



WILD SEASONS

WILDLIFE TOURISM IN DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

PROJECT REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

The following is a report by the Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP) on the progress made by the Wild Seasons project in 2013. It is intended to accompany the final claims made to the principal project sponsors, the Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Programme and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). The report details the project experience for those involved, including:

- the activities undertaken
- the outputs and outcomes delivered
- an analysis of both
- the lessons learnt, and
- recommendations for the way forward and projected costs.

2. BACKGROUND

Phase 1

Wild Seasons arose from a previous SUP project, known as 'Nith Estuary Nature Based Tourism', that brought together a loose amalgam of private, public and third sector nature-based bodies seeking to promote the region for its wildlife importance. Under the Wild Seasons banner, and with assistance from LEADER and SNH, this joint group developed a central resource offering information and advice to businesses wishing to make nature-based tourism an integral part of their operation.

Through the development of a website, promotional materials, an exemplar nature-based trail within the Caerlaverock National Nature Reserve and, crucially, close partnership working between the nature-based bodies and the industry-based Destination Dumfries & Galloway (DD&G), 'Wild Seasons Phase 1' put in place the platform on which this current project ('Phase 2') sought to build.

Project Management

Wild Seasons is delivered by the SUP through local project-based staff and managed by a Steering Group representing the principal contributors to the day-to-day running of the project, i.e. SUP, Dumfries & Galloway Council (D&GC) Ranger Service, DD&G and the Local Biodiversity Action Partnership (LBAP – represented by the Council's Biodiversity Officer).

Supporting the delivery are the members of the Working Group, representing each of the nature-based bodies affiliated to Wild Seasons (eg. the RSPB, Wildlife & Wetland Trust, National Trust for Scotland, Cream o’Galloway, the Forestry Commission for Scotland, and individual D&GC Rangers).

Phase 2

Hot on the success of Phase 1 of the project, SUP submitted successful applications to the D&G LEADER Programme and SNH for Phase 2 funding, the aims of which were to:

- engage a wider representation of the private sector in the Wild Seasons initiative and seek their investment in it
- take the nature based product to a wider market, specifically to increase visitor numbers to the region
- continue efforts to further develop the nature based product of the region, focussing on the delivery of high quality 'exemplar' projects
- support approaches to accessing and enjoying the nature based product, especially through the development and support of collaborative effort and projects
- develop links to relevant initiatives (e.g. the UNESCO Biosphere) to promote the potential of nature based tourism within them, and to use them as platform for the promotion of Wild Seasons.

A number of objectives and activities were linked with these aims and these are described in section 3.

Funding Package

The total projected cost of the project was £78,910.

Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Programme	50%	£39,455
Scottish Natural Heritage	45%	£35,510
Southern Uplands Partnership	5%	£3,945
Total Project Value	100%	£78,910

Project Inception

The project was approved to start by LEADER on 7th January 2013. Initial progress with Phase 2 was hampered by difficulties in recruiting a Project Officer which resulted in two separate recruitment phases and a delayed start and – due to funding deadlines – a shortened project life of just 10 months (from the envisaged 15 months), i.e. from March to 31 December 2013. The recruited Project Officer, though experienced, was also only available to the project on a part-time basis, as a result of which the Steering Group decided to recruit consultants, under the supervision of the Project Officer, to address specific elements of Phase 2.

This did not affect the momentum of the project as the partnership representatives were able to continue to attend relevant tourism events, maintain and promote the website, use social media and generally continue to engage with the industry. However, it did require a radical rethinking of what could be achieved in the time available.

Wild Seasons set out to “Develop a diverse and dynamic business base” but having had only nine months to make a difference it will take time will tell how much has really been achieved. But the indications are good. A recent event which involved the launch of the Wild Seasons Marketing Guide was attended by over thirty businesses who expressed an interest in using the Guide, inputting to future development needs associated with Wild Seasons and many requested that they be added to the accommodation listings on the website. With organisations such as the Scottish Tourism Alliance who are “an independent trade body comprising of trade associations, individual businesses, marketing services and local area tourism groups who earn their living from tourism or have an active interest in tourism,” speaking so positively about the achievements made through the Wild Seasons project, it is fair to say that we must be doing something right.

3. STRATEGY

Rationale

The activities originally proposed to fulfil the aims of Phase 2 were intended to enhance the capacity of businesses and nature-based bodies in the region to identify, synthesize and promote its wildlife attractions to the wider public over the longer term but otherwise lacked coherence, eg. a theme or structure around which they could coalesce in order to give the project more impetus, while still retaining the associated project outputs. Given the time and resources available to the project, it was agreed to address this through a more focused strategy.

The Strategy

The Wild Seasons website www.wildseasons.co.uk already featured natural sites, trails and individual walks in Dumfries and Galloway with the greatest potential for viewing wildlife. The strategy drawn up for Phase 2 aimed to develop a great deal more information on the wildlife sites (or ‘Wild Locations’) and to link them to a series of self-guided visitor itineraries (‘Wild Routes’) which contain information on the range of local accommodation, visitor attractions and other facilities, plus wildlife events that may be happening, in order to retain visitors in each area. This would create the structure required by the project, through which a coherent visitor ‘product’ would be developed that could be marketed more widely.

For each route, Wild Seasons would attempt to get a good representation of accommodation / facility types and standards and to link with community initiatives where possible. Businesses engaging with Wild Seasons in order to benefit from joint promotion would be expected to demonstrate a commitment to nature-based tourism in various ways including:

- promoting themselves as ‘wild friendly’, eg. by linking to the Wild Seasons website and other local initiatives on their websites or leaflets;
- demonstrating a good knowledge of their local nature-based attractions and/or wildlife;
- being accredited as walker / cyclist-friendly; and
- having due regard for the sustainability of the environment, eg. by having a Green Tourism Business Award or similar.

