

THE SOUTHERN UPLANDS PARTNERSHIP

Annual Report 2015/16

March 2016



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The Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP) was started by local people keen to keep the communities and countryside of the south of Scotland alive and healthy. The Partnership represents all sorts of people, as well as government bodies, agencies and Councils. Anyone who is committed to the future of the south of Scotland is invited to join and get involved.

In another challenging year for the Partnership, we have progressed a number of long-standing projects (such as the Biosphere) and we have developed some new areas of work (Community Broadband and Wild land). In addition, as a means of generating much needed income, we have undertaken a number of tasks on behalf of partners and commissioning bodies.

We have an active Board of Directors that has met three times and the Working Group six times with Directors regularly representing SUP and its interests both at meetings and in helping to deliver strategic pieces of work. We published our 14th set of accounts with an annual report showing a stable financial position (see www.sup.org.uk).

The Partnership currently employs two full time core staff, one part time core staff and an additional six project staff (two full-time, four part-time) who deliver specific projects. In the 2014/15 financial year, the Partnership attracted £384k for specific project work and a further £104k for strategic and core work. These funds came from a wide range of sources.

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere

We have been involved in the Biosphere since leading on the public consultation that took place in 2007 as to whether local communities supported the concept of biosphere status for south west Scotland. Since then we have continued to play an active role and are currently part way through a three year project managing and hosting the Biosphere Team, on behalf of the Biosphere Partnership. The team have a focus on three distinct areas including Natural Heritage, Business Development and Community and Learning. Key highlights so far have included the publication of a Management Plan for Priority Species and Habitats in the Biosphere which we are now starting to use to engage with landowners. We have also seen developed a highly successful Biosphere charter program that encourages businesses, communities and individuals to support the biosphere and offers an opportunity to promote their association with biosphere aspirations. There is a revamped website, interpretation and a new initiative that is using the “Sense of Place” process to help communities develop pride in their biosphere. Members of the team visited the Dyfi Biosphere in Wales to attend an event focused on a Citizen Science surveying “App” that we are hoping to trial locally.



Staff also joined a group that visited Urdaibai Biosphere in Spain looking at potential partnership opportunities. Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Dr Aileen McLeod MSP, launched the new Climate Ready Biosphere Vision and Action Plan and spoke very positively about the value of the biosphere and her support for it.

Upland Restoration and Wild Land

After the recent flood events experienced during the winter of 2015/16, management of the uplands to store more water and reduce peak flooding occurrences has once again been in the headlines. Our Peatland Action Officer, funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, has worked to identify and co-ordinate peatland restoration work in the uplands of Dumfries and Galloway. A key aspect of this work is the rewetting of upland areas that have been drained during the last 50 or so years, allowing the land to once again act as a sponge contributing to a reduction in the height and frequency of peak river levels. Funds have been allocated to 24 projects which will restore 680 hectares of peatland. Advice has been given on management of a further 2820has.

Also linked to upland management we have been meeting with stakeholders around the Talla Hartfell area interested in exploring how the new wild land designation might benefit Southern Scotland. Wild land is loosely defined as semi natural land that shows minimal signs of human influence.

It seems there may be scope for a habitat and nature based tourism / local regeneration project to be developed. We now need to follow-up with the stakeholders who were unable to attend the meeting.

We are also looking at ways of funding works that will continue to deliver the Black Grouse work we have been supporting for a number of years and will take forward the new strategy being produced by our partners.

Dumfries and Galloway Environmental Resources Centre (DGERC)

SUP has been hosting the DGERC since September 2011. The Centre has continued to deliver its agreed actions, while at the same time significant efforts have been put into plans to extend its remit into Ayrshire. A Heritage Lottery Fund application has been successful and we have been invited to apply to LEADER for the required match funding. The proposed project would involve employing a Project Officer for two years to work with communities and partners in Ayrshire to raise awareness of the region's natural heritage and the value in using biological data to help protect it.

South West Scotland Coastal Trail

SUP has long been a supporter of the development of access in southern Scotland as a means of helping to stimulate the local economy through tourism opportunities. Over the last few years we have worked closely with Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Natural Heritage to survey and negotiate with



landowners for the development of a 64 mile route that circumnavigates the Rhins of Galloway. We are now working closely with partners to help raise the funding required to implement the vision.

