

# Galloway Glens Biosphere Experience Final Project Report September 2018 – March 2020





## Contents

Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Who Was Involved in the Project? .....	3
Objectives fit with LEADER Strategy and HLF Outputs .....	3
Funding .....	4
Project Experience .....	5
Delivery and Actions.....	5
Training and Networking.....	5
Events .....	<del>7</del> 6
Tours .....	<del>7</del> 6
Bus Tours.....	<del>8</del> 7
Bike Tours.....	<del>8</del> 7
Workshops.....	<del>9</del> 7
Weekend Packages .....	<del>10</del> 8
Winter Birds In The Biosphere .....	<del>10</del> 8
Kirkcudbright Artist’s Town: Past and Present.....	<del>11</del> 8
Marketing .....	<del>12</del> 10
Social Media.....	<del>12</del> 10
Marketing Plan .....	<del>12</del> 10
Conclusions.....	<del>13</del> 11
Outputs - LEADER .....	<del>13</del> 11
Outputs – HLF/Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme .....	<del>13</del> 11
Budget.....	<del>14</del> 12
Achievements.....	<del>14</del> 12
Lessons Learnt.....	<del>14</del> 12
Summary.....	<del>15</del> 13



## Introduction

The project was developed to encourage local businesses, individuals and groups to explore opportunities to promote experiential tourism within the Galloway Glens landscape partnership area. We wanted to people to see how their skills and knowledge could provide a unique experience for visitors by immersing them in the history, culture, environment or art of the region.

It was hoped that this would encourage collaboration between businesses to begin to offer packages of activities, accommodation and food to create a more bespoke experience for guests. If successful this would hopefully lead to improvement in local economy due to increased numbers of visitors and potentially job or training opportunities for young people in our rural communities who may not have considered tourism as a career path.



## Who Was Involved in the Project?

The project was led by Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP) but worked closely with the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere and the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership to ensure any developments complimentary to existing initiatives were transferable over a wider area.

A full-time project officer was recruited in September 2018 to manage the project. This involved networking with over 80 individuals, businesses and organisations including local accommodation providers, the creative sector, activity tourism businesses, local authority partners, NGO's, community groups and tourism bodies.

A list of the contacts made during the project can be found in the [appendices](#).

## Objectives fit with LEADER Strategy and HLF Outputs

Tourism is a vital part of the local economy and is one of three sub-sections of the economy theme set out in the LEADER Development Strategy 2014-2020. Experiential tourism is identified as part of the rationale for tourism and it is suggested that VisitScotland, D&G Outdoor Access Forum and Visit South West Scotland are the key partner bodies for this activity.

The LDS also identifies the need to “promote mentoring in the creative/artisan culture” and to find “innovative ways of joining up local arts”.

The project was designed to directly address this opportunity to tap potential in the region for “experiential” tourism products, ie high quality novel experiences, provided by local businesses and agencies that can be sold to the visitor.

It was also intended to help create links between local arts and crafts people and there may well be opportunities to promote local mentoring. An example might be a local artist or artisan who could run workshops for small groups, if they had the right skills, appropriate venue and suitable back-up (eg catering, toilets, insurance, etc.). These opportunities are often small scale, and their development requires local cooperation between businesses so that critical mass can be achieved.



The project aimed to develop new products locally, and to use the Biosphere and Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership project to give them an identity.

It ~~was~~ ~~it~~ ~~be~~ important to give careful consideration to the most appropriate way of marketing the new products and we ~~had~~ ~~ve~~ ~~included~~ a modest budget to help with this.

An aspiration was that groups of businesses may apply for marketing assistance, e.g. Growth Fund, once they have products ready for market.

