically in relation to:
  - a. The development of a geographic area as an identifiable destination for tourists
  - b. The natural environment and cultural resources as the basis of tourism and wider economic activity
  - c. The active management of tourism to ensure that natural, cultural and historic resources are as little impacted as possible.
2. To promote on-going learning and ideas exchange between partners
3. To promote areas to each other and to a wider audience with the specific aim of increasing visitor numbers.

These aims are offered as a start point for discussions between us and any interested partner group.

It is our intention that this initial phase of visits and working together will be the basis of a long-term, on-going and active partnership between the participant areas

Further information on the area, its assets and facilities can be found at:

Dumfries and Galloway Council

<http://www.dumgal.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1991>

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide/m/mersehead/index.asp>

Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

<http://www.wwt.org.uk/caerlaverock>

National Museum of Costume

[http://www.nms.ac.uk/our\\_museums/museum\\_of\\_costume.aspx](http://www.nms.ac.uk/our_museums/museum_of_costume.aspx)

New Abbey Corn Mill

[http://www.historic-](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/propertyplan/propertyoverview.htm?PropID=PL_220&PropName=New%20Abbey%20Corn%20Mill)

[scotland.gov.uk/propertyplan/propertyoverview.htm?PropID=PL\\_220&PropName=New%20Abbey%20Corn%20Mill](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/propertyplan/propertyoverview.htm?PropID=PL_220&PropName=New%20Abbey%20Corn%20Mill)

Sweetheart Abbey

[http://www.historic-](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/propertyplan/propertyoverview.htm?PropID=pl_283&PropName=Sweetheart%20Abbey)

[scotland.gov.uk/propertyplan/propertyoverview.htm?PropID=pl\\_283&PropName=Sweetheart%20Abbey](http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/propertyplan/propertyoverview.htm?PropID=pl_283&PropName=Sweetheart%20Abbey)

Mabie Forest Park

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/Website/recreation.nsf/LUWebDocsByKey/ScotlandDumfriesshireForestsoftheSolwayCoastMabieForest>

<http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/usmapindexes/southeast.html>

<http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/usmapindexes/southwest.html>

Further information regarding the proposed trans-national partnership can be obtained from:

Contact	John Sellers
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E-mail	nicola.hill@dumgal.gov.uk
Language skills	English