

Connecting Threads - A River Culture Vision for the Tweed



Spanning traditional and contemporary cultural practices, Connecting Threads is a 5-year programme of cultural activities to celebrate the intangible heritage of the Tweed along a new source to sea trail.

Connecting Threads harnesses the distinctive river heritage and cultural landscape of the Tweed to promote a vibrant contemporary identity for the Scottish Borders. Shaped by the river habitat itself and in partnership with local communities, conservation and environmental organisations, the proposed cultural programme will bring different knowledges and creative practices together in innovative and experiential ways to support a culture of stewardship and collaboration. The cultural events, art works and activities situated in, on and alongside the river will invite communities and visitors to make deeper connections to the Tweed, strengthen cultural leadership and contribute to a sustainable locally driven economy. *Connecting Threads* is the cultural strand of a landscape scale project **Destination Tweed** led by Tweed Forum, an umbrella organisation consisting of all the statutory and voluntary bodies with an interest in the Tweed and its management.

Destination Tweed aims to conserve, celebrate and promote the Tweed from beyond the source to the sea, building an identity beyond its 100-mile length, creating a unique and world class visitor destination. A shared use trail will connect Moffat to Berwick-upon-Tweed, providing a focal point for a wide range of conservation and enhancement projects at key sites that will be delivered by a range of partner organisations. The aspiration is that the trail will be known as one of the great long distance routes in the UK. Connecting Threads forms a core element of the engagement proposals.

River Culture is the over - arching and cross - threading theme of *Connecting Threads* which aspires to:

- make visible, enrich, interpret, interrogate, and celebrate the varied cultural landscapes of the Tweed River through a multi- stranded public programme of cultural activity.
- highlight the Tweed river corridor as a place of exchange, learning, and collaborative practice through a cultural heritage learning programme
- support high quality traditional and contemporary cultural practices through a programme of artist residencies and commissions.
- engage local communities and visitors of all ages in a meaningful way with the cultural landscapes of the Tweed trail, re-invigorating old stories and narrating new tales of the river for the future.

- use cultural activity to connect rural communities and small towns with a focus on issues of resilience and community cohesion in a period of changing demography, land use practices and climate change.
- support and encourage sustainable cultural practice, cultural and community leadership and ambition and social entrepreneurship.
- enhance the capacity of the Tweed trail for economic development and cultural tourism by providing distinct, high quality resources, products, and experiences.

Historically the cultural narrative that dominates the Scottish Borders is that of rivalry – whether that be reivers, rugby or common ridings. *Connecting Threads* is an opportunity to reconsider the region through the river ways and to find and tell other cultural narratives which can encourage and support a more connected, sustainable region and to facilitate greater collaboration within and between communities up and downstream. Journeying, mapping and storytelling are some of the themes emerging to identify what is valued culturally, what is being lost and could be restored, what is already happening and can be built on and to discover the stories and voices that we need to hear today to address species loss and social justice at a time of Climate Emergency.

Key to the project are the delivery of artist or culturally led experiences for local people as well as visitors around the river to encourage a deeper and closer connection to the Tweed. Activities that create access to the river and aim to encourage a greater sense of care and custodianship within communities which can continue beyond the project.

The project has two parts - a development phase (2020 – 2021) followed by a 5-year programme (2022 – 2027) if funding is successful.



DEVELOPMENT PHASE (12 MONTHS) 2020- 2021

The focus of the development period is to:

- to build capacity in terms of people and learning to collaboratively design a 5 - year cultural programme, including early collaboration with other *Destination Tweed* project partners.
- to trial a range of pilot projects to develop future programming and activities which will increase learning for the future. There will be a focus on supporting cultural and community leadership, sustainable practice and co-operative and partnership working.
- Securing additional funding for the 5-year programme.

To enable this development phase two new posts (0.6) are being created, a River Tweed Cultural Curator and a River Culture Animateur.