Nature Based Tourism Development

With nature based tourism reputed to be worth £1.4 billion/year to Scotland (Scottish Natural Heritage 2010), and predicted to grow significantly over the next few years, it is no surprise that we see it as being of great potential to the South of Scotland. Over the last few years we have led a partnership of wildlife managers and businesses in developing the nature based tourism opportunities that Southern Scotland has to offer. We have coordinated the Borders Nature Festival, Wild Spring and Wild Autumn festivals under the banner of Wild Seasons. Since Wild Seasons funding ended in December 2014, we have continued to work with partners in Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders to get their input into shaping the next project. We are currently assessing the best sources of funding to continue this successful project.

Ettrick and Beyond Community Broadband

During the year we have been working with Community Broadband Scotland and a number of local communities to survey households in a wide area centred on Ettrick that is unlikely to be part of the British Telecom roll out of high speed broadband. The task has been to scope out the case for, and the scale of, a community broadband project. 700 responses were received. The report stage is complete and we are now seeking funds for the next stage of the project which will generate a tender document and a business case. We are interested in working with other local communities across Southern Scotland who also feel that they could benefit from our input.

Energy Mapping

Working with the local Community Development Company, we have proposed a pilot energy-potential mapping project for the Ettrick and Yarrow area. This would produce a supplementary layer for the Borders Land Use Strategy pilot showing renewable energy opportunities in the Ettrick and Yarrow Valleys. The tendering process has been completed and funding from Local Energy Scotland has recently been confirmed.

EuroRural Tourism

The EuroRural Tourism project is a partnership of seven countries who are working together to explore different approaches to the packaging of authentic rural experiences and accommodation to visitors. The project is still in its early stages but offers an opportunity to bring together local tourism businesses and accommodation providers in the south of Scotland to work together to develop a Scottish rural cultural experience that can be shared with partners from across Europe. The project has been awarded 75% funding from the EU and runs till March 2017.



Commissioned Work

In the current economic climate we are also finding ourselves having to increasingly look for paid commissions that will use our skills, expertise and extensive network to help deliver commercial work that can help support the wider aims and objectives of SUP. Some of the commissioned work we have undertaken in the last year includes:

Scottish Rural Parliament

We worked with a number of partners to make the case for the next Rural Parliament to take place in Dumfries. We were one of two locations considered but in the end we lost out to Brechin. We have now been asked to help run a series of community events across southern Scotland, ahead of the next Rural Parliament. We are working with the Rural Parliament running a series of local workshops to stimulate discussion about rural issues that will be taken up at the national event in Brechin.

Resilient Communities

SUP is providing staff time to the Resilient Communities project being led by Dundee University which started in April 2015. The project is funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. To date we have assisted with community workshops in Hawick and Newcastleton.

Eildon Leaderfoot National Scenic Area

SUP has been asked by Scottish Power Energy Network (SPEN) to help put a bid together for funding that might pay for the development of an enhancement strategy and project plan for the Eildon Leaderfoot National Scenic Area (NSA). The NSA is little-known and yet the newly reopened railway allows visitors to arrive at the NSA boundary and potentially walk or cycle through it.

Element Power

At the request of Element Power we have supported a number of community meetings to consider the establishment of an “environmental project” fund linked to a windfarm proposal in Dumfries and Galloway. We ran a number of workshops creating community action plans that identified key issues and opportunities that the communities hoped to focus on.

Nordic Walking

At the request of the Creetown Initiative, SUP staff have undertaken work to scope out the potential of a Nordic Walking Initiative in Creetown. Local routes have been surveyed and proposals explored. Eight taster sessions were held for local people to try out the activity.



Input to other initiatives and projects

During the year, we met with a wide range of agencies and non-government organisations with the aim of sharing ideas, reducing duplication and seeking new opportunities. These included South Lanarkshire Rural Partnership; South Ayrshire Council; the Crichton Carbon Centre in Dumfries; the Ettrick and Yarrow Community Development Company; Galloway Forest Forum; Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Local Action Group; Berwickshire Community Council Forum Environment (BCCFEn) ; Crichton Institute; Scottish Rural Action; the Borders Social Enterprise Chamber; Tweed Forum; Borders Forest Trust; RSPB; Forestry Commission Scotland; various departments of Scottish Government, as well as a number of Community Councils and Community Initiatives.

We made contributions to a number of ongoing strategic initiatives including the Land Use Strategy; the Borders Low Carbon Economic Strategy; the Borders Social Enterprise Community Hub initiative; the Ken-Dee Landscape Partnership project.

We were also involved in a number of projects that we developed but which have not progressed for a range of reasons: An EU light-house tourism project; the Crichton Institute-led Discovering Dumfries and Galloway's Past and a co-housing initiative aimed at helping elderly people remain in rural communities for longer.

The above work is only possible because of the support we receive from our members, Patrons and partners. We thank them all warmly for their support and look forward to their continued involvement.

