

Spring 2019 Newsletter from the Southern Uplands Partnership

Spring is in the air and there are some positive signs of things to come. We have been working with the team at the South Scotland Economic Partnership (SoSEP) as they start to shape what will become South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE). The Government Bill has been out for consultation and we were among several who expressed concern at the minimal detail it contained on its social remit. We were pleased to be asked to host two events to discuss what is needed if we are to increase the number of “enterprising” communities. Both meetings were well attended and reports on the meetings will be available in due course.

Following on from an excellent workshop run by the Crichton Carbon Centre in January, we have been encouraged to extend the debate into the Borders and to identify what the environmental priorities should be for SoSE. Representatives of 30 “environmental” organisations met in the Scottish Borders Council Chamber and had a useful discussion on what the priorities should be for SoSE and the Borderlands Initiative. We will report on this next time.

SUP projects are going well, as you will see below. The SUP Board has been discussing what will happen when the LEADER Programme finishes next year, and how we will secure funds for future projects. The announcement that the Borderlands Initiative has been allocated a budget of £345 million is good news, but it remains to be seen how these funds will be allocated.

SUP has managed to make a small surplus in the 2018/18 financial year which is a positive achievement in the current climate. We look forward to welcoming members to the Annual General Meeting, which this year will take place on 21st August. Anyone interested in the work of the Partnership can become a member for only £24/year. Contact Pip Tabor on piptabor@sup.org.uk for more information.

South of Scotland Golden Eagle project

All three eagles (Edward, Emily and Beaky) are doing well, exploring the skies of the Southern Uplands. The Eagle Team would like to say a big thank you for the fantastic community and public support for the project through its first year. The Team is now busy getting prepared for the second translocation of young eagles this summer. The Community Outreach Team have been busy launching the first ever Eagle Champions Badge at Innerleithen Cubs, in partnership with Scouts Scotland and have also been working with several local schools on their Eagles Schools Certificate. For regular updates on the work the Team are doing, visit the project blog: <https://www.goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk/blog>.

The Galloway Glens Biosphere Experience - Experience the Biosphere with Minibus Day Tours

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere and the Galloway Glens Biosphere Experience have teamed up with Solway Tours to offer some single day tours in the Galloway Glens area. The excursions are part of a Galloway Glens and Dumfries and Galloway LEADER funded project which aims to boost tourism in the area by creating a range of experiential activities.

The initial day trips will take place in April with more dates to follow throughout the year. The first tour took place on Tuesday 2nd April and feedback from participants was a thoroughly enjoyable day visiting some of the key castles and towers in the area. The second is on Thursday 11th April and will take guests on a trail around some of the most interesting and picturesque spots on Loch Ken.

Solway Tours is a 5 Star Rated tour operator with VisitScotland and already hosts personalised small group tours all around the region for visitors. The transition to single day tours allows visitors to experience the local area around the other events they may have already planned for their stay.

Project Officer Laura Davidson said, "I'm delighted to be working with Mark and Lesley of Solway Tours. Their passion and knowledge of our wonderful area is infectious and I'm sure visitors will have a fantastic time on whichever trip they choose."

The project is working on a number of other experiences which will be advertised soon. Follow the Facebook page @ExperienceGalloway or visit the Biosphere website www.gsabiosphere.org.uk to keep up to date with the latest events.

A Changing Landscape

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere (GSAB) hosted a recent fact-finding visit to the south west by representatives from the Environment and Land Use Directorate of the Scottish Government to learn more about the current and future land use pressures in the area and the role the Biosphere Partnership has taken in facilitating discussion about how we can address them.

The visit started with a discussion on how the Biosphere, with its cross-sector membership including farmers, foresters, conservationists, business and community representatives across three local authority areas, is uniquely placed to promote and encourage a better understanding between the key players and a more balanced approach to land use policy. The group discussed a programme of engagement led by the Biosphere that has involved the identification of species and habitats in the region that have been agreed by both conservationists and land managers as priorities for better management.

The discussion moved on to the very successful event held by the Biosphere team meeting at St John's Town of Dalry last winter which brought together 70+ representatives from all the key land use sectors together for a stimulating and revealing debate on how our countryside is being reshaped due to changes in government priorities and funding schemes. This was followed in the summer with a visit to Carsphairn for a visit by the National Moorland Forum which represents a wide range of rural land managers. On both occasions the potential of the Biosphere to give everyone a voice and break down barriers was recognised.

The visiting group were then taken on a circular tour from the Biosphere's headquarters at Kirroughtree near Newton Stewart via Gatehouse Station and back along the A75 where they were presented with a range of different land use circumstances typical to the region. From the decline in typical hill rough grazing which has led to the expansion of coniferous plantations which have at times conflicted with the need for peatland restoration. The group also considered the contrast between the mosaicked landscaped of the Fleet Valley National Scenic Area and the intensive dairying landscape of the Cree estuary, all with a backdrop of Cairnsmore of Fleet National Nature Reserve.

