



THE SOUTHERN UPLANDS PARTNERSHIP



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ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

June 2022



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DR CHRIS MILES, PARTNERSHIP CONVENER

I am happy to report that this has been another successful year for the Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP). As we came out of the lockdown phases of the Covid pandemic we remained a viable organisation with sustained activity across many of the projects we were involved with before Covid came along, and some new ones. That we survived is in no small measure down to the work that the core and project staff have continued doing throughout it all, despite the restraints they have been under. However, the year ahead looks even more challenging. The restraint on public spending has already hit the income of the Southern Uplands Partnership. We are increasingly dependent on income from project work and from supporters and Patrons.

So, the World Climate summit (COP26) in Glasgow came and went. Promises were made by Governments that we really would take action to keep global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees. Then they went home, Russia invaded Ukraine, energy became scarce and prices surged and food is starting to follow the same course.



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To get us through this, Governments are responding by reverting to old polluting habits, burn more coal, use more oil, with the promise that when we get through this, we will address the existential threat we all face in climate change and biodiversity loss. Meanwhile records continue to be broken on heat and drought around the world.

How does this affect us in the South of Scotland? Our rural communities are not immune. Prices of fuel and electricity for heating and transport have rocketed. That is why work we are doing with partners focussed on energy efficiency, carbon capture, building natural capital and building community resilience is so important. We are seeing major investments into our area by those who want to use the South of Scotland to generate renewable energy or to grow trees and lock up carbon. This has stimulated debate about what say local people have in the changes this brings to their landscapes, land-use and what benefits local communities get. SUP will continue to argue that local communities should be able to influence these changes and should benefit from them through a share in the benefits that often distant investors receive.

SUP CORE TEAM UPDATE 2021/22

The core SUP team is made up of Pip Tabor, Sheila Adams, Katy Ewing and Darren Flint and the following summary outlines the key work areas from over the last year to March 2022.

All of SUP's work delivers on our Strategy 2021-2025 and three goals:

1. Goal 1: Promote integrated land use as the basis of sustainable development
2. Goal 2: Support communities to be both vibrant and resilient.
3. Goal 3: Promote actions that maximise climate and biodiversity resilience

The full Strategy document can be viewed at <https://sup.org.uk/publications/>

Project Highlights:

The team has had a busy year working on a broad range of rural regeneration and environmental projects, including ...

Black Grouse Recovery project

Jen Clark has been scoping out a full upland biodiversity project, so we are ready for future funding opportunities. The SUP team is now developing this work, along with numerous partners, into a fully costed landscape focused project.



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Recharge in Nature

This exciting partnership between SUP, NatureScot and Electrek Explorer delivered an app showing locations offering electric vehicle recharging, plus offering suggestions for nearby places to experience nature. The Recharge in Nature project is a pilot covering the whole South of Scotland and is part of NatureScot's wider Green Recovery Nature Based Tourism Programme.

South West Scotland Coastal Way

The long-held desire to link the Cumbrian Coastal Path and Ayrshire Coastal Path took a mighty leap closer with the setting up of a coastal way partnership between SUP, People's Project and Dumfries and Galloway Council. In the autumn of 2021, SUP undertook a recruitment process and Richard Clarke was appointed. Richard started in January 2022 as the Project Officer to deliver the trail from Gretna to Portpatrick. You can read more on this on page 8.

Southern Uplands Partnership Services Ltd (SUP Services Ltd)

Southern Uplands Partnership Services Ltd, our wholly-owned trading company, has been bidding for work, and winning some interesting contracts, which will generate funds to support the charity. One area where we are starting to specialise is that around energy-efficiency where there is a huge task to get our rural housing stock modified to meet the net-zero target. At present, there are too few people with the skills to undertake this work so we are working with local partners to try to raise awareness of the issue and to point out the scale of the opportunity for local businesses if they have the right skills and training. So far, this work has concentrated on the Scottish Borders, but we are starting to link with partners in Dumfries and Galloway. SUP Services Ltd was awarded funds to undertake further work on the energy efficiency supply chain in the Borders <https://sup.org.uk/projects/scottish-borders-construction-forum/>

On behalf of the South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE), SUP Services Ltd undertook the planning of locations, venue hire, equipment and technical logistics, site facilitation and report writing for 30+ public engagement events right across southern Scotland.

Dumfriesshire East Community Benefit Company (DECBG)

On behalf of Dumfriesshire East Community Benefit Group, SUP continued to administer Community Benefit funding schemes from ScottishPower Renewables' Ewe Hill Windfarm and, more recently, Solwaybank Energy Ltd's Solwaybank Windfarm Community Benefit Fund. As well as the grant scheme administration, SUP is also contracted to provide the financial, secretariat and governance requirements of DECBG, so there is a lot of activity there.



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In autumn, SUP carried out a recruitment process to appoint a Community Development Officer for DECBG. Jamie Dent was appointed to this position, to help local groups and charities develop projects and access funding. You can read more on this on page 7.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

A very successful AGM was held online on the Zoom platform on 17th November 2021, with around 40 people participating. The formal business of the meeting was followed by very interesting talks by Morag Paterson on Communities and Forest Plans, and Nic Coombey on PLACE (People Landscape Art Culture Environment) in the Biosphere, generating good questions and discussion.