## Funding

Funding came from a number of sources as detailed in the table below:

Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Programme (49.99%)	£36,843.00
Heritage Lottery Fund (Galloway Glens LPS) (38.54%)	£28,400.00
Dumfries and Galloway Council (Area Committee)	£3,166.50
Dumfries and Galloway Council	£3,166.50
Southern Uplands Partnership	£2,111.00
	<b>£73,687.00</b>



## Project Experience

### Delivery and Actions

The project ran from September 2018 until March 2020. The project officer was employed on a full-time basis from September 2018 until January 2020 when they continued to work on the project on a part time basis (50% pro rata) until March 2020.

The project aimed to deliver a marketing plan, a series of networking and training events and a programme of trial events, activities and packages which could be promoted to visitors.

### Training and Networking

On Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018 the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership hosted an event called Galloway Is Special as part of Dumfries and Galloway Business Week. The aim was to inform businesses about the opportunities presented by the UNESCO Biosphere and the Dark Sky Park designations. As part of that event there was a chance to give a short introduction to this project and it provided a good networking opportunity so early on in the process. A copy of the slides can be found in the [appendices](#).

The Galloway Glens team arranged a series of Business Academy events in 2019 in conjunction with Business Gateway. It was a good opportunity to signpost training opportunities to the businesses who had engaged with the project so far. The project officer was able to attend these and use them as a networking opportunity.

**31<sup>st</sup> January** – Maximising income from your accommodation business

**28<sup>th</sup> February** – Creative Businesses: New Ideas for Getting your Work to Market

**29<sup>th</sup> April** – Food Producers: Starting or Growing your Small Food Business

**5<sup>th</sup> September** – Accommodation Providers: Boosting Business Through Green Credentials

**10<sup>th</sup> October** – Retail Businesses: Driving Footfall Through Social Media



On 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019 the project hosted an informal tourism discussion group with some invited local tourism providers. The aim was to open up communication channels between different providers and share ideas and best practice. This meeting was held at The Gallery at Laurieston and 10 people attended representing different tourism sectors.

The group started with a round the room introduction and then moved on to look at some of the discussion points:



- What is your opinion on the current state of tourism in our immediate area?
- What % of your business is made up of visitors vs locals
- What is your capacity for an increase in visitor numbers?
- If visitor numbers in the area doubled or tripled would your business have any constraints for dealing with this?
- Do you do any marketing specifically aimed at visitors before they arrive in the region? Is it working?
- What would you like to see happen in the region to attract more visitors?
- How can we make visitors more aware of events/activities/experiences on offer?
- How could businesses/groups/individuals work better together to improve tourism for all?

The discussion was informal with notes recorded on a flip chart as people spoke allowing the conversation to flow freely around the topics. All of the group agreed that it had been a useful exercise and had created new networking opportunities.

A full transcript of the discussion can be found in the appendixes.

## Events

As part of the project a number of tourism events took place to establish the demand and feasibility of running these on a more commercial basis. Working with already established and newer tourism businesses it was a good opportunity to encourage networking and collaboration.

A summary of the events can be seen in the table. More details about each are given in the next section.

Event	Date	Businesses Engaged	Attendees D&G	Attendees Non D&G	Cost to run PP
Castles & Lochs Bus Tour	2/4/19	1	11	0	£10.90
Loch Ken Bus Tour	11/4/19	1	0	0	N/A
Glens & Lochs Cycle Tour	1/5/19	1	0	0	N/A
Laurieston Loop Cycle Tour	5/5/19	2	0	0	N/A
Winter Birds In The Biosphere Weekend	31/1/20-2/2/20	4	0	8	£286.55
Make Your Own Herbal Ointment	27/02/20	2	10	0	£23.50
An Introduction to Permaculture and Composting	12/03/20	3	6	4	£40.60
Kirkcudbright Artists Town: Past & Present Weekend	20/3/20-22/3/20	6	7 booked	2 booked	Covid 19 Cancelled
Foraging For Medicinal Herbs	24/03/20	2	12 booked (2 wait list)	0	Covid 19 Cancelled
Creating A Mandela Garden With Permaculture	26/03/20	3	11 booked (2 wait list)	0	Covid 19 Cancelled