To ensure that all businesses involved were knowledgeable about the local opportunities for enjoying wildlife, the aim was to work with Destination D&G and other partners to:

- run workshops offering advice on how to be 'wild friendly' for their customers;
- organise familiarisation trips to local sites and trails;
- offer individual advice, as appropriate, on marketing, the use of social media and even tailoring their businesses / land to cater for wildlife visitors; and
- make available a series of publications on the wildlife of the region (and where to see it) and a step-by-step guide to marketing for wildlife visitors.

For those wishing to understand in more depth the local product and how to communicate it to visitors – and possibly to establish a new venture – the project would organise a guide training event.

Finally, and in order to support this initiative, Wild Seasons planned to:

- link the website and key industry websites to promote joint work;
- provide regular, direct social media updates to the industry through existing Wild Seasons Facebook and Twitter accounts;
- continue to develop the seasonal events programmes, such as the Wild Spring Festival; and, in the process,
- promote the nature based product to potential visitors outside the region in order to boost the numbers coming to Dumfries and Galloway.

As Phase 2 progressed, the opportunity also presented itself to:

- run the region's first Wild Autumn Festival;
- update and make more comprehensive the existing events website; and
- rebrand the initiative and produce a number of new promotional products for use by partners and businesses at future events.

The full strategy is enclosed with this report as **Annex 1**.

Proposed Activities

Table 1 below, summarises the range of activities proposed for Phase 2, as revised to accommodate the above strategy.

Original Objectives	Original Activities	As Revised
A business resource & reference centre		
Develop & maintain reference material on wildlife for visitors and businesses - mainly through development of website (www.wildseasons.co.uk), including access, information, promotion and branding. The website also to act as a co-ordinated 'shop front' for wildlife activities for the benefit of residents, visitors and businesses	<p>Increase availability of downloadable information on walks, wildlife and events, etc.</p> <p>Create still and video library for use by the industry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an interactive event map / calendar at www.wildseasons.co.uk • Create an interactive section (a 'blackboard') for site locations, sightings 	<p>All retained with addition of publication of new, standalone publications on where to see wildlife & step-by-step guide to marketing</p> <p>All retained</p>

Original Objectives	Original Activities	As Revised
Industry Engagement		
Host showcase events to promote the regions' NBT offer and signpost nature-based bodies and businesses to resources, including the website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 familiarisation visits / talks for industry regarding the regional nature based offer • 6 active links to key industry web-sites to promote 'working together to better present the natural product' • Run 2 events offering the industry advice on how to be 'wild friendly' for its customers, including the use of nature in promotional materials and on web sites • Provide regular (at least weekly) social media updates to the industry through existing Wild Seasons Facebook and Twitter accounts. 	<p>Retained</p> <p>Retained</p> <p>Increased to 4 workshops</p> <p>Retained</p>
Nature based product development		
Further develop the nature based product of the region, focussing on the delivery of high quality 'exemplar' projects, such as the Flooders Trail.	Develop 2 more self-guided 'wild tours'	Increased to minimum 6 routes based on linking existing locations
Accessibility of the product		
Work with the wider tourism industry, including various individuals who presently act as guides / instructors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the existing guides group to develop a stronger and clearer product • Establish a stronger web presence • Research and advise the group on key issues including corporate forms / insurance and bonding. 	Retained
Promotion and Marketing		
Complementary work with Destination D&G as well as wider tourism activity to 'cross-promote / cross-reference' existing and proposed activities, eg. the Wild Spring and Wild Autumn festivals and so market the wildlife product outside the region and increase visitor numbers to the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend 2 tourism 'fairs' outwith the region to promote nature based tourism in Dumfries and Galloway • Make links to wider initiatives (e.g. the UNESCO Biosphere, Dark Skies, etc) • Work with industry representatives, particularly through DD&G, to promote the seasonal event programme 	<p>Dropped (needs undue resources and at odds with consumer-facing nature of new initiative)</p> <p>Retained</p> <p>Retained</p>

Original Objectives	Original Activities	As Revised
Exit Strategy / Sustainability		
<p>Aim in total is to engage the private sector in taking better advantage of the economic opportunities on offer, especially through collaborative efforts, and to give them the confidence to invest.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear 'succession' for the project to become an integral part of Destination D&G's future functioning, if / as appropriate. • Develop an on-going funding package for the post, possibly located within one of the partner organisations. • Develop a Business Plan for the next stage of the project. 	<p>Retained</p> <p>Retained</p> <p>Retained</p>
Other / Cross-cutting Themes		
<p>Embedded within this are cross-cutting themes such as ensuring a sustainable approach (eg. through use of Green Tourism Business Scheme), disability issues, learning / training, etc.</p> <p><i>Table 1, Proposed Activities</i></p>	<p>Apply as appropriate in all of the above</p>	<p>Retained</p>

4. THE PROJECT EXPERIENCE

Procurement of Consultants

Bowles Green Consultants of Yorkshire were commissioned through public competitive tender in April to support the development of the website and social media, to run the 'Wild Friendly' workshops and familiarisation trips and generally to engage with businesses to encourage work with Wild Seasons.

Red Kite Tours of Inverness were commissioned through competitive tender in May to provide the guide training programme.

Bright Signals of Edinburgh were commissioned by public competitive tender in July to stage and promote the Wild Autumn Festival (they had already been commissioned by DD&G to run the Wild Spring Festival) and by a simple competitive tender to provide advice on the re-branding exercise.

Wirefly Design of Dumfries were commissioned by public competitive tender in August to develop a new events website and booking facility.

Bluebell Scotland of Edinburgh were commissioned by public competitive tender in September to write and design a step-by-step guide to marketing to wildlife visitors.

Website

Through the Bowles Green contract, Creative Station of Dalry were given a brief to redevelop the Wild Seasons website. The project officer was instrumental in liaising with nature-based bodies and businesses, visiting wildlife locations and testing routes in order to develop the new content.

