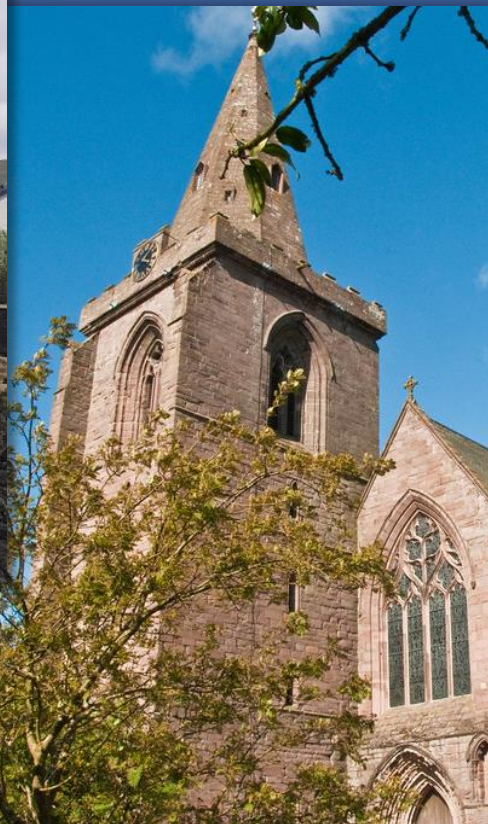


Community-led tourism in Scotland

Lessons learned

May 2022



Community-led tourism in Scotland

Tourism plays a key role in supporting Scotland's regional and local economies with many rural and island communities reliant on visitor spend. The economic value of the tourism industry has historically been the predominant focus for both industry and government but in recent years the significance of hospitality and tourism as a driver of sustainable development has become more recognised and valued. The motivation for the development of responsible tourism has, in part, been advanced by visitors' desire to make more sustainable choices, involving both socially and environmentally responsible experiences.

Tourism touches the everyday lives of Scotland's people, impacting communities economically, socially, and environmentally. Community-led tourism is understood to be one route to a more sustainable sector, putting people and place before profit. Community-led tourism therefore is at the pioneering end of promoting socially responsible tourism offerings; enriching both the lives of the people who live here and the people who visit.



Brechin & Girvan- Proof of Concept Project

The Community Led Tourism Development Project was delivered by SENScot in partnership with Creetown Initiative Ltd - and funded by the Tourism & Events Division at Scottish Government. Aligned to the ambitions set out in [Scotland Outlook 2030 Strategy](#), this project aimed to demonstrate the value and impacts of a community-led tourism approach.

Following careful consideration and consultation, we selected to work with communities in Brechin in Angus and Girvan in South Ayrshire to:

- Work with the local community to develop a local steering group with representatives from public, private and third sectors as well as local community.
- Support the group in identifying and adopting the most appropriate business model for local development and delivery
- Support the group in creating an action plan bespoke to the area and informed by the community- and identify leads within the community - setting out a clear vision and objectives, mapping and analysis of existing tourist provision and identify opportunities for development. Connecting with current Place Plans and regional tourism plans to ensure alignment and no duplication.
- Provide access to financial resource and unlock external funding opportunities to expand capacity and enable delivery of the first phases of the action plan.
- Work with both communities to identify future funding; investment options and a business plan to ensure long term sustainability.

A dynamic approach to tourism development

Community-led tourism is a collaborative approach that puts local people at the centre of the decision-making process to develop a tourism offering which benefits the whole community. Unlike the traditional top-down approach to tourism planning and development, the community-led approach relies on grassroots involvement and community leadership. It looks to build a strategy which allows small, local organisations, communities, and businesses to capture the footfall of visitors who are attracted to larger, popular local assets.

Recent market changes have created opportunities for the tourism industry to redefine its customer base and, as conversations about environmental and social sustainability become ever more prevalent, to look beyond its traditional purpose of creating profit and further recognise the importance of community involvement.