Joan Mitchell, Chair of GSAB, said:

"The Scottish Government is revisiting the big strategic issue of a rural land-use strategy for the country. Here in the south west we are facing big challenges in preserving, and indeed enhancing, a balance in land use and biodiversity in the light of climate change and Brexit-induced economic pressures on upland and hill livestock farming. These issues are also of vital concern to the tourist

industry, one of whose underpinning assets is the landscape and wildlife of the area. The visit from Scottish Government representatives showed that they value the work the Biosphere has been doing to stimulate discussion and put forward ideas on how we can facilitate a future decision-making process that engages with all those on whose future land use in the region depends.”

The Biosphere Team hope that the visit could lead to a pilot project linked to the role of a future Regional Land Use Partnership for south west Scotland.

SWSEIC and the Future of Biological Data

A report into the way biological data is collected and managed in Scotland has been published by the Scottish Biological Information Forum (SBIF). Commissioned by the Government, it suggests a future structure based on four regional centres linked to a central database. This makes good sense, but we believe it misses some key issues.

Firstly, good quality biological information has to be collected at a very local scale, by local people. These recorders need to be trained, encouraged and supported. The South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC) has an excellent track record of doing just this, but it will be much harder to do if the “Centres” become centralised and remote.

Secondly, biological data is just part of a range of environmental data that we believe people are going to need access to. If we are to guide land use so that it delivers a range of services we will need to know more about what the land could be used for and what the likely impacts of the various options will be. Future public grants will almost certainly relate to the delivery of a range of public benefits. We also need to monitor a range of environmental factors in relation to climate change and the impact it will have on issues such as flooding, erosion, fire-risk, invasive species and biodiversity decline. If the full range of environmental data was held in an integrated system, such that it could be accessed and – most importantly interpreted – locally, the benefits could be significant. When resources are scarce, it makes sense to see whether agencies sharing data management might both save money and allow diverse datasets to be interrogated in novel ways.

We are therefore keen to see SWSEIC expand its capacity to manage data and to provide new data services to a range of partners. Watch this space.

Dumfriesshire East Community Benefit Group (DECBG)

The Trustees of DECBG met on 13th March to determine the 19 applications which were received by the January deadline for this round of funding, requesting a total of £310,564. Once again, the Ewe Hill 16 Fund was heavily oversubscribed and there were some difficult decisions to be made. Congratulations to the successful Groups: Eskdale Agricultural and Pastoral Society (purchase of sheep gates £3,700); Eskdalemuir Community Council (Eskdale Defibrillator project £17,415); Gilnockie Public Hall Committee (roof maintenance £3,600); Gretna and District Festival (Gretna Festival Upgrading £2,500); Kirkpatrick Fleming and District Community Council (Village Hall chair seating replacement £1,645); Langholm Playcare Ltd (running costs £15,000); Langholm, Eskdalemuir, Ewes and Westerkirk Parish Church (external disabled access £12,685); The Langholm Initiative (Richer Lives: Next Steps £20,000); Lockerbie Squash and Racketball Club (replacement of heaters and health and safety upgrade £25,000); Mid Annandale Amateur Football Club (accessible toilet block and covered grandstand £30,000); Muckle Toon Adventure Festival (Muckle Toon Adventure Festival 2019 £7,500); Stormont Hall, Springfield (new room divider £4,342); Upper Eskdale Development Group (Pool and a Pint £1,252).

Wild Land

There is progress on the Talla Hartfell Wild Land Area Initiative. Thanks to support from Rewilding Britain, SRUC has been commissioned to undertake a study into the current economy of the area and to project this forward as best they can in the light of current uncertainties. This work will be shared with local people and an alternative model will be developed, based on maximising the benefits of wildness (i.e. green tourism, recreation, renewables, ecosystem services, local food etc). It will be interesting to see how the two scenarios compare. We will keep you posted.

Ride Scotland's Horse Country

And finally, have you liked, followed and shared the project's new website, Facebook and Instagram pages?!

Please have a look and do share us as far and wide as you can, www.ridescottishborders.com, also on Facebook and Instagram @ridescottishborders.

Scottish Borders Council generously allowed us to build our website on the back of their existing popular Walk Scottish Borders and Cycle Scottish Borders web pages which means a continued presence for horses riding in the Scottish Borders beyond this project.

Work has also been continuing with the Council's Countryside Access Ranger Team who have been very helpful in identifying routes and are also working with us to resolve particular issues where they can. Forestry Commission Scotland staff have also been very generous with their time and knowledge, helping us to identify horse friendly routes and horsebox friendly parking sites. We are still keen to reach out to accommodation providers in Dumfries and Galloway, indeed anywhere in the South of Scotland, that has or is interested in Equestrian Tourism. So, if you know of anyone who might be interested please send them our way.

We had a successful trip to the Your Horse Live Expo in Birmingham in November. It is the single biggest horse shopping and information event in the UK and over 25,000 visitors passed through the event. Lynne Jobes from Beirhope Alpacas (and Chair of the Planning to Succeed Accommodation Providers Group) also came and helped sell the Borders to the UK horse population.

Social media is proving very popular with some successful bookings coming directly from it. A group from Bristol are coming to ride for two weeks and a group of American ladies are coming for 12 days after seeing our videos. One of our fellow SUP employees is also crossing over the debatable land for her own adventure!

There is a definite market out there for Equestrian Tourism, the buzz is building and an exciting summer awaits Coming soon - a press launch for the website and we have some exciting guests in the pipeline to come to stay and to review their experience.



