

WIGTOWN FESTIVAL COMPANY
DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY LEADER
WIGTOWN CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
(2016-2018)

END-OF PROJECT-REPORT (OCTOBER 2019)

INDEX

1 Introduction

2 Project overview

2.1 Project concept

2.2 Project staffing and management

2.3 Project structure

2.4 Alignment with Dumfries & Galloway LEADER Local Development Strategy 2014-2020

2.5 Budget

3 Lecture Weekends (Workstream 1)

3.1 Concept

3.2 Delivery

3.3 Legacy and post-LEADER development

4 Creative Writing Courses (Workstream 2)

4.1 Concept

4.2 Research

4.3 Delivery

4.4 Legacy and post-LEADER development

5 Bookshop Holidays (Workstream 3)

5.1 Concept

5.2 Delivery

5.3 Legacy and post-LEADER development

6 Year Round Activity (Workstream 4)

6.1 Concept

6.2 Delivery

6.3 Legacy and post-LEADER development

7 Targets

8 Conclusion

7.1 Beneficiaries.

7.2 Project Outputs, Legacy and Sustainability

1 INTRODUCTION

This end-of-project summary offers a narrative overview of the outcomes of the Wigtown Cultural Tourism Development Leader Project (2016-2018), looking at project deliverables, legacy and ongoing potential for developing the models established within the project's two-year timespan.

2 PROJECT OVERVIEW

2.1 Project concept

The Wigtown Cultural Tourism Development Project was undertaken by Wigtown Festival Company (WFC) and funded as part of the Dumfries & Galloway LEADER programme. The two-year project began 1 September 2017 and formally ended 31 December 2018. Its aim was to develop cultural tourism in Scotland's National Town in Wigtown, Dumfries & Galloway, outside the existing ten days of the well-established Wigtown Book Festival.

A Book Town is traditionally a rural town that attracts tourists to its cluster of secondhand bookshops. The model of the Book Town was based on Hay-on-Wye in Wales and was given definition by research at the University of Strathclyde in the 1990s, which inspired Wigtown to attain a Book Town identity in 1998. An International Association of Book Towns (IoB) now exists with members around the world, from Iceland to South Korea.

This project was conceived as a response to the challenges faced by Book Towns in a digital age when even the most obscure secondhand books are available online. It also acknowledged that, while the Wigtown Festival had done much to attract tourism to a remote rural area in "shoulder" tourism period (September-October), the economic impact was concentrated on the period of the festival itself.

Development of the project plan was inspired by an independent report commissioned by Wigtown Festival Company, which considered unexploited possibilities of developing and extending year-round activity in the Book Town and the economic impact associated with it.

This preparatory report was undertaken with extensive consultation with stakeholders in Wigtown's Book Town status, from festival staff, through book shop owners to Wigtown Festival Company volunteers, including a brainstorm with 22 attendees from across the community. It showed a common desire to develop the year-round activities and attractions of Scotland's National Book

Town. The project also more broadly acknowledged the growth potential of literary tourism as an underdeveloped sub-section of cultural tourism.

At the start of the project, the funding package was as follows:

Wigtown Festival Company -	£60,000
LEADER -	£60,000
Total -	£120,000

2.2 Project staffing and management

The project appointed two members of staff: Jessica Fox (development officer) and Harvey Lindsay (project assistant). They reported directly to the Wigtown Festival Company Board of Trustees. Michael McCreath was the trustee appointed to act as liaison.

2.3 Project structure

The project had four workstreams:

- i) Lecture weekends. Two pilots of creative weekends/ mini-festivals with the aim of creating viable events that could be developed post-project by Wigtown Festival Company.
- ii) Creative writing courses. Market research and piloting of three creative writing/ reading weeks that would enhance the identity and extend the appeal of Scotland's National Book Town, leading to the establishment of a business model for a permanent writing centre.
- iii) Bookshop holidays. Prior to project commencement, Wigtown Book Festival ran a pilot project offering holiday-makers the chance to run a bookshop in Wigtown as an experiential vacation ("The Open Book"). The LEADER Project aimed to develop and support that business model, leveraging the international network of visitors as well as exploring models for opening a second bookshop.
- iv) Year-round programming. This included cooperation with one other local festival to enhance existing activity, creative leadership and liaison with other non-Book Festival annual events including Wigtown Spring Book Weekend, Spring Fling, Wigtown Writers Gathering, Wigtown Poetry Competition.