The website was consequently re-launched in August with a new, fresher look and lots more information for visitors. A comprehensive guide to the wildlife of Dumfries & Galloway remains at its core but new features include:

- Details of nearly 50 wildlife viewing locations linked to an interactive map;
- Accommodation and other service listings and promotions;
- A series of visitor itineraries linking local wildlife sites with route maps, places to stay and other facilities plus other things to see and do;
- Up to date news, Tweets and Facebook posts about local wildlife events;
- Many more walks and leaflets to download.



Figure 1- Home Page of New Wild Seasons Website

Social Media

A workshop was held in September for project partners who were interested in developing and implementing a social media marketing strategy for Wild Seasons. A pilot social media campaign was developed and individuals volunteered to take a lead on adding content to the Wild Seasons Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest feeds. These were also linked to the website. Key elements of the pilot social media activity were:

- Targeting two tweets and one Facebook post per day
- Using the nature calendar as a basis for subject matter
- Promoting events in advance and on the day
- Increasing the numbers of followers, etc.

A summary of the social media workshop and our social media strategy is attached at **Annex 2**.

Workshops

Three training workshops were held to help tourism businesses understand the nature tourism market and to provide information and guidance on product development and marketing. The courses took place at NTS Threave (24th September), WWT Caerlaverock (7th November) and at Machars Action in Wigtown (22nd November). They were promoted widely to tourism businesses in the region through DD&G, ADGAP and by direct e-mail and telephone calls to businesses identified as being interested in nature tourism.

The workshops were designed to provide information on:

- *The region's nature tourism product* – delivered by nature tourism managers (Carl Munday, NTS, at Threave, Brian Morrell, WWT, at Caerlaverock and Andrew Belinski, RSPB, at Wigtown)
- *The nature tourism market and how to reach it* – delivered by Steve Green (Bowles Green Limited)
- *Experience from businesses in the region* – delivered variously by Anne Anderson from Barend Holiday Village, Robin Hogg from Galloway Holidays, Michael Clark from Williamwood farm, Shonagh Wright from the Aston Hotel, Ronnie Bradford from Brookford B&B and Tim Stephenson from the Creetown Gem Rock Museum
- *How businesses can benefit from working with the Wild Seasons project* – delivered by Iain Wilson (Wild Seasons).

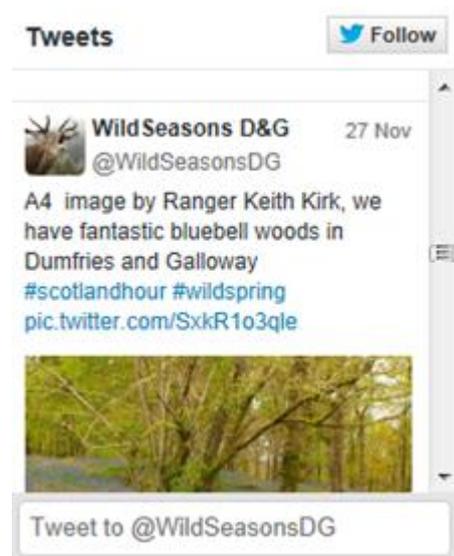


Figure 2 - Tweets posted on Wild Seasons website



Figure 3 - Brian Morrell of WWT at Caerlaverock Workshop

Additional contributions were made to individual courses by Callum Murray (RSPB) and Karen Morley and Elizabeth Tindall (both Dumfries & Galloway Ranger Service).

In total 36 people participated in the training courses (14 at Threave, 12 at Caerlaverock and 10 at Wigtown). Feedback from participants was very positive, as illustrated by comments received following the NTS Threave workshop which are set out in **Annex 3**.

Familiarisation Trips

A pilot familiarisation visit was organised and promoted at short notice before the onset of the visitor season, in June. Four tourism sector representatives participated. The trip visited Lochmaben, Eskrigg Local Nature Reserve, Moffat Community Nature Reserve and the Grey Mare's Tail in Moffat Glen. Feedback was used to refine the fam trip model and four familiarisation trips were organised in the Autumn, as follows:



Figure 4 - Threave Estate Fam Trip, Oct 2013

- 7th October – *Loch Ken and the Galloway Kite Trail* (visits to the Galloway Forest Red Deer Range, Clatteringshaws Visitor Centre, Red Kite Feeding Station and Threave Osprey and Bat Reserve)
- 16th October – *The Fleet Valley* (Visits to Cream O' Galloway, Cairnsmore of Fleet National Nature Reserve, Carstrammon Woods and Carrick Bay)
- 21st November – *Wigtown Bay and Cree Woods* (Wigtown Hall Osprey Feed, Wigtown Bay Nature Reserve, RSPB Wood Of Cree, Cree Valley Community Woodlands and the Creetown Gem Rock Museum)
- 27th November – *Nith Estuary* (visits to WWT Caerlaverock, Glencaple, Mabie Forest and RSPB Mersehead)

The trips were aimed at tourism businesses and their staff. Like the courses, trips were organised across the region and were run shortly after the training courses, so that they could also be promoted at those events. Trips started at 11am and ended at 3.30 pm, so that accommodation providers could return to greet arriving guests. Each trip visited several sites where participants were met by the site managers for a short tour and talk. Transport was by minibus and lunches were provided. Feedback from participants was positive with the main benefits being: learning about new places, learning about the nature of places they were already aware of and making personal contact with the managers of sites, all of which help to address a key business need – learning about the nature of the region.



Figure 5 - Guide Training at RSPB Mersehead

Overall, 33 people took part, including 4 on the June pilot, 9 to Loch Ken and the Galloway Kite Trail, 7 to the Fleet Valley, 7 to Wigtown Bay and Wood of Cree, and 6 to the Nith Estuary).

Descriptions of each of the fam trips and feedback received are provided at **Annex 4**.