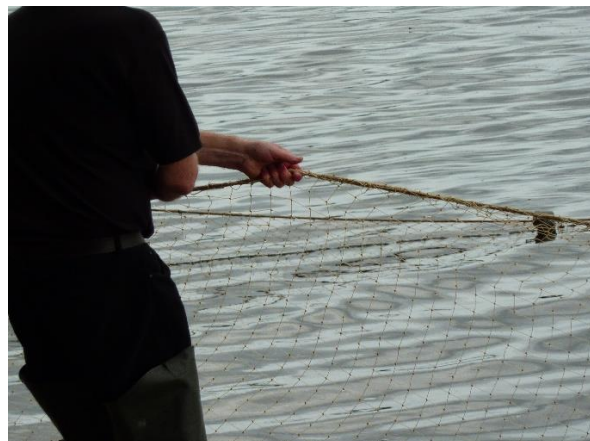
- **River Tweed Cultural Curator** (0.6) responsible for making the wider over-arching connections between the Upper, Middle and Lower Tweed activity project zones and between the other *Destination Tweed* partners. A focus of this role will be the curation of a River Festival, collaborating on the delivery of the cultural leadership and learning exchange programme and finding additional funding for the 5-year programme.
- **River Culture Animateur** (0.6) responsible for developing cultural activity and building partnerships in one of the three designated activity project zones (Upper, Middle or Lower Tweed.) The activity programme will include a community cultural audit to contribute to a digital mapping of the Tweed, collaborating on the delivery of the cultural leadership and learning exchange programme and piloting a river guide scheme. For the development phase the focus of activity will be on the Middle Tweed zone from Innerleithen to Kelso.

In the development stage both posts will be based at Southern Uplands Partnership. Both posts will be for 12 months. If funding for the 5 -year programme is successful both posts have the potential to continue for the duration of the 5 year project (2022 – 2027) and two additional River Culture Animateur posts (0.6) working in the Upper and Lower Tweed zones will be created.

In addition, it is also intended that there will be a **Pathfinder Artist Residency** in the Upper Tweed Valley in the Development Phase which will engage with deep local knowledges embodied in individual people, local history societies, archives and environmental and cultural organisations. Funding is in the process of being sought for that component.

5 - YEAR CULTURAL PROGRAMME

APRIL 2022 to MARCH 2027



The 5 -year cultural programme begins in the Year of Scotland's Stories. Whilst the development phase will be used to define the key components it is envisaged that the programme will include a wide range of cultural activity that may include:

15 Artists Residencies

3 Artist Residencies per year will be hosted in different communities and organisations in the Upper, Middle and Lower Tweed. Artists will be invited to respond to annual call outs and will be selected by interview. Some of these residencies will be engaging more specifically with local people and others will take the form of artist commissions to create work for the Tweed trail that might be temporary or permanent. There is scope for adventurous and wide -ranging artist proposals in any art form.

As part of the residency programme artists will contribute to *River Ways* an experiential trail that encourages connection to place drawing on our different perceptual systems. The propositions will invite people to pause in different ways at particular places along the trail drawing attention to other species and to how we connect to place through the senses.

Bi-annual River Festival (2022, 2024, 2026) A family friendly celebration of River Tweed culture for visitors and local communities. It is envisaged that there will be a different overarching theme for each festival bringing attention to different aspects of the river e.g. Homecoming of the Salmon; River Crossings; Tweed Tales; River Craft(s). The River Festival will create a celebratory public programme of activities and events and offers a framework for all the organisations involved in *Destination Tweed* to contribute to and participate in.

Cultural Leadership, Knowledge Exchange and Collaboration Programme to allow for learning, exchange and reflection around cultural heritage practice for the 21st century. This takes several forms:

Bi-annual Gathering of Waters Conference (2023 and 2025) A Tweed assembly to showcase and share the work that is being achieved through the *Destination Tweed* project; to disseminate new research, knowledge and good practice; to make new links by inviting guest speakers from other national and international river cultures;

River Guides Scheme - an initiative to encourage local people, particularly young people, to talk about their place to visitors and within their communities and to encourage cross -generational learning and exchange. The scheme aims to bring generations together to share information and stories in and about a particular stretch of the river and to support this through offering training in 'performance' and public speaking skills and creating a framework for the river guides to operate within.

River Learning: Series of up to 20 learning exchange sessions per year for the cultural heritage sector based on identified needs.