## Tours

The first events targeted by the project were guided tours. It was felt that single day or part day tours were an established business model in other areas of the country. There appeared to be an opportunity to trial similar offerings within the project area which would identify potential routes and themes. The cost of hiring transport to run single day tours is a barrier to entry in this market, in other parts of the UK these types of businesses typically run their own fleet of vehicles. Additionally, in areas with a high footfall of tourists it is easier for tour operators to fill tours with on the day bookings. Our model locally would likely need to rely on advance bookings from visitors to ensure each tour was viable financially.





## Bus Tours



Having made contact with Solway Tours who specialise in small group history-based tours we agreed to trial two 1-day routes. The idea was to provide visitors with a snapshot of the area with a knowledgeable local guide. Solway Tours operate their own 16 seat mini bus and agreed to run the two tours at a reduced rate to assess the demand. These were scheduled for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> April. The first tour focussed on a few of the castles and tower houses in the area and had a history focus. The second tour was more general taking in some of the history, nature and culture around Loch Ken. Uptake for the tickets was slow, the first tour was attended by 11 people mainly consisting of other tourism providers in the area who were invited to experience the trip and be able to talk about it to visitors. The second tour was cancelled due to lack of interest.

Feedback from the first tour was excellent with an average overall rating of 9.4/10. Particular praise was given to the guide experience and the small group atmosphere.

## Bike Tours

The project had also connected with Galloway Cycling Holidays who provide guided and self-guided cycling itineraries for visitors as well as a bike hire service. We were keen to trial some shorter guided trips which would take place in the Galloway Glens area but aimed at leisure cyclists. Bike hire was also available if required. These were scheduled for early May.

We had no uptake for the 3 advertised tour routes and on reflection feel that there was a gap in the marketing that didn't target the casual cyclist effectively. We still feel there is potential for guided tours of this sort but need to identify if they are designed for regular cyclists or those with no experience and market accordingly.



Galloway Cycling continue to promote their eBike fleet to encourage the less confident cyclist to join in.



## Workshops

A number of workshops were organised in February and March 2020. These [were](#) themed around using herbs for medicinal purposes and the principles of permaculture in gardening. It was felt that both of these topics linked well with the principles of the Biosphere and we were well supported by two local experienced practitioners in these areas.

The first was a practical workshop, teaching participants how to make their own herbal ointment for medicinal use. Local herbalist Alex Ross led the session and provided the necessary materials. The group consisted of 10 people who all left with their own marigold ointment to use.



Alex Ross was scheduled to lead a herbal foraging walk at Barrhill Woods in Kirkcudbright. This had a focus on picking herbs and plants that had medicinal purposes. It was felt that foraging for food has become more popular in recent years and medicinal foraging was a new approach. The walk was very popular and places were fully booked with a waiting list. Unfortunately, this event had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak.



We were also planning to run two permaculture practical sessions. Local permaculture tutor Lusi Alderslowe created full day taster sessions on composting and creating a mandae<sup>a</sup> garden. The composting session was held at the Garroch Walled Garden (a Galloway Glens Project) in March 2020 where the group spent some time discussing the principles of permaculture and the practicalities of composting. They then proceeded to build a batch composting system which will be able to be used by the community garden.

The mandae<sup>a</sup> garden session was set to take place at Ironmacannie Mill, a permaculture site. Sadly, this event also had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak, it had been fully booked with a waiting list.

There seems to be a demand for hands-on, small group events with a focus on sustainable, natural principles. This fits well with the local environment in our area and also the ethos of the Biosphere. The challenge is making visitors aware of such opportunities and making places available for booking. There may be an opportunity for accommodation providers who have suitable facilities to host such events and promote them to their guests as well as opening up additional places to local people.

Feedback summaries from each of the events that took place can be found in the appendices.



