



Tweed Valley Tourism BID, Annual Report 2023

Summary

What kind of a year was 2023 for Go Tweed Valley and the Tweed Valley Tourism BID? In a word, busy. There was the UCI Cycling World Champs, of course, plus the first full year of operation of the visitor centre, the launch of the Tweed Valley's own destination video, continued planning around development of the Tweed Valley Canoe Trail, plus behind-the-scenes work to help improve tourism infrastructure.

While challenges remain, it has been a year full of positives. A range of exciting new businesses have come to the Tweed Valley, with the likes of The Milkman, Haus & Co, Dirty Brewing and Out Out Gastro Pub all adding to the quality of the tourism offer.

The Tourism BID has attracted many new opt-in businesses, again including several that are new to the area: Tweed Valley Pods, Dilkusha, Colin McLean Photography, Great Tapestry of Scotland, Lou Lou's Vintage Emporium, Springfield Farm Holiday Pods and more. Together, such businesses add not just to the vibrancy of the area for visitors but also as a place to live and work.

At time of writing, the Tourism BID has around 95 participating businesses (bringing an anticipated annual income of approx. £68k) plus almost 20 opt-ins.



Business plan

It's vital that we measure our work against the five priority actions in the business plan that was voted for when the Tourism BID was established in 2020. That's what businesses wanted us to deliver and it is what guides everything that we do. The following report digs deeper into each of those priority actions.

Business plan priority: Marketing & promotion

All of our promotional work is based around marketing the Tweed Valley as a well-rounded destination for sustainable tourism. This is achieved through a balance of digital and physical marketing, along with relationship building at networking events and conferences.

Online and digital marketing. The Go Tweed Valley website, our primary online marketing asset, has enjoyed strong growth in traffic, with 42,470 visitors (+37%) and 65,859 page views (+34%) over the period from 1 Feb 23 to 31 Jan 24.

This includes the following individual page headline views:

Homepage: 8,062

UCI Cycling World Champs: 4,857

Camping, bunkhouses & lodges: 3,702

River swims: 3,322

Biking events: 2,985

Bike route booklet: 1,837

Events & festivals: 1,812

Overall views include 6,723 visits to our accommodation pages, while our events & festivals section as a whole had just short of 7,000 views.

Throughout the year, themed digital campaigns helped shape the identity of the Go Tweed Valley brand, covering Nature & Outdoors (Wild Tweed Valley); Arts & Culture (Creative Tweed Valley); Activity & Adventure (Cycle Tweed Valley); and Food & Drink (Cosy Tweed Valley).

These themes were mirrored in our physical marketing, with displays and in-person sessions and exhibitions at the visitor information centre that showcased a variety of Tourism BID businesses. We also developed a Creative Tweed Valley trail map that features a dozen Tourism BID galleries, studios and arts spaces throughout the Tweed Valley. Physical copies of the map are available from the visitor information centre and all participating businesses.

Other marketing and promotional highlights throughout the year include:

Go Tweed Valley destination video. Ahead of one of the busiest tourism seasons ever in the Tweed Valley – one during which the eyes of the world were upon us – we worked with the excellent TCH Creative to produce the Tweed Valley’s first ever dedicated destination video. Launched in May 2023, and featuring more than 15 Tourism BID businesses, the video highlighted the wealth of experiences that visitors can enjoy in the area. In the film, locals are seen exploring the summit of Lee Pen on foot, the wilder reaches of Gypsy Glen on two wheels and the tranquility of Cardrona Forest on horseback – as well as enjoying the best of local food & drink, retail and the arts. The video has a prominent position on our home page, with the original file available for use by all Tourism BID businesses

Tweed Valley Tales audio trail. In April 2023, we worked closely with Tweed Forum, Destination Tweed and the University of Dundee to create Tweed Valley Tales, a new audio trail for the Geotourist app which features 20 data points up and down the Tweed Valley, from our most popular attractions to lesser-known gems that give visitors a true flavour of the area. The audio trail, the only one chosen for the app in the south of Scotland, has seen more than 1,200 views online and is available on our website.

Go Tweed Valley Flickr image database. Tourism BID businesses can strengthen their own marketing by using our Flickr image database – a photobank of almost 500 professional images which can all be downloaded for free and which is updated on a regular basis.





We are a respected and valued partner of many larger organisations, with the strong relationships built with each helping to further promote the Tweed Valley. A few examples:

VisitScotland. As a product of our much closer relationship, the Go Tweed Valley destination video now features on VisitScotland's Scottish Borders landing page plus its Peebles specific page.

VisitBritain. Updated information on the Tweed Valley (specifically the Tweed Valley Railway Path) will go live on the Visit Britain website in March 2024.