The motivation for a community to take control of their tourism offer can develop through a variety of channels such as: a pride and attachment to place; existing social capital; the need to tackle a local power imbalance and local issues; and the chance to explore new opportunities. When a community takes a lead in developing its tourism offer, the focus shifts from solely economic value to social and environmental value. Encouraging local communities to take ownership of tourism in their area can help preserve historic and cultural heritage, improve management of land and assets for community use, encourage the development of new business opportunities, and improve the quality of services and sustainability of the area; socially, economically and environmentally. By working with communities, a valuable resource can be unlocked to create a richer and higher quality experience for visitors.



The Scottish tourism industry has unquestionably suffered as a result of Covid and, with many businesses struggling, we have seen communities across the country coming together to provide support to one another and take a lead in local decision making. The context in which this project was delivered was Covid-19 sensitive and we were fully cognisant of the constraints that the pandemic crisis and emerging lockdown measures present - that impacted and informed delivery.

Community-led tourism in Girvan & Brechin

What we provided:

- Skills and experience
- Local and national connections
- Investment

Creetown Initiative Ltd worked directly with the communities to boost capacity and to provide access to knowledge.

Working with partners we ensured that local and national bodies were connected to the work and personal introductions were made.

We provided 80k of investment to each area and supported the groups to attract external funding.

What the communities needed:

- Resources
- Access to relevant knowledge
- Broader connections
- To be valued

We recognised that access to financial resources and capacity building would be key to the success of this project.

The investment and hands on support from Creetown Initiative Ltd proved vital. For the long-term sustainability of the work access to resources remains of high importance.

While there is an abundance of local knowledge and a wide range of skills within the steering groups, there were still gaps in expertise. SENS Scot was able to tap into a wider national network to ensure that needs were met.

In every community there are a number of key players that influence change and impact on investment. This project created an opportunity to bring these disparate local, regional and national players together to ensure a joined up approach.

The key element of this project was to empower the communities to take a leadership role in their tourism offer. In doing this it was important to make those taking part feel valued: feel that their voice and their work is valued.



The poster for 'Community Led Tourism Brechin' features a logo at the top left consisting of three interlocking circles in red and green. The text 'COMMUNITY LED TOURISM' is in a bold, sans-serif font, with 'Brechin' in a larger, green, script-like font. Below the logo, there are three circular images: the first shows four people standing outdoors in a park-like setting; the second shows a close-up of a hand working on a piece of wood; the third shows a group of people sitting around a table in a meeting. To the right of each image is a section of text. The first section is titled 'Who are we?' and describes the community as local people working together to welcome visitors. The second section is titled 'What do we do?' and describes the development and delivery of partnership projects. The third section is titled 'What can you do?' and encourages involvement, stating 'every action counts!' and providing the contact email 'contact@angustourism.co.uk'. At the bottom of the poster, the 'ATC' logo is shown next to the text 'ANGUS TOURISM COOPERATIVE', followed by the website 'www.angustourism.co.uk' and social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

COMMUNITY LED TOURISM Brechin

Who are we?
We are local people in the community working together to welcome visitors to Brechin

What do we do?
We develop and deliver partnership projects and connect people who strive to make our beautiful city a great place to live and visit

What can you do?
Get involved – every action counts!
contact@angustourism.co.uk

ATC ANGUS TOURISM COOPERATIVE
www.angustourism.co.uk

Community-led tourism in Girvan & Brechin

The hurdles



- Covid-19
- Capacity
- Private sector buy-in

Covid-19 undoubtedly created the biggest barrier to the project for both communities. Alongside the national impact on mental health and wellbeing and the economy, Covid-19 impacted on the project development and delivery. Online meetings with no face-to-face contact meant that steering group relationships took longer to build and slowed work down. Peer support between the communities had to happen online rather than face-to-face, and while useful, this impacted on relationships and one to one sharing. Wider stakeholders were also unable to visit the two communities, and this again slowed relationship building.

While we recognised from outset that capacity would be an issue for the communities, it was stipulated within the offer from Scottish Government that the groups could not create any short-term jobs. This created issues that we were able to navigate by supporting capacity building within the lead organisations. Although not ideal, as both steering groups would preferred to have total control, this did ensure that there was adequate resource to ensure delivery.