Guide Training

A group of individuals experienced in various aspects of the region’s natural and cultural heritage had already come together in Phase 1 of the project to form a nucleus of ‘wild guides’. The objective of Phase 2 was to identify more, existing guides and offer the opportunity to be trained to other individuals and businesses so as to enlarge this core group and give potential visitors greater opportunities to access the countryside and wildlife of Dumfries & Galloway. The intention was also to ‘professionalise’ the guides by ensuring that they were aware of the health & safety, insurance and other regulations relating to the industry and to provide advice on business planning where necessary. Finally, as so far as possible, guides were encouraged to promote themselves to potential visitors with specific information on their geographical and subject specialisms, availability and prices.

A guide training course covering all these aspects was held at RSPB Mersehead over three days in November. It was attended by 12 delegates of varying backgrounds and levels of experience, ranging from three businesses already in operation but looking to hone their guiding skills, to B&B and self-catering accommodation owners looking to offer their guests an additional service. A copy of the guide training programme is enclosed at **Annex 5**.

A copy of the electronic flyer used to promote the range of courses described above is enclosed at **Annex 6**.

Publications

Two specific publications were produced by the project to develop the capacity of businesses to market themselves to and cater for wildlife visitors.

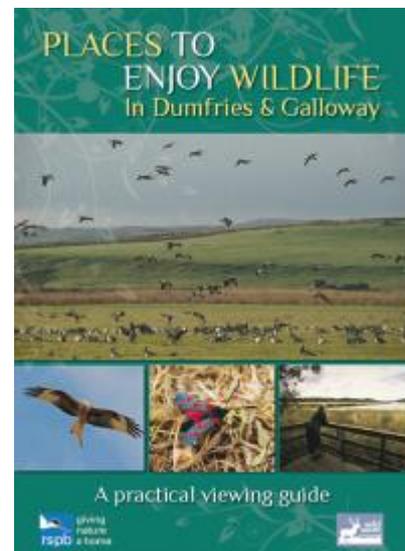


Figure 6 - Cover of Places to Enjoy Wildlife'

The first, ‘Places to Enjoy Wildlife in Dumfries & Galloway’, had been previously published by the RSPB as part of their LEADER-funded project ‘Connecting Communities’. This 48-page, spiral-bound, laminated booklet illustrates and describes the most likely locations for viewing all the most significant species of flora and fauna present in the region and is an extremely useful publication to help business owners inform their guests accordingly.



Figure 7 - example page from Interactive marketing guide

100 copies of the publication were reprinted for distribution to businesses attending workshops and familiarisation trips or committing themselves to the Wild Seasons brand in similar fashion. The second, 'A Marketing Guide for Nature-Based Tourist Businesses in Dumfries & Galloway', is a practical guide, produced as an interactive PDF, which offers specific help and advice on marketing to businesses wishing to attract nature-based visitors to the region. It is tailored to the Dumfries & Galloway market but borrows from Tourism Intelligence Scotland's publication 'Wildlife Tourism in Scotland' and supplements the range of advice available to tourism businesses through DD&G's industry-facing website. The publication also includes 6 case studies of businesses already demonstrating good practice in the region.

Events Database

Towards the end of Phase 2, savings in the budget resulting from the delays already mentioned allowed the steering group to commission the development of an enhanced and more comprehensive events management website, linked to the main Wild Seasons website and building on a framework already developed at the outset of the project. New features included maps and an on-line booking facility so that Wild Seasons project managers and partners could start to capture visitor information and improve future marketing. The new website went live in November 2013 and already contains over 160 nature-based events being run by some 20 partners during 2014, the majority focused on the Wild Spring Festival planned by DD&G.

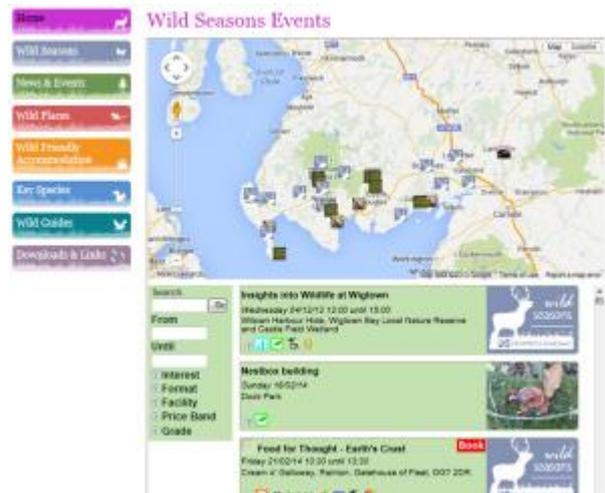


Figure 8 - Screenshot of new Events Management Webpage

Input to Wildlife Festivals

During April and May this year DD&G hosted the region's largest and most successful wildlife festival to date. The separately-funded Wild Spring Festival contained over 140 family events which were advertised on the Wild Seasons events website, attracted 18 joint offers from accommodation providers and other businesses and received some 4,700 visitors eager to get up close to animals, birds, fish and plants. It is estimated¹ that 50% of visitors were from outside the region and this activity resulted in over £200,000 of spend in the local economy.

Building on this success, and anxious to maintain the momentum being generated by this and the other Wild Seasons initiatives already described, the Steering Group hosted the inaugural Dumfries & Galloway Wild Autumn Festival in October and early November.



Figure 9 - Some of the publicity generated for WAF 2013

¹ DD&G Festival Report 2013, May 2013

This was launched with a blitz of national and regional publicity including features on BBC Scotland TV and Radio news, ITV Borders and articles in 'The Herald', 'D&G Life' and several other magazines as well as Facebook.

The Festival contained over 100 family-friendly events involving some 20 different organisations across the region such as Galloway Activity Centre's very popular Wilderness kayaking and mountain biking events. These are illustrated in a special pull-out supplement produced for the festival and attached as **Annex 7**.

Wild Seasons Phase 2 has also contributed financially to the roll-out of Wild Spring 2014 through support for the hard copy brochure and associated promotional flyers.