UCI Cycling World Champs. Led by Enduro Sports Organisation, Go Tweed Valley played an integral role in the Local Organising Committee established to deliver the Glentress elements of the UCI Cycling World Champs. During hundreds of hours of physical and online meetings, we forged close relationships with other key event partners, including Scottish Borders Council, South of Scotland Enterprise, Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland and Scottish Cycling. We are especially proud of the following contributions:

1. Alongside Bluebell Scotland consultancy, Go Tweed Valley was commissioned by Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland to produce a paper outlining opportunities for integrating businesses and communities into this major international event.
2. Alongside Cycling World Champs partners, we helped create a Fringe programme of events around the main race days at Glentress.
3. We created and provided local commentary notes for broadcast heard and viewed by millions on BBC free to air and social channels.
4. We worked closely with accommodation providers/businesses to ensure that all were ready and prepared for this one-off event.
5. We worked with local retailers and community groups to 'dress' High Streets as part of welcoming the cycling world to the Tweed Valley.
6. Together with South of Scotland Destination Alliance, we had a stand on-site at Glentress for the entire period of the event during which we promoted the area to UK and international visitors, teams and competitors.



Social media channels. Social media followers and organic reach has grown steadily this year – overall reach in 2023 was just over 214k – but was lower than in 2022 as we were cautious with our spending. With no funded projects for influencer visits or sponsored ads, we instead piggybacked on and supported the UCI Cycling World Champs promotional activity, making the very most of their global reach.

Two promoted ads in 2023, however, still saw excellent results:

May 2023, Launch of destination video, 100k reach

Sept 23, eBike hire competition together with Alpine Bikes Glentress, 56k reach

And then there were the notable one-offs. Special mention must go to sports broadcaster and author Andrew Cotter whose Instagram post following his appearance at the Go Tweed Valley-curated Wild Writers Festival in January 24 saw more than 12k likes in just two days. It is the kind of profile for the Eastgate Theatre (as host venue) and the Tweed Valley generally that just can't be bought.

Trade & travel buyers. In November 2023, we were delighted to attend a networking event at Barony Castle organised by South of Scotland Destination Alliance that enabled us to reach member organisations of the Scottish Destination Management Association and Scottish Independent Tour Operators Association and flag all that was available in the area. They were particularly interested to learn about luxury/hotel/unique usage accommodation; outdoor attractions and activities; local food & drink; slow and sustainable tourism; Meetings, Incentives, Conferences & Exhibitions (MICE); agritourism; history & heritage; local storytellers; and authentic experiences.

A glance ahead – our 2024 campaigns (online, digital, physical)

For 2024, we intend to ramp up again, with an influencer visit in the pipeline for mid/late April (Scottish travel expert, Kathi Kamleitner) and further promotional spend for targeted content on social media – particularly around the launch of the Tweed Valley Canoe Trail in April.

In addition to our own channels, we will continue to work closely with South of Scotland Destination Alliance through its consumer face, Scotland Starts Here, and VisitScotland to reach audiences throughout the UK and in key international markets.

Our first campaign of the year is rooted in the theme of health and wellbeing – our ‘12 months of Tweed Valley’ inspires visitors to engage with our calendar of cultural festivals, sporting events, spa retreats and more.

January saw the return of the Wild Writers Festival at the Eastgate Theatre with a programme curated and supported by Go Tweed Valley. The ambition for January 2025 is to combine a much bigger Wild Writers Festival with the return of the Peebles Outdoor Film Festival and radiate out to venues and homes throughout Peebles in a likely four-day format. It is an excellent opportunity to involve a range of Tourism BID businesses at a traditionally quieter time of year.

As we move into spring, our focus will shift to nature and outdoors with a celebration of one of the valley’s greatest assets: the River Tweed. History and heritage will then take centre stage through the summer months with a look back at the big houses, creative industries and common ridings and festivals that are woven into the fabric of life in the Tweed Valley.

And our final campaign of 2024 will shine a light on the spirit of activity and adventure in the valley. Expect hiking, cycling, trail running, fishing, horse riding, golf and more.