A key part of learning within this project is that communities require access to resource to fund a member of staff to deliver on the agreed priorities. It is unfair and unrealistic to expect communities to deliver the high-quality outputs without financial support.

Private sector buy-in proved difficult in both areas. It is unclear as to why participation was so low, but it is assumed that Covid-19 has impacted. Many tourism related businesses were shut during lockdowns and staff were furloughed, once the lockdowns eased businesses were too busy playing catch up. Both groups expect to gain private sector buy-in as projects are delivered and the communities start to see fruition from the work.



Community-led tourism in Girvan & Brechin

The wins

- Community buy-in
- Action plan development
- Project delivery
- Local, regional and national recognition
- Peer support

As the work has developed the wider community has become more engaged and broader connections have been made. As can be seen from the evaluation, there is a growing interest and, with it, growing expectations.

The development of the action plans proved to be a bonding process for the groups and created opportunities for them to learn more about their communities. They spent a significant amount of time developing these plans- they explored the needs of the community, what the priorities were, what was achievable, who they needed as partners and what resource they required. Both communities are clear that this is just an initial piece of work that can be built on in the coming months and years.

The delivery of the projects, using the allocated budget, has had a phenomenal impact of the groups and the community. They have worked closely to ensure high quality delivery and broad collaboration across the community. The projects have created excitement within the communities and a renewed sense of belonging and ownership.

A positive outcome of the initial delivery of projects has been the recognition that the groups have received. From local and national press to government and tourism bodies, the stories of the work have travelled and are already being cited as best practice by colleagues. This recognition adds to the communities feeling valued and their voices recognised.

By bringing the two towns together there has been opportunity for peer learning. As the groups developed they remained in contact, sharing best practice and expertise. This relationship is set to continue as both towns look forward to visiting each other and taking part in future events.



The right time to act

There's no doubt that Covid-19 has accelerated a move towards a different model of tourism - a marked interest and demand for staycations, slow tourism, green and responsible tourism and family vacation offerings. Community-led tourism delivers on many aspects of this new model. What's often referred to as the slow tourism model, resonates with both domestic and international markets, and aims to foster a sense of connection between visitor and place; the feeling of being a welcome part of a community.



The twin shocks to Scotland's economy - and the tourism industry - from the pandemic and Scotland's exit from the European Union means that raising the profile of community-led tourism and expanding opportunities is both timely and never more needed. Communities that are resourced and empowered to build a better place, for themselves and for visitors, are more likely to embrace all the benefits that tourism can bring.

Across Scotland, in particular rural & island Scotland, thousands of community-led tourism initiatives are being driven forward by local people, local businesses and community enterprises. These range from dark sky centres, quirky craft and food trails, festivals and events, heritage centres, pubs, marine and motorhome facilities, adventure tourism offers and novel family experiences. These initiatives are all designed by the local community for the local community on the basis that they are exactly the authentic and accessible offerings popular with tourists.

Equally, tourism and local regeneration go hand in hand. Local improvements, be it a high street face-lift, a community swimming pool, a wheelchair accessible path, heritage project or a mini festival - all

benefit local people - whilst at the same time making a place more attractive to the visitor. It is local improvements like these that will underpin a move towards responsible tourism, enabling tourists to make a meaningful connection to a place and fostering a great sense of pride for communities.



The ask

Invest in community-led tourism

Create funding options for community-led
tourism initiatives

Upskill supporting staff within local and national
bodies to understand community needs

Create resources, toolkits and gather research
and evidence to aid community-led tourism
developments

Develop a policy statement or strategy for
community-led tourism that is embedded in
future decision making

Resource and provide opportunity for a voice for
community-led tourism in Scotland





CREETOWN
INITIATIVE

TRADING AS BARHOLM ENTERPRISE LTD



COMMUNITY LED
TOURISM
Girvan



COMMUNITY LED
TOURISM
Brechin



Scottish Government
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