Branding & Promotion

Although the development of the new Wild Seasons website had involved a fresher look and new iconography for the initiative, the overall branding had remained the same, was inconsistent with other promotional materials which had been produced by Wild Seasons or its partner bodies and needed an overhaul. The offer, by FCS officer Lucy Hadley, to help



Figure 10 - Detail of new WS branding

design new logos and branding guidance provided the opportunity to undertake this exercise on a value-for-money basis with professional input from Bright Signals.

The new branding has now been incorporated into the marketing guide already described, will feature on a range of new promotional materials – such as banners and posters – being produced for use at events and by businesses themselves, and will be used for promoting the Wild Spring Festival in 2014.

Business Engagement

The majority of the business engagement undertaken was through the initiatives already described, ie. workshops, guide training and familiarisation trips and the promotion, discussions and provision of information leading up to them. However, a similar level of engagement resulted from becoming involved in 3rd party conferences and joint business marketing initiatives, such as the DD&G Annual Tourism Conference at Easterbrook Hall, Dumfries in April 2013 and Destination Langholm's initial conference in September. In all cases, the events were promoted through existing business channels such as the regular newsletters disseminated by DD&G and ADGAP.

Other opportunities for engaging with businesses were gained through discussions arising from 'ad hoc' requests for listings on the website, special offers and joint promotions with events festivals and similar requests for information. In several instances these were followed up by visits to the businesses concerned and/or included the provision of advice on marketing, wildlife or the use of social media by the project officer, the marketing consultants or other partners.

Altogether some 65 businesses and community enterprises engaged directly with Wild Seasons in one form or another and this is described in more detail in sections 5 and 6. Due to the criteria used by funders, this number differs from the outputs reported.

Community Engagement

The project has actively engaged with community-based initiatives in a number of ways – the degree of success is evaluated in section 5. These include:

- Promotion of community-run wildlife sites such as at:
 - Aldouran Glen, Leswalt;
 - Moffat Community Nature Reserve;
 - Eskrigg Nature Reserve, Lockerbie;
 - the bird-viewing sites promoted by Making the Most of Moorlands, Langholm;
 - Balloch Woods, run by the Creetown Initiative; and
 - a number of sites managed by Cree Valley Community Woods.

Such sites have also been incorporated into ‘Wild Routes’ wherever possible and host events which are promoted on the website as well;

- Promotion of community assets such as the former lighthouse-keepers’ cottages at the Mull of Galloway, now run by the Mull of Galloway Community Trust; and the Joseph Thomson Local Heritage Centre at Penpont;
- Direct engagement with community tourism initiatives such as Destination Langholm and an emerging group of businesses in Gretna and Gretna Green who are seeking to diversify from the wedding trade;
- Use of community-based resources such as Glenkens Community Transport for two of the familiarisation trips and Machars Action offices for the Wigtown workshop.

5. OUTPUTS & OUTCOMES

Achievements

The following is an objective summary of the project achievements. Tables reporting on performance against the revised objectives generally and specific LEADER and SNH Output and Outcome targets are attached at **Annex 8**.

Website

The project has a greatly enhanced, colourful and engaging website. Its functions reflect and contribute to the strategy objective of developing a more coherent nature-based tourism ‘product’ in the region which:

- facilitates greater linkages between natural attractions, events and businesses;
- offers opportunities for joint promotions; and
- provides greater and more up to date information to businesses & consumers alike.

The website has been well-received by a number of individuals and agencies, including SNH advisers. **Annex 9** contains a selection of comments received.

Social Media

The project has encouraged, focused and demonstrated the effectiveness of the use of social media for promoting up-to-date nature-based tourism opportunities to a much greater extent than previously.

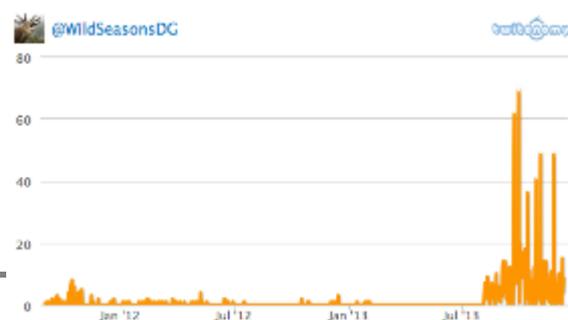


Figure 11 - Twitter Usage pre-Phase 2 and now

During the pilot project, the number of Twitter followers has been increased from 413 to 646 and the level of activity has increased considerably, as shown in the graph in figure 11 of Tweet history from July 2011 to December 2013. The Facebook page has 459 'likes' and is achieving a growth rate of 2.7%. 37% of posts are images and 8% are videos, with a high rate of calls to action (for example clicking through to a website for further information). Pinterest, however, has been slower to take off, chiefly because locally, people have been slower to embrace it.

Annex 10 contains more detailed analysis of Twitter usage and the types of messages posted.

Business Engagement

The project has so far engaged with 48 individual businesses or community initiatives in actual joint work and promotion or with the definite potential for the same in the very near future. The table attached as **Annex 11** lists all the businesses concerned, together with a commentary on the nature of the engagement or involvement with Wild Seasons.

The list includes:

- over 40 businesses (using a slightly broader definition than LEADER) that attended workshops, fam trips, social media and/or guide training.
- 26 that are currently being promoted on the Wild Seasons website.

These numbers will increase over the coming weeks and months as the opportunities arising from recent engagement activity are followed up.

The table attached as **Annex 12** is a consolidated list of those individuals and businesses that attended workshops, fam trips, social media and/or guide training events, showing those that meet LEADER output criteria.

Given the positive nature of comments from participants at all events, the numbers actually participating and especially the number of people who either cancelled at short notice, or simply didn't turn up (to workshops and fam trips in particular) was disappointing and raises a wider issue (discussed below) of engaging tourism businesses.