Business plan priority: Tourism infrastructure

Our work on tourism infrastructure ranges from the exciting (new trails and visitor services) to the less glamorous but equally important elements (parking, functioning toilets, bike storage and more) that are needed if we are to ensure that the area meets the needs of visitors, businesses and local communities alike. Major developments include:

Tweed Valley Canoe Trail. With planning ongoing throughout 2023, the launch of the Tweed Valley Canoe Trail in Spring 2024 – the first such trail in the south of Scotland – will see one of our most ambitious projects come to fruition. Covering a distance of around 30 miles, with a focus on the scenic Upper Tweed, the trail starts just minutes from Dawyck Botanic Garden and finishes on the outskirts of Galashiels. It passes some of the area’s most iconic landmarks – Neidpath Castle, Traquair House and Sir Walter Scott’s Abbotsford – connecting paddlers with the people, places and stories that have shaped this part of the Scottish Borders. Small scale and light touch, trail infrastructure includes dedicated signage, canoe anchor points, waymarker posts and a range of rest stops and paddler-friendly accommodation. The ambition is to celebrate one of Scotland’s great rivers like never before as well as showcase the Tweed Valley as a destination for a different kind of visitor – bringing benefits for a variety of Tourism BID businesses (guiding and gear companies, eateries, accommodation and more). Although created by Go Tweed Valley, trail development has been a collaborative process, with the team working closely with landowners, fishing interests, paddlesport representatives and local clubs, Scottish Borders Council and Forestry & Land Scotland.

The trail has already captured national media attention, featuring in a variety of prominent outlets and channels:

VisitScotland’s 11 Reasons to Visit Scotland in 2024 and on the main Scottish Borders landing page

The Guardian’s 2024 travel planner on 1 Jan with a feature article to come in March 24 (following a press trip arranged together with South of Scotland Destination Alliance)

In-depth feature scheduled to run on the BBC Travel digital channel in April 24.

Such coverage represents outstanding profile not just for the canoe trail but also the wider area.



Go Tweed Valley visitor information centre, Peebles High Street. We believed it was important to have a strong, visible presence in the heart of the Tweed Valley and so it has proved, with our visitor information centre a valuable asset for visitors, Tourism BID businesses and local residents.

Here are some highlights from the centre's first full year of operation:

1. Stands, exhibits and window displays featuring more than 40 Tourism BID businesses.
2. Upwards of 500 visitors per month in the high season, between 100 and 300 over winter months. This will pick up again as we head towards Easter.
3. Our Visitor Centre Manager, Sarah McNeil, is constantly directing visitors to local businesses, generating three- and four-figure sums of revenue to many (including £1.5k in sales for one gallery owner).
4. We continue to capture valuable visitor information and metrics (where from, length of stay, where staying, what doing while here). This helps us to understand visitor trends and requirements that, in turn, help drive our offer at the visitor centre and across the area.
5. A hub of activity in the build up to and during the UCI Cycling World Champs – visits from international competitors, volunteers and spectators all asking about what to do locally.
6. In-person events throughout the year added colour and interest: a talk about the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project; a Meet the Artist event with Kate Hayes from Solo Gallery in Innerleithen; and a cooking demonstration and talk by Cringletie's Iain Gourlay.
7. In October 23, the visitor information centre hosted 35 Blue Badge Holders who were visiting the area to increase their knowledge of the Scottish Borders.

Tourism infrastructure cont ...

While we've seen some positive steps forward, there remains an urgent need for core visitor infrastructure and we continue to work with partners to bring improvements.

There has been solid progress in Innerleithen where we have fed into the HUB CIC's plans to open a toilet, shower block and bike wash on Hall Street; installation of Park & Pedal signage to help with car parking congestion; and improvements to existing car parking that will see QR code generated donations from visitors reinvested into community-led projects.

And while it hasn't yet come to fruition, we have been working with the owners of Kerfield Farm and the flood mitigation and planning teams at Scottish Borders Council to progress plans to offer seasonal camping and motorhome provision at a site just outside of Peebles.

Other infrastructure – updates:

Part of our role is to support and share information about major projects being led by other organisations. These include:

MTB Innovation Centre, Caerlee Mill, Innerleithen. South of Scotland Enterprise's delivery partners are on site at Caerlee Mill and working to prepare a safe and sympathetic approach to renovating this historic building. The final timeframes for completing the full build will be known once this initial work has been concluded in May 2024. In the meantime, work is ongoing to design in detail and agree the location for a bike trail test facility and a bike park development. The final Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal funding will be released once this initial work has been completed, at which point more information will be available (expected May 2024).

Destination Tweed and River Tweed Trail. Tweed Forum has submitted its Full Borderlands Business case to the Scottish Government to secure the last piece of its funding jigsaw (decision expected from June 2024). On the ground, elements of the planned River Tweed Trail, led by Scottish Borders Council and supported by Sustrans and South of Scotland Enterprise, are taking shape. Work has begun on the new link from the Tweed Valley Railway Path in Peebles through the grounds of Peebles Hydro and into Whitestone Park. This will see a new pedestrian crossing over the A72. Lights have been installed into Eshiels Tunnel, Woodend Bridge in Cardrona has been redecked and upgrades are being made to the dismantled railway line between Walkerburn and Scrogbank. In addition, Tweed Forum is assisting with designed landscape enhancements at Traquair, conservation charity Buglife will help deliver Pollinators Along the Tweed and Connecting Threads are planning another busy year of cultural events.