## Weekend Packages

We were able to put together a couple of packaged weekends towards the end of the project period. The project funding was used to cover the costs of the guides, transport and incidental costs making this an attractive prospect for visitors.

### Winter Birds in the Biosphere

The first was a birdwatching weekend which took place from Friday 31<sup>st</sup> January to Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2020. The accommodation and meals were provided by the Selkirk Arms Hotel in Kirkcudbright, the guide was ex RSPB manager Chris Rollie and the bus and driver were arranged through Glenkens Community Transport.

Guests arrived on Friday and were met by guide Chris for a welcome drink and a two-course evening meal. Afterwards Rick Taylor from the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project gave a talk about their work to reintroduce eagles to this part of Scotland.

Saturday was a full day of birdwatching in the local area. After breakfast everyone collected their packed lunches from the hotel and set off on the bus. We visited sites including Threave Estate (National Trust for Scotland), Ken Dee Marshes (RSPB), the Red Kite Feeding Station and Cally Palace and Woods (MacMillan Hotels). Saturday evening was spent enjoying another meal in the hotel with and after dinner talk on Robert Burns and Birds by Chris Rollie.

Sunday morning was spent around Kirkcudbright visiting the Red Squirrel Hide at Barrhill Woods (A Galloway Glens project) and taking a walk along the river Dee. Returning to the hotel for a light lunch before guests departed in the afternoon.



57 species of bird were recorded over the weekend despite some challenging weather conditions. The weekend was attended by 8 guests travelling from Ayrshire, Cumbria, Lancashire and Derbyshire. The feedback was excellent with an average score of 9.6/10. A full feedback summary can be found in the appendixes.

*The cost to run per person was £286.55 based on a group of 8 people. Research shows that similar packages in other parts of the UK cost around £350. This makes the weekend a profitable option if it can be marketed effectively.*

## Kirkcudbright Artist's Town: Past and Present

The second weekend package was due to run from 20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020 was also based in the Selkirk Arms Hotel in Kirkcudbright. Led by Fiona Lee of Kirkcudbright Art Tours and incorporating other local artists and businesses in the programme. This event was not able to go ahead as planned [due](#) to the COVID-19 outbreak restricting travel and closing some attractions.

Guests were due to arrive on Friday and be given a local art map at check in allowing them to start exploring the area at their leisure. Friday evening's schedule consisted of a meal hosted by Fiona followed by a talk. The talk was to be delivered by local art historian David Steel who shared his knowledge of artists who have painted in the area and the landscapes that inspired them. Saturday morning would have been spent on a guided tour of Kirkcudbright with Fiona. The tour visits the oldest part of the town including studios and houses that have hosted a huge variety of artists over the years. This includes a visit to Broughton House, Edwardian home of the famous Glasgow Boy, E.A. Hornel.

The afternoon should have been spent in Kirkcudbright Galleries where a ticket to the visiting Scottish Portrait Awards was included. The impressive permanent collection in the gallery gives visitors the chance to see the work of some of the artists they would hear about during the morning tour.



Saturday evening would have comprised of another hosted dinner and then a presentation by local textile designer Morag MacPherson displaying some of her Kimono and fabric designs and the inspiration from her travels to Japan.

Sunday morning should have been spent in the company of local landscape painter Elizabeth Gilbey who would accompany the group on a bus tour of some of the local bays and secluded spots favoured by artists. Elizabeth talks about how artists worked outdoors and the challenges and rewards of "en plein air" painting. This would have finished off with a visit to Elizabeth's studio to see some of her current work and a chance to enjoy a packed lunch.





## Marketing

### Social Media

As part of the project a Facebook page was set up called Experience Galloway. The page aims were to promote activities and events taking place in the Galloway Glens area which may be of interest to visitors. It was also hoped that it could be used as a way of raising awareness amongst tourism businesses about the other offerings in the area.