Joint Work

The project has been notable for the amount of goodwill and joint working that has been evident between project organisers, nature-based bodies and community initiatives to enable it to work coherently for the benefit of all.

Such work has included:

- free use of venues for events and other meetings;
- organisation representatives present at or even facilitating workshops or guiding fam trips;
- website content and images;
- organisation and input of events to the new events database;
- joint working at festivals; and

- provision of advice and assistance to businesses engaging with Wild Seasons; to list just a few examples. This degree of cooperation has positive implications for the future direction of the project.

Guides

A further pleasing aspect of the project has been the ability to enhance the core group of 'Wild Guides' from the previous 6 to the current 10, including our first guide offering boat trips. Other individuals offering tours or guiding, including two further boat trip companies, have engaged with the initiative and their closer involvement will be pursued. A number of businesses attending the guide training course currently run hotels/B&Bs, self-catering accommodation or visitor attractions and simply wanted to develop a new service that they could offer their guests.



Figure 12 – New guides on Wild Seasons website

The guide training course arranged as part of the project was fully subscribed and feedback on the course was very positive – see **Annex 13** – with lots of networking, positive ideas for joint working and enthusiasm for further training in the future. The training course also addressed generic business management issues such as regulation, insurance, health and safety and marketing and it is noticeable that businesses requested more such information, which has implications for partners such as the Council and DD&G.

Publications

The project produced two publications that will help local tourism businesses to become 'wild friendly' and increase their capacity to attract and cater for nature-based visitors. The RSPB publication 'Places to Enjoy Wildlife in D&G' had been previously printed but Wild Seasons has been able to give it greater circulation and, significantly, a number of larger businesses have indicated that they would be willing to contribute financially to a reprint in the future.

The new marketing guide is an interactive pdf which features on the DD&G website as a further aid to 'wild-friendly' businesses or those seeking to become so. It will be launched at a separate, nature-based tourism summit on 26th February 2014.

Events Management Website

The project resulted in the creation of a new, comprehensive events management website to which over 20 nature-based bodies and businesses contribute. This gives national and even international access to the range of events happening in the region, compared to the hard copy programme that was previously produced. It also allows visitors to book and pay for events and provides the events contributors collectively to develop a database of 'wild-friendly' visitors to whom they can promote initiatives in the future and market the wildlife potential of the region as a whole.

Festivals and Promotion

The project contributed to the most successful Wild Spring Festival to date and was responsible for the first ever Wild Autumn Festival, together with the national and international publicity that those initiatives engendered for the region. As well as encouraging new visitors to the region, the additional promotional activity associated with the initiatives made more people aware of Wild Seasons and of the wildlife potential of Dumfries & Galloway, thus building up potential for the future.

New promotional materials produced by the project will allow it to give Wild Seasons greater prominence at a larger number of wildlife attractions in 2014 and beyond.

Community Engagement

One of the most pleasing aspects of the project was the extent to which it was able to engage with community-based initiatives, support for which has a potentially wider impact than work with individual businesses in isolation. This engagement took a myriad different forms, as already described, and the potential created also has implications for the future direction of Wild Seasons.

Final Project Budget

Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Programme offered a grant of £39,455 which was 50% of the total anticipated cost. The project was very slightly underspent and the total amount provided by LEADER was £39,089.

The final spend on the project £78,177.99.

Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Programme	50%	£39,089.00
Scottish Natural Heritage	45%	£35,509.42
Southern Uplands Partnership	5%	£3,579.57
Total Project Value	100%	£78,177.99

6. ANALYSIS & CONCLUSIONS

Overall Achievement

We believe Wild Seasons Phase 2 has successfully addressed its revised strategic objective of establishing a coherent framework for the continued development and promotion of the nature-based tourism product in Dumfries & Galloway. The experience and achievements described above suggest that this type of tourism product has a receptive national market and that, properly promoted, it can generate additional visitor numbers to the region.

Equally significant, however, is the fact that a structure has been created with new communication channels, management tools, an enhanced knowledge and resource base, links to community initiatives and a distinctive brand and more elevated awareness of the product nationally. All of this should enhance the capacity of tourism businesses themselves to make nature-based tourism a more integral part of their operation and attract new visitors accordingly.

With the continued input of minimal resources and careful management this should allow the initiative to grow organically in the medium to long term with the distinct potential for joint business initiatives, including joint marketing initiatives, economic and social benefits for local communities and environmental benefits arising from a new type of tourism.

It is in this overall context that we now look at the lessons learnt from the running of Phase 2 and their implications for the continued management of Wild Seasons, the type and level of resources to be devoted to it and the focus of future activities.

Model vs Brand

At a basic level, the *working model* that has been established for the development of nature-based tourism in Dumfries & Galloway has the potential to be replicated elsewhere. As demonstrated, it relies on creating positive links between, on the one hand, the people and organisations that manage, are knowledgeable about and can best showcase the countryside and wildlife and, on the other, the businesses that cater for the visitors coming to enjoy them in order to promote the product effectively and enhance the visitor experience.

This translates into the *product brand* because visitors see their experience as part and parcel of the relationship between tourist businesses, nature-based organisations and guides, etc. and the greater access and understanding that this affords to wildlife sites and nature-based attractions. Carefully managed, this can become a quality brand, enhancing the region's reputation and attracting more visitors.

In Dumfries & Galloway, the product brand has the potential to develop this quality and reputation because of:

- the strength of the product – the undoubted quality of its countryside, coast and wildlife;
- its distinctiveness – the remote, unspoilt and 'wild' nature of the local environment (as exemplified by the existence of the Biosphere Reserve and the Dark Skies initiative); and
- the network of countryside agencies and organisations that exist to manage it.

In seeking to broaden the Wild Seasons initiative or replicate the model elsewhere, the SUP or other organisations will have to be mindful of this recipe for success and develop their strategies accordingly. Wild Seasons Dumfries and Galloway can include and promote nature-based attractions on its northern and eastern fringes without dilution of the core product but the product brand does not necessarily translate wholesale to other regions.