This report considers the project outcomes under these four workstreams. It also looks at possibilities for future development following project completion.

2.4 Alignment with Dumfries & Galloway LEADER Local Development Strategy 2014-2020

The Wigtown Cultural Tourism Development Project directly supports Theme 1 (Economy) of the D&G LEADER Local Development Strategy (LDS) in the following ways:

- a) *“Tourism (as an economic sector alongside its role to strengthen services)”*.
The project’s aim to develop a year-round programme of activity for Wigtown has particular value in an area in which the tourist economy is seasonal. The Lecture Weekends (in particular Big Bang) and Bookshop Holidays both increase opportunities for tourism outside peak periods.
- b) *“Arts and Culture – developing the role that arts and culture plays in the life of the region, with a view to maximising its economic contribution.”*
The project strengthens Wigtown’s cultural offering, for example by helping develop the Print Room as a year-round cultural venue, supporting a new digital ticketing system that can be used year-round, raising the profile of the Wigtown Poetry Competition and creating an interactive events calendar and new website.

It also supports Theme 3 (Sustainable Settlements) of the LDS by enabling WFC to create a new bookshop - Number 11 - and to keep an existing bookshop (The Open Book) open. This is vital for Wigtown to maintain a core number of bookshops necessary to support its identity as Scotland’s National Book Town. Through the LEADER project we also identified the importance of the Print Room as a cultural hub for Wigtown.

2.5 Budget

As the project progressed, it was necessary to make changes to the budgets so that the best use of the money was made. After one member of staff left, the money that had been set aside for their salaries could be redistributed to the other workstreams. These changes meant that more money could be spent promoting events through marketing and contributed to the installation of a new ticketing system that was used throughout the project.

The budgets for the creative writing and year round workstreams were also adjusted to accommodate changes made to the events. The writers’ gathering was decided to be better aligned with the creative writing projects than the year round activities, so was moved to reflect that. The flexibility of the project allowed for the budgets to be adapted as necessary.

3 LECTURE WEEKENDS (WORKSTREAM 1)

3.1 Concept

The aim of this workstream was to establish a commercial model for lecture weekends outside the period of Wigtown Book Festival, as a first step in developing a sustainable year-round programme for Wigtown.

The concept of Big Bang, a science and Dark Skies lecture weekend, was chosen for development because it linked well with existing local initiatives, in particular the Galloway Dark Sky Park, Dumfries & Galloway Science Festival and Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere. The popularity of a Dark Sky strand within Wigtown Book Festival 2012 was also a factor. The event was designed to offer an attraction in the Book Town during the less touristed winter season. The weekend also was intended to respond to wider cultural interest in the creative mixing of art and science.

3.2 Delivery

The first Big Bang Weekend took place from 2-4 February 2017. In its first year, the event celebrated women in science, hosting NASA researchers and marking the life of the pioneering Scottish scientist Mary Somerville. In 2018, the event was repeated as part of the LEADER project with the theme “When Is Something Alive?” featuring visiting lecturers from the world of AI, space exploration, genome engineering, literature and comedy.

Attendance was above expectation in Year 1 (2017) at 595, with more than 90% audience satisfaction. Media coverage included BBC News, the Herald and Scotsman and across-the-board-local media. Other benefits included link ups with local schools through two outreach events. Anecdotally, there was also a large rise in business for local food providers over the weekend. In Year 2, audiences grew to 812, though revenue was down, the result of experimenting with a more accessible ticket pricing, especially for children and young people.

3.3 Legacy and post-LEADER development

Neither of the weekends funded through LEADER broke even after staffing costs were allocated. However, the events’ popularity suggested that the commercial model remained viable. Areas that would support future development were identified as sponsorship (restricted under LEADER), the ability to target return visitors through improved use of data, and date changes to avoid the clash with Christmas and New Year holidays and the main marketing period.