The page was a useful tool for listing events and using paid advertising to market these to specific audiences. The paid advertising campaigns used on Facebook can be seen in the table below:

Campaign name	Clicks	Reach	Cost Per Click	Spend
Event: Castles and Towers in the Galloway Glens	148	3570	£0.14	£20.00
Event: Loch Ken Day Tour	145	3574	£0.10	£15.00
Event: Glens and Lochs - Guided Cycle Tour	88	2310	£0.17	£15.00
Event: Winter Birds in the Biosphere	30	1555	£0.67	£20.00
[04/12/2019] Promoting <a href="http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/explore-the-biosphere/biosphere-experiences/birdwatching-weekend/">http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/explore-the-biosphere/biosphere-experiences/birdwatching-weekend/</a>	69	1898	£0.14	£9.90
Event: Kirkcudbright Artists' Town, Past & Present	63	4174	£0.48	£30.00
[07/01/2020] Promoting <a href="http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/explore-the-biosphere/biosphere-experiences/birdwatching-weekend/">http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/explore-the-biosphere/biosphere-experiences/birdwatching-weekend/</a>	53	2768	£0.19	£9.91
Event: Make Your Own Herbal Ointment	14	1217	£0.71	£10.00
Event: An Introduction to Permaculture and Composting	16	494	£0.11	£1.79
Event: Creating a Mandela Garden with Permaculture	14	940	£0.45	£6.35
Event: Foraging For Medicinal Herbs	30	639	£0.08	£2.52
Event: Kirkcudbright Artists' Town, Past & Present	35	2899	£0.60	£21.00
[06/03/2020] Promoting <a href="http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/explore-the-biosphere/biosphere-experiences/kirkcudbright-art-weekend/">http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/explore-the-biosphere/biosphere-experiences/kirkcudbright-art-weekend/</a>	2	64	£0.17	£0.33
[06/03/2020] Promoting <a href="http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/explore-the-biosphere/biosphere-experiences/kirkcudbright-art-weekend/">http://www.gsabiosphere.org.uk/explore-the-biosphere/biosphere-experiences/kirkcudbright-art-weekend/</a>	160	2966	£0.07	£11.99
Event: Inspirations from Japan with Morag MacPherson	1	356	£1.21	£1.21
			<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£175.00</b>

### Marketing Plan

As part of the project outputs a draft marketing plan was created which could be used to develop a marketing strategy for future initiatives.

A number of marketing activities were undertaken to promote the tours and events that took place including social media advertised, printed flyers and posters, press releases, email marketing through business partners and website listings on the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere website.

See appendices for a copy of the marketing plan and examples of some the advertising that took place.



## Conclusions

### Outputs - LEADER

Target Result LAG List	Target	Actual
Number of new jobs created	1	1
Number of individuals trained/gaining new skills or re-skilled	10	16

Non-Participant Activity Target Result LAG List	Target	Actual
Number of businesses supported to diversify	10	4
Number of businesses supported to grow	10	3
Number of projects supporting the development of tourism businesses across the region	1	1
Number of projects supporting the development of environmental, nature-based, cultural, activity and experiential tourism	1	1
Number of projects supporting the development of the arts and culture sectors	1	1
Number of projects that –enhance these environments –support the sustainable use of any of these environments –demonstrate the value of these environments to the lives of the people of Dumfries and Galloway	1	1
Number of projects supporting nature based tourism initiatives	1	1
Number of projects developing initiatives to raise awareness of the diverse landscapes, habitats and species of Dumfries and Galloway	1	1
Number of projects developing urban/rural relationships	1	1

### Outputs – HLF/Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme

Project Outputs	Target	Actual
Workshops (attendees)		49
Training Participation		16
Training Tourism and Business Development		1
Fte job created for 3 years	0.5	0.5
More visitors attracted?		79
Local people and visitors have a better understanding of the heritage		79
Businesses/groups connected		10
Average Social Media reach of tourism events in area		200