Continued Business Engagement

Although the project has largely achieved its objectives and targets for engaging with businesses in the current phase, it has proven difficult to encourage them to take part in the training courses and fam trips, despite widespread and direct promotion of the opportunity. One possible reason is the high proportion of 'lifestyle' businesses in the region with little incentive to diversity. Another is the low awareness of the potential of nature-based businesses.

It is clear that engaging businesses effectively in nature tourism marketing of the region will be a long term project which will grow as businesses see their competitors succeeding in the market.

Addressing this issue will mean persuading businesses of the size of the nature-based tourism market, continuing to advise and support them in promoting the local product to, and catering for, wildlife visitors, and encouraging more contact between tourism businesses and local nature managers.

Project Ownership

The branding of the initiative as 'Wild Seasons Dumfries & Galloway', and the need to coalesce regional partners and players to make the project effective, argues for a greater and more coherent *local* management structure based on an agreed strategy and working parameters.

The project relies on a great deal of goodwill, as already described, and informal working arrangements backed by the enthusiasm and commitment of local managers. By their nature, however, such arrangements have a low priority compared to local, organisational objectives and cannot be relied upon which reduces the ability to plan effectively or manage efficiently.

Much of the business support required is generic, relating to such issues as social media, website and marketing training. Much of the training provided by Wild Seasons, though geared to nature-based tourism and set in the context of the regional wildlife offer, was similarly generic. We have no doubt that this is the experience of other tourism initiatives in the region dealing, for example, with the arts or food.

In establishing the future framework for Wild Seasons, this argues for:

- a) agreement at a senior level amongst the key partner organisations in Dumfries & Galloway on the framework to be adopted, its aims / objectives, collaborative arrangements and, if possible, funding, etc;
- b) vesting of the future management of Wild Seasons under the formal auspices of a local organisation with a regional identity; and
- c) vesting of the future management within an organisation with a wider business or at least tourism remit.

SUP is such an organisation but it should be noted that there are other candidates.

Project Management

The time input required of the project officer and principal consultants together on this project leave us in no doubt that it deserved full-time project management. However, stripped of the need for establishing the initial strategy and ground rules for the project, including elements of the new structure (such as website layout or the events management system), briefs for consultants and administrative procedures, etc., we believe that the next phase of the project can be managed by a part-time officer, say on around 2-3 days / week.

This assumes the project officer:

- can work within the formal framework already described;
- will inevitably need to travel extensively (at least 1 day/week) around the region.

Use of Consultants

The use of consultants is often necessary to provide technical advice and services not otherwise available to the project staff or partners or, in the case of Wild Seasons Phase 2, due to time constraints. The project made extensive use of consultants for both these reasons but with mixed results.

In addition to monitoring their individual performances, the effectiveness and efficiency of using consultants depends on a clear brief, good project management and constant, consistent communications. The time spent on this can detract from the ability to address specific project objectives. Financial resources spent on consultants not resident in the region (usually the case because of procurement rules) are also a lost local economic benefit.

With hindsight, we believe that the resources spent on consultants in this project could have been reduced. Lessons learnt include:

- reviewed early enough, there is usually more time than you think to do things differently and/or look for other people (including partners) to do it;
- the administrative / project management elements of a brief should not be handled by consultants;
- tightly control the consultant performance and draw up specific payment schedules and deliverables in advance;
- consider the additional cost implications of sub-consultants who are not VAT registered and negotiate accordingly.

Future Work Areas

Experience and feedback gleaned from the project suggest that the following work areas and themes should be the focus for the next phase of Wild Seasons:

Continued business engagement

- Organic development of businesses engaging with the project: the project officer should develop specific leads, meet individual businesses and use opportunities to network through larger gatherings, regular mailings by other organisations, etc. The emphasis should be on the commitment and quality of the businesses concerned in order to develop 'centres of excellence' in the medium to long term.
- Continue to hold regular training workshops and familiarisation trips: those held in Phase 2 were of a high quality and well-received. They get lots of information and messages across quickly and provide an opportunity to network.

Training and Capacity Building

- Develop business capacity generally: work with partners, especially in the Council and through Business Gateway, to offer more training in such areas as the use of social media, marketing (based around the new marketing guide) and website development.
- Through partner organisations, offer specific advice to businesses on becoming wild-friendly: Council Rangers can offer some of this advice but tight resources require this responsibility to be spread amongst others where possible.

- Consider also the potential for peer-to-peer support: several business owners gave well-received presentations at workshops and/or were the subject of case studies in the marketing guide. Armed with a standard project brief and presentation materials, such businesses could become Wild Seasons ambassadors.

Joint Marketing and Promotions

- Strengthen links with national organisations such as Visit Scotland, Wild Scotland and the Tourism Alliance: this will give the Wild Seasons initiative a greater national presence while enabling local businesses to get access to specialist advice, tour agency contacts and other joint marketing opportunities.
- Encourage local, joint marketing and promotional initiatives, especially through community initiatives where appropriate: a limited number of the most likely initiatives should be planned in advance and be the focus of annual work programmes. There is great potential for engaging with community transport initiatives in particular to run local tours for visitors and more familiarisation trips for businesses.
- Continue to arrange and host bi-annual wildlife festivals as resources allow: they are an invaluable means of coalescing events and visitor promotions as well as maintaining momentum for the project as a whole.

Access to Wildlife

- Continue to identify and engage with existing guides and promote them through Wild Seasons: they not only offer visitors an invaluable service in interpreting and making the local countryside and wildlife more accessible, they can also help other businesses, especially accommodation providers, to enhance the product they offer.
- Involve existing and new guides in the development of joint marketing and promotional initiatives where appropriate: wildlife weekend packages run by hotels or tours promoted by community groups welcome help and advice in making such contacts, and *vice versa*.
- Develop training opportunities for new, recently trained and existing guides: there was clear demand for a refresher course among those attending the recent guide training course but equally a suggestion that this could be done through peer-to-peer support, shadowing existing guides and / or linking them with low-key events as a way of gaining experience.