On this basis, WFC ran a third Big Bang in 2019 at a later date (8-10 March) external to the LEADER Project. Audiences grew 23 per cent over 2018 with project losses cut by more than 50% and revenue up by 102%. Media interest significantly increased with coverage in The Times, Telegraph, Herald, I-Paper, Scotsman, Border TV, BBC Radio Scotland (Good Morning Scotland and Out of Doors). It is expected that the event will take place again in 2020 and an ongoing

development plan has been drawn up with the aim of bringing Big Bang Weekend into profit by 2021.

Developing Big Bang through LEADER has created a strong model for other lecture weekends in Scotland's Book Town. It has allowed us to grow vital organisational skills and knowledge, establishing an approach to marketing, promoting and delivering lecture weekends that is transferable beyond Big Bang itself. One example of this is a new Day of Curiosity mini-festival, in association with Glasgow University Dumfries Campus, which was delivered in Wigtown in June 2019.

4 CREATIVE WRITING COURSES (WORKSTREAM 2)

4.1 Concept

The aim of this workstream was, following market analysis, to pilot three creative writing / reading weeks. The intention was to attract new visitors to Wigtown and complement other offerings of the Book Town, notably bookshops and literary events. Subject to viability, it was proposed to develop a business model for a new permanent creative-writing centre based in Wigtown.

4.2 Research

A research phase began in autumn 2016: this included face-to-face interviews with four major market-leading providers of creative-writing courses / residencies: Cove Park, Arvon, Hospitalfield and Scotland's national writing centre at Moniack Mhor. It also involved a paper analysis of other current models / providers. In addition, 25 existing festival attendees who had attended creative writing courses were surveyed on their motivations for participation, as per the project plan. Three key findings from this research period were:

- i) Creative writing weeks are borderline financially viable for most organisations in the UK without substantial funding (eg public or charitable trust).
- ii) Profitability often relies on the "big-house" model, in which participants live and work under one roof for a week, and where the organisers make a profit on accommodation in addition to writing course fees. This is also especially popular among potential participants.
- iii) The market for creative writing is increasingly competitive with publishers and agencies, such as Faber Academy and Curtis Brown Creative, and media organisations such as The Guardian "cutting out the middleman".

4.3 Delivery

Taking into account, the research in 4.2, it was decided to explore the following three non-residential models for writing weeks:

i) *Secrets of Story* (November 2016). This week-long event aimed to attract participants interested in literature and relied on two established authors with an established following and creative writing experience (Robert Twigger and Jason Webster). Feedback was positive: all participants said they would return. Guests were split 50% between locals and visitors, with visitors from America, Germany and England. Despite significant promotion, however, only half the places were taken. Feedback, however, suggested that a week was too long for most people to take time off work. There was also demand for online access to sessions.

ii) *Writing for Social Media* (March 2017). This weekend aimed to attract a non-literary audience seeking practical instruction in online writing. To deliver it, we invited Celeste Noche, a specialist in online writing originally from AirBnB, to host a week long creative writing course in Wigtown to develop participants' social media skills. In addition to attracting new visitors to the town, the course aimed to fulfil the needs of local businesses and entrepreneurs. Taking on board the feedback from the first course, the course was delivered in two weekend sessions with flexible hours. Feedback was positive, though the timing of the course in school half-term negatively impacted take-up.

iii) *Writers' Gathering* (May 2017). The Writers' Gathering Weekend targeted members of established creative writing groups in Scotland and further afield. This was a response to issues with weekends i) and ii) in attracting enough individuals to take part. The Writers' Gathering had the highest number of attendees of the three weekends (40), though it failed to break even commercially.

4.4 Legacy and post-LEADER development

This was the most challenging of the four workstreams. The scheduling of the initial two courses did not, in retrospect, give time to promote the activities properly and maximise participants. And, although the activity was conceived with an eye towards developing a permanent writing centre in Wigtown, no suitable property was available during the time of the project. Purchasing a property was also not realistic, given the timescale in raising money and the level of potential financial risk to reward.

However, the activity showed that creative-writing activities can still play an important part in a year-round programme of activities for Scotland's Book Town with an emphasis on short courses (weekends / long weekends) potentially with digital content attached. On this basis, The Writers' Gathering will be part of WFC's year-round programme in 2019 and ongoing.