## Budget

Item	Budget	Spend
Project Officer (1FTE salary and on-costs)	£48,758.50	£43,848.94
Travel	£3,420.00	£1,452.71
Laptop, phone and IT	£1,300.00	£1,435.36
Meetings, Marketing and PR	£9,880.00	£1,986.86
Project management	£10,328.50	£6,440.52

## Achievements

All of the activities that ran as pilots were very well received by attendees. Feedback summaries for each event can be found in the appendixes. In general people liked the small groups, knowledgeable group leaders and the local focus. Generally, the participants were from Dumfries and Galloway but the feedback suggests that this would be of interest to tourists too.

Overall, there has been good networking between businesses, community groups and individuals. The project has been successful in helping to build working relationships that did not already exist. It is hoped that these networks will continue to function and expand as a legacy of the project.

There has been an increased momentum towards the final six months of the project with more businesses approaching and expressing an interest in being involved. This highlights that there is an enthusiasm within tourism businesses to develop their offering and work together for greater benefit.

The workshops events running in the last three months of the project proved very popular and all booked up extremely quickly. Sadly, the COVID-19 outbreak meant some of these could not go ahead but they have shown there is demand for these types of activities.

The project has also been well placed to raise awareness of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere. A number of businesses have signed up as Proud Supporters as a result of the project and are actively talking about the Biosphere in their own marketing activity. This is a key opportunity for businesses to capitalise on world renowned designation and use it to attract more visitors.

## Lessons Learnt

One of the biggest challenges for the project was the timescale. Trying to develop tourism activities within the 18 months project life meant that there was only 1 full summer season during the course of the work. It was difficult to get buy in from tourism providers at the very start of the project as they preferred to wait and see how it developed. Having a second summer season within the scope would have been hugely beneficial to the piloting work.

Connected to the project timescale issues was the speed of networking. The project officer was new to the sector and therefore nearly all networking was starting from cold contacts. This had an inevitable impact on the ability to push out trial activities at the beginning. The networking really started to prove fruitful after





around 12 months on the project when more people started to express an interest in working with the project.

One of the key features of this area is the number of people running 'lifestyle' businesses. Many have moved here in semi-retirement or for a change of career direction and others run activities as a hobby or side to their main business. This meant that capacity was an issue as often those who offered an interesting experience for visitors were not motivated to expand the number or size of groups. It was also noticeable that many of these businesses took an extended break over the winter months reducing the opportunity to offer out of season itineraries.

It would have been good to see more awareness of other projects running locally through the Galloway Glens scheme or LEADER funding [and to explore potential synergies](#). There currently isn't a formal channel to raise awareness of each projects work and there were certainly some areas where activities overlapped. This project has interacted with a number of other Galloway Glens projects throughout the duration but there would be an opportunity to develop inter project networking in a wider scale and encourage sharing of best practice and resource pooling.

From a logistical perspective the Package and Linked Travel Arrangements legislation 2018 has given some restrictions on what could be offered through the project. There is a real opportunity to offer small group, niche packages with specific themes throughout the year. However, the organiser of the package needs to comply with the insurance and financial regulations to ensure traveller security.

[The Biosphere team are currently exploring the feasibility of developing a social enterprise that complies with the requirements enabling them to sell direct.](#)

## Summary

In summary the project can be viewed as a success. Despite some challenges with the timescale and networking needed, a good range of activities were investigated during the course of the project. There were opportunities to create new business networking opportunities and generate ideas amongst existing tourism providers. It is expected that [through the Biosphere team](#), these connections will continue to work together to build on the progress made so far.

The project successfully showed that there is a need locally for an organisation [such as the Biosphere](#), to coordinate tourism packages and assist small businesses with the networking and marketing aspects that come with trying to promote these [more](#) widely. Having a resource that can help with the logistics and communications to the travel industry and visitors would allow the activity and accommodation providers to focus on their own business and service levels.