Business plan priority: Events & festivals

We have been vigorous in our promotion of all major events throughout the area and have worked hard to plug local businesses into events so that they benefit from them as much as possible. Events are a key focus of our quarterly mailings to consumers and are some of our most visited pages on the Go Tweed Valley website.

We have also undertaken business community feedback on three key events in 2023 – UCI Cycling World Champs, TweedLove and Tour O’ the Borders – feeding back the results to event organisers in a series of detailed reports.

Gathering such feedback from residents and local communities, which sits alongside event organisers' more participant focussed surveys, helps us leverage support for the infrastructure developments required for large-scale events.

Meanwhile, our work to develop new events continues with our support for the Eastgate Theatre’s Wild Writers Festival, which took place for a second time in January 2024. As detailed on page 6, the 2025 event will be bigger again and we hope will become another key date in the calendar, at a usually quieter time of year.

We were proud to also support the development of a Fringe programme of events around the UCI Cycling World Champs (see page 4) that contributed greatly to the visitor experience away from the race site at Glentress.

In March 2024, we will circulate a full listing of all major events so that Tourism BID businesses can plan ahead and use material for their own marketing purposes. All major events are also listed on the Go Tweed Valley website.

In addition, we feed our event information to larger tourism partners including South of Scotland Destination Alliance and VisitScotland for their websites and consumer mailings.





Business plan priority: Support and advocacy

One of our most important working relationships is with the South of Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA), a destination marketing organisation with a remit that covers the whole of the south of Scotland. In many ways, we are their eyes and ears on the ground here in the Tweed Valley, providing local knowledge, content and connections that feed into their wider work.

This close relationship benefits Tourism BID businesses in a variety of ways:

1. We ensure that the Tweed Valley is well represented in all the good work that SSDA does across the south of Scotland.
2. We represented the Tweed Valley at the SSDA's 2023 Annual Conference (held at Peebles Hydro) and organised a FAM trip for delegates that involved a variety of Tourism BID businesses.
3. We ensure that our events and key developments from the Tweed Valley feature on SSDA's Scotland Starts Here consumer website.
4. We are helping to shape a new Tweed Valley page on Scotland Starts Here, ensuring that content is clear, engaging and up to date.
5. We are working with SSDA and VisitScotland to have Go Tweed Valley promotional assets available at the iCentre in Edinburgh – with plans for FAM trips for iCentre staff so that they can better familiarise themselves with the Tweed Valley and wider Borders.
6. Alongside local businesses, we continue to feed into SSDA's Locally Led Destination Development work and its 2024-2034 South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy – developing a local plan of how to work with and benefit from this new strategy and united approach.



Support and advocacy cont ...

Finally, our work to support businesses extends to enabling access to grants and public funding that business may not always be aware of. Most recently, we encouraged and supported a variety of businesses to take advantage of South of Scotland Enterprise's Cycling Infrastructure Fund, which offers an excellent opportunity to install a range of cycling-friendly facilities (such as secure storage and bike wash provision).

We highlight all such opportunities in our monthly newsletters and are on hand to assist with any enquiries about funding opportunities generally.

Business plan priority: Corporate tourism

The pandemic had a significant impact on the corporate tourism industry. As such, this has been an area of lesser focus for us in the last few years. It's now evident that corporate tourism is back on the rise again so it's time for us to shift our attention to supporting Tourism BID businesses in this direction in 2024.

Initial discussions with a number of accommodation businesses have already taken place and a series of corporate itineraries are now in development. We look forward to sharing more on this element of the business plan in the months ahead.

Tweed Valley Tourism BID, February 2024

Useful contacts and links

Rich Rowe, Project Manager, rich@gotweedvalley.co.uk

Lindsay Quayle, Project Officer, lindsay@gotweedvalley.co.uk

Sarah McNeil, Visitor Centre Manager, visitorcentre@gotweedvalley.co.uk

[Tweed Valley Tales audio trail](#)

[Go Tweed Valley destination video](#)

[Go Tweed Valley Flickr album](#)

Images (from page one): Innerleithen and the Tweed Valley, Ian Linton; Still from destination video, Tom Hamilton; Stained glass window at Stobo Kirk, Go Tweed Valley; Spectators at UCI Cycling World Champs, Go Tweed Valley; Fishing on the River Tweed, Ian Linton; Andrew Cotter at the Wild Writers Festival, Mikuni Uehara; Ashiestiel Bridge, Marc Marshall; Audience at Go Tweed Valley visitor information centre, Go Tweed Valley; River Tweed at Peebles, Tweed Forum; Pirn Hill Fort, Ian Linton; Traquair woodland trails, Ian Linton; Paddling the Tweed, Marc Marshall

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