In general, for writing courses to thrive, we recognise the need to develop relationships with existing groups and to explore partnerships. To this end, we have been holding discussions with Scotland's national Writers' Centre at Moniack Mhor about holding writing courses in Wigtown from 2020.

While the pilots have not supported a business case for a dedicated creative writing centre, they do contribute to the case for establishing a broader creative / cultural centre in The Print Room venue which could support creative writing and other events.

Even without development, this venue (which is next to Wigtown Festival Company's offices) has already been used for The Writers' Gathering, Wigtown Book Festival, Dumfries & Galloway Arts Live (touring theatre network), art classes and craft workshops (eg silversmithing), Book Week Scotland and rehearsal space for Performance Collective Stranraer (regional youth theatre).

We believe that, with investment, The Print Room could become a year-round cultural hub, supporting a growing range of year-round activity. In this way it has the potential to make an important contribution economically and culturally to the area.

Following LEADER, we have negotiated with the owners of the building a lease with an option to buy, and the aim to raise money to do so has been written into WFC's business plan. To date, applications to raise funds have been submitted to the Land Fund and Garfield Weston and we continue to seek other potential funders. In October 2019, we were successful in an application to the South of Scotland Economic Partnership (SoSEP) for £20,000 funding towards a feasibility study on purchasing the Print Room and our offices at 11 North Main Street.

Although a separate spin-off organisation was envisaged to run the creative-writing/cultural centre, it became clear during the project that Wigtown Festival Company would be better placed to run such a centre itself.

5 BOOKSHOP HOLIDAYS (WORKSTREAM 3)

5.1 Concept

The Open Book is a unique holiday experience concept in which tourists are invited to visit Wigtown and run a second-hand bookshop while paying to stay in the flat above. The project was originally piloted as a residency, and was a response to the planned closure of one of Wigtown's existing bookshops.

During this LEADER project, we looked at ways to move the Open Book onto a more commercially sustainable footing. This included conducting a marketing and pricing review and developing a network of international alumni. The workstream also interrogated the possibility of developing an "Open Book 2", which would replicate or complement the existing shop and add to the core tourist attractions of Scotland's Book Town.

5.2 Delivery

As part of this workstream we delivered a package of activity designed to support the operation of the Open Book, raise its profile and extend its economic impact. This was as follows:

- i) Review of business model and development of core product. This included delivery of a new commercial plan, review of pricing, refresh of Airbnb page, staff training in customer service and refreshing stock to improve the visitor experience and make it more consistent. Through this development activity, the Open Book has now become financially self-sustaining.
- ii) Creation of a media plan and toolkit for international journalists, plus 3 x press facilitation trips and PR support. On the back of this, the Open Book story was picked up by media outlets worldwide. These included New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Times (London), Guardian, Daily Mail, CNN, Good Morning America, BBC Breakfast, ABC Sunrise (Australia), BBC World Tonight, Scotsman, Herald and other outlets in more than 15 countries worldwide. Advertising value equivalent is in excess of more than £120,000, raising the profile of the Book Town and the region.
- iii) A network of more than 50 international guests who had previously run the Open Book was created with its own Facebook page. We continue to add to this, with former Open Bookers acting as unofficial ambassadors for the shop and our other activities. We also established and continue to manage a separate GDPR compliant database.
- iv) Phase 2: as part of this workstream, we explored opportunities for building on the success of the Open Book by opening a new shop. In the absence of a suitable venue for an “Open Book 2”, we looked at other gaps in Wigtown’s bookselling market.

Following consultation with other booksellers and local businesses, in 2017 we opened a new bookshop at the Festival Company’s offices at 11 North Main St. The first bookshop in Wigtown to concentrate solely on new books, it is - like the Open Book - run by volunteers. LEADER funding contributed to a programme of business development (including “shop doctor” support), delivery of a new commercial plan, introduction of Electronic Point of Sale, and staff training.

5.3 Legacy and post-LEADER development

In March 2019, thanks to LEADER support, the Open Book won the Innovation in Tourism Award at the Thistle Awards, Scotland’s “tourism Oscars”. The original property is currently booked up until 2022.