Website

- The website should continue to be the focus for news, information, events and joint promotions, etc. and should be kept up to date and 'fresh'.
- The website has been developed to be consumer-facing (although the wildlife and site-based information it contains is of equal benefit to businesses) with business-specific information placed on the DD&G website. A priority should be to develop a specific and easily understood web link between the two, similar to the relationship between visitscotland.com and visitscotland.org.
- Similar consideration should be given to links with other tourism product-based initiatives such as 'Spring Fling' and 'Savour the Flavours'.
- Medium-term, depending on resources, the website should be reconfigured to be more mobile and tablet-friendly.

Social Media

While some staff within nature-based organisations have been enthusiastic about tweeting and posting, others have been slow to contribute. As a result, social media content depends on the continued involvement of a small number of individuals. Businesses have also been slow to take up social media marketing and to benefit from re-tweeting and re-posting the material generated by Wild Seasons. Bowles Green held one-to-one social media training sessions with Lockerbie Local Nature Reserve, Williamwood Farm and Creetown Gem Rock Museum but there is latent demand for more.

- Based on the strategic and practical lessons learnt social media activity in Phase 2, update the social media marketing strategy and promote the Wild Seasons social media material to local tourism businesses.
- Arrange further, joint training in the use of social media to partner organisations and businesses.

Other Networking and Communications

- Engagement with and cooperation from partners in order to support the above work areas will be greatly facilitated by the formal agreement described earlier. However, at an individual level, this process will require regular, face to face contact and up to date briefings on practical and policy developments. This could be done through *ad hoc* partner meetings or through invitations to the planned business workshops (see also 'Resources' below).
- A regular but simple partners' newsletter should also continue to be disseminated.

Resources

Key to enabling the above to happen will be the level of resources that the project can command. This could be mitigated in a number of ways, most of which are implicit in the conclusions above, ie:

- Formal agreement on the project framework and collaborative arrangements, etc.;
- The need for a part-time project officer only;
- Avoidance of consultants where possible;
- Use of partners, partner organisations, peer-to-peer support and even 'ambassadors' where possible to deliver training and capacity building, signposting where appropriate;
- Work through central / national organisations and/or existing business networks and community initiatives, as appropriate, to develop further joint marketing and promotion.

7. THE WAY FORWARD

With such a wide partnership having been involved in developing Wild Seasons, it is no surprise that the project is being widely praised and supported for both its aspirations and its achievements from within public sector organisations, private business representation and environmental charities operating in the region. Indeed organisations such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Tourism Alliance suggest that Wild Seasons in Dumfries and Galloway is leading Scotland in the development of Nature Based Tourism.

Within that partnership there is very strong support for the project to continue to be grown in Dumfries and Galloway and for the lessons learnt to be transferred across to The Borders as part of a push on Nature Based Tourism in the South of Scotland.

Our recommendations for the way forward for Wild Seasons flow naturally from the above but can be summarised as follows:

- There is a proven value to and structure for the Wild Seasons initiative which should continue to be supported;
- Extension of the Wild Seasons working model to border areas would be feasible but wholesale translation of the initiative to other regions will require further consultation and careful management;
- The framework for the next phase should be formally agreed amongst as wide as possible a network of partner organisations to establish aims / objectives, a work programme, collaborative arrangements and financial or in-kind contributions as appropriate;
- This should include Visit Scotland and the Southern Uplands Partnership to help link with wider initiatives, as described, but also to help access funding;
- This group – which could potentially number 20 organisations - should form the basis for the over-arching ownership and management of the initiative;
- The SUP is the organisation best placed to act as the accountable body for the next phase of the project and to lead and steer the above framework but, for day-to-day management and presentational purposes, the project should sit with Destination Dumfries & Galloway;
- A project management team should be established, to meet monthly, comprising those from all relevant partner organisations with day-to-day responsibility for the principal tools, contacts and communication channels required of the project, eg. website, social media, events management, on the ground wild-friendly and business support – this could comprise a maximum of 5 or 6 people;
- A job description and work programme for the new project officer should be developed based on the foregoing 'Areas of Work';
- This 'package' of agreement, management structure, job description and work programme should form the basis for applications for additional funding to allow the next phase to be implemented.

8. PROJECTED COSTS

It was always hoped that the long term sustainability of the project would be directly linked to "paid for" accommodation advertising appearing on the Wild Seasons website. Unfortunately due to issues raised nationally this does not currently look like being a viable exit strategy.

However there is a small group of volunteers from within the partnership who will give their time freely to maintain the website, social media and events listings. But the key function of engaging with businesses requires the input of a Project Officer, so a new funding package is being considered to try and keep this moving forward.

A suggested budget for implementing the above is set out in Table 2, below.

Item	Estimated Cost (£s)	Commentary
Project Officer salary	£15,000	Annual salary @ £26,000 <i>pro rata</i> for 2.5 days / week + 15% NI & pension
Travel, Hospitality & Office Expenses	£3,000	Travel up to 500 miles / month @ 0.45p / mile plus occasional expenses
Recruitment	£1,500	Estimated based on current project
IT & Office Accommodation	£2,500	New laptop / mobile & package
Management Charge & Overheads	£2,000	10% of foregoing package
Website maintenance & updating	£3,000	Based on quote received for work described in section 7 plus annual domain name & hosting costs
Festival promotion	£5,000	2 x £2,500 professional promotion, spring & autumn festivals
Guide training	£1,000	3 x £350 / day refresher training or guide shadowing
Catering / hospitality & minibus hire for training events	£1,000	Based on current project experience
Total	£34,000	

Table 2 – Project Phase 3 Project Costs