We remain keen to develop another residential Open Book, employing the improved structures and financial models developed during the LEADER project - as there is a waiting list of more than 1400 customers for the original. To this end, we continue to seek suitable property.

6 YEAR ROUND ACTIVITY (WORKSTREAM 4)

6.1 Concept

This workstream explored how Wigtown Festival Company, as one of the largest and most experienced cultural organisations in Dumfries & Galloway, could use its experience to collaborate with other organisations and events, offering creative leadership to the sector. It also looked at practical ways to promote and enhance a year-round programme of events in Wigtown for the whole community's benefit.

In June 2018, a request was made to change the budgeted allocation of expenditure in the project plan. This was granted. The change moved funds from the Salaries budget into Marketing, Bookshop Development and Year-Round activity.

The approved change request also earmarked funds for upgrading our ticketing system to a digital box-office in order to achieve the goal of marketing multiple events throughout the year without causing upheaval to the staff and office. This is also included in the activity detailed below.

6.2 Delivery

Activities were delivered over the period of the project, as follows:

i) Partnership with local festival. In 2017, we looked at collaboration with the Newton Stewart folk music festival but capacity issues meant that they were unable to proceed. At the last minute we partnered with the Wigtown & Bladnoch Food Festival. This included delivery of a joint marketing campaign (including 2 e-shots, 2,000 mailout, professional PR support) and programming five events. Ticket sales rose 5%, though our impact was limited by the timing and there were issues about responsibility for programming, timing and expectations.

ii) A new Explore Wigtown brand was developed, including social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) and tourism website (www.booktownscotland.com), including the introduction of an interactive events calendar.

iii) Wigtown Poetry Prize. Under LEADER we increased traditional marketing and for the first time were able to engage professional PR for the poetry competition. We also cleaned and revised our database. The competition's international reach can be demonstrated by the fact that 2018's winners came from London, the Western Isles and New York. Entries and revenue grew an average of 11% over the period of the project and the prize moved into profitability.

iv) Marketing mailout to 5,000 former customers in May. This additional mailout was part of a wider campaign to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Wigtown as Scotland's National Book Town. It also allowed us to ask existing mailing list members to opt-in under incoming GDPR legislation.

iv) Introduction of digital ticket system (via Ticketsolve) including three terminals, 3 thermal printers, tickets, training for 5 staff members in 2018, enabling year-round ticketing, as per change agreement.

6.3 Legacy and post-LEADER development

Activity under this workstream has strengthened Wigtown Festival Company's ability to deliver a year-round programme and to offer creative leadership within the community.

In 2019, the new digital ticketing system will be used for Big Bang, our children's book festival Big Dog and the upcoming Day of Curiosity as well as Wigtown Book Festival itself. Improved mailing list enables us to better target audiences for these events. Following LEADER investment in the Wigtown Poetry Competition, we have been able to attract a sponsor in 2019-2021 to cover the cost of the prize.

Although the collaboration with Wigtown and Bladnoch Food Festival was challenging, it has helped us create a template for more fruitful collaborations. In 2018, WFC ran a successful joint marketing campaign with the new Kirkcudbright Festival of Light and we aim to repeat this with the Stranraer Oyster Festival in autumn 2019. Use of the Explore Wigtown, www.booktownscotland.com and the annual events calendar is ongoing.

7 Targets

- i) **1 individual trained/gaining new skills/reskilled.** As part of The Art of Social Media creative writing course, Harvey Lindsay was given the opportunity to attend as a consumer. This allowed him to develop his skills in writing for social media, which was to be a large part of his job moving forward.
- ii) **6 young people trained/gaining new skills/reskilled.** While Celeste Noche, the practitioner who ran The Art of Social Media, was in Wigtown to deliver the course, she ran a session for the members of the Wigtown: The Festival team, made up of secondary school children aged 12-18. There was no record of attendance kept at this session.
- iii) **1 project supporting development of tourism across the region.** The year-round content that was delivered as part of the project helped develop tourism across the region. It supported other local festivals in Wigtown, Newton Stewart and the development of the Explore Wigtown brand helped to bolster tourism throughout the region.

- iv) **1 project supporting the development of environmental, nature-based, cultural, activity and experiential tourism.** The Open Book project offers a style of tourism that is completely unique to Wigtown. The opportunity to run a bookshop for a week is as much an experience as it is a holiday.
- v) **1 project supporting the development of the arts and cultural sectors.** The Lecture Weekends that were delivered as part of the project added new programmes of events into the calendar, bringing more tourism to Wigtown and targeting new markets with more specified content, like the Big Bang Weekend.

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Beneficiaries

- The following groups benefited from the work undertaken as part of the Dumfries & Galloway LEADER Wigtown Cultural Tourism Development Project (2016-2019):
- Wigtown residents - through the additional economic benefits of Book Town and Book Festival-inspired tourism including new year-round events; also through new cultural provision, such as the Big Bang weekend and the development of The Print Room as a venue.
- Wigtown businesses - including booksellers, through extra tourist visits and additional media coverage (eg of Open Book) and development of new website.
- WBF 2018 unique visitors.
- WBF staff and volunteers - building skills and capacity to develop and deliver year-round programme.
- Wigtown Food Festival - through direct support of WFF, transfer of skills.

Final Budget

The project had a slight underspend of £2,851.89 and so the final total eligible spend for the project was £1,117,148.11, with match funding from our own funds of £60,000 and LEADER provided £57,148.11.

8.2 Project Outputs, Legacy and Sustainability

The key aim of the D&G LEADER Wigtown Cultural Tourism Development Project (2016-20218) was to strengthen the year-round offering of Scotland's National Book Town in Wigtown,

developing new events and making existing activity more sustainable. The project outputs show that this has been achieved.

This was an ambitious project that included a very wide range of activities and, as the report details for each workstream, some were more successful than others. However, end-of-project outputs reveal a number of innovations that have been mainstreamed with WFC and which will be sustained after the end of LEADER funding.

- i) Big Bang, a Winter/Spring Dark Skies science weekend in Scotland's National Book Town. This event was set up through the LEADER project in 2017 and has been sustained. The fourth Big Bang (the second subsequent to LEADER funding) is scheduled to take place in March 2020. The Big Bang development plan expects the event to move into profit in 2021. The success of Big Bang also led to the establishment of the one-day Day of Curiosity festival with Glasgow University Dumfries Campus in June 2019, which we aim to repeat in 2020.
- ii) The Writer's Gathering, an annual meet-up for writers was established in 2017 as part of the LEADER programme and has been sustained since and is now a fixture in the annual calendar of events.
- iii) The Open Book. The LEADER project enabled us to develop the Open Book holiday bookshop and move it onto a commercial footing. In March 2019, the Open Book won the Innovation in Tourism Award at the Thistle Awards, Scotland's "tourism Oscars". The bookshop is now in profit and is booked up until 2022.
- iv) Number 11 Bookshop. With the help of the LEADER project - which contributed to a programme of business development - we opened a bookshop at our office in 11 North Main Street Wigtown. The first bookshop in Wigtown to concentrate solely on new books, it now makes a profit which helps support other activities of Wigtown Festival Company.
- v) Through the project, we identified the importance of The Print Room venue as a cultural hub. In October 2019 we were awarded £20,000 for by the South of Scotland Economic Partnership (SoSEP) towards a feasibility study for purchase of The Print Room and our offices.
- vi) Digital Ticketing System. Through LEADER we were able to introduce a digital ticketing system that could be used for events in Wigtown year-round, and to train volunteers and staff in its use. In its first year, the system has processed more than 20,000 tickets.
- vii) The additional marketing mailout for the Book Town on its 20th anniversary in 2018 contributed to a 14% rise in attendance at the 2018 Wigtown Book Festival.

The above list of outputs / legacy activity is not definitive. In the case of Workstream 1- the delivery of creative writing courses - the project was important in helping us to test the feasibility of new activity and to recalibrate our ambitions accordingly. While we continue to see creative writing as an important part of the National Book Town's cultural offering, we do not believe that the idea of a residential centre in Wigtown is feasible, given the balance between financial risk and potential reward. Instead we will look to partner with established providers of creative-writing courses (eg Moniack Mhor) to bring this activity to Wigtown.

ENDS