Civtech Challenge

SUP teamed up with the Langholm Initiative, John Muir Trust, South of Scotland Enterprise and Scottish Government on a Civtech Challenge. Our challenge was: “How can we use technology to help land managers make informed land-use decisions and increase carbon capture and storage”. The Civtech process is all about problem solving, innovation and business development. It has been quite a commitment for all involved, but the result is that a company (Gingerland) has developed a radical new platform (Rethink Carbon) that uses a range of data sources and calculators to present data in a form that will help land managers make better decisions. The company has now been awarded funding to take the idea to the next level and we are all very excited at the potential. You can see the “Demoday” pitch here: <https://www.civtechdemoday.com/challenge-4-ginger-land>

Funding and Administration

The end of LEADER funding saw a huge amount of work in finalising the grant claims for the South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project and the end of the PLACE in the Biosphere project in September 2021 involved submitting the last grant claim to National Lottery Heritage Fund. The annual audit of both SUP and SUP Services finances was also a substantial piece of work over the summer months, resulting in a clean bill of health for both organisations.

For more information, contact Pip Tabor (piptabor@sup.org.uk) or Sheila Adams (sheila@sup.org.uk)

New Team Members

In April 2021, a recruitment process was undertaken to find a Project Officer for the Core Team. Katy Ewing and Darren Flint joined Pip and Sheila in the Core Team in May/June 2021, as a job-share. As well as being involved in some of the projects above, Katy and Darren have been busy working on:



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- Revamp of SUPs quarterly newsletter and E-newsletter – sign up at www.sup.org.uk
- Overhaul of the SUP website design, functionality and content www.sup.org.uk
- Liaison with a number of communities wishing to create Community Project Officer roles
- Set up and manage SUP’s social media accounts to promote and increase awareness of SUP through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube

For more information, contact Katy Ewing (katy@sup.org.uk) or Darren Flint (darren@sup.org.uk)

2021/22 Project Updates

South of Scotland Golden Eagle project (SSGEP)

Translocation 2021, stakeholder engagement and eagles

2018 and 2019 project eagles (Beaky, Edward, Emily and Skan) continue to do well and are displaying behaviour which suggests they have settled on territory. We continue to monitor their progress through satellite data and out in the field.

Summer 2021 saw a very successful translocation season with 8 juvenile eagles collected (4 females and 4 males) and safely released from our aviaries in the Moffat Hills. Their subsequent activity has been monitored closely with all 8 young eagles quickly identifying feeding stations and settling in well to their surroundings. We have continued to work with communities, volunteers and stakeholders to name the birds.

Coming off the back of the pandemic and lockdowns, our Stakeholder Engagement Officer has been able to get out and about more to visit landowners, farmers, keepers and others in the land-based sector to tell them about the project, answer questions and highlight any concerns to the project.

Targeted engagement in areas where eagles are spending more time has also been undertaken with positive relationships developed with these landowners and ongoing dialogue established.

General feedback continues to be positive and is undoubtedly linked to the proactive efforts of our stakeholder work.

We continue to support schools with information and materials where possible but look forward to returning to classrooms as the situation improves. Keen not to lose momentum following lockdowns, we were regularly in touch with Scouts Scotland to see how we could work together to keep Eagle Champions in the minds of groups in the south of Scotland.



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Scotland's first Eagle Town celebration took place between 19th-26th September 2021. This had been delayed from the previous year due to the pandemic. With backing from the local authority and in partnership with Moffat and District Community Council, an 8-day programme was put together which highlighted both the conservation of the golden eagle and Moffat as a tourist destination as well as bringing together the local community. The Eagle Town celebration marked the end of the festival featuring a pipe band, speeches from Green MSP Lorna Slater, SSGEP Chairman Michael Clarke, and the Academy's Head Girl and Boy. An eagle bench carved by local chainsaw artist, Sam Bowsher, was presented to the town. With the success of the event, and many involved from Moffat keen to keep the celebration going in the future, another event has been confirmed for 16th-18th September 2022.

We have continued to deliver project talks online throughout the last year. These have reached communities right across the south of Scotland and further afield. With groups now returning to normal face-to-face meetings, we are taking many bookings for the year ahead.

The role we had initially planned for the Eyrle morphed into an Events Assistant role with volunteers manning information stands outside the Waterwheel Tearoom to promote the new exhibition and offer general project information.

For more information, contact Cat Barlow (cat@sup.org.uk)

[South of Scotland Golden Eagle Project \(goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk\)](http://goldeneaglessouthofscotland.co.uk)



Volunteer, Neill Sayer, with SSGEP Community Outreach Officer, Rick Taylor, in Moffat

Dumfriesshire East Community Benefit Group (DECBG)

The Dumfriesshire East Community Benefit Group, with support from SUP, has been distributing funds to communities surrounding the ScottishPower Renewables' Ewe Hill 16 windfarm since 2017 and from Solwaybank Windfarm since 2021.



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In January 2022, Jamie Dent was appointed to the post of Community Officer with the task of supporting local groups in the development of projects and in accessing funding both from Community Benefit funds and from other funders. The post was created after being identified in the East Dumfriesshire Regional Community Plan as a priority, following a lengthy community consultation which identified a shortfall in capacity and specialist knowledge.

Since he came into post Jamie has been working to engage with local groups and is currently supporting more than 14 projects at varying stages of development across the 16 communities in Eskdale and South Annandale covered by the fund: “My main aim at this stage is to engage with as many groups and communities as possible, to increase the amount of external match funding and to increase the scope and scale of local projects”.

The projects under development at the moment address a broad range of issues from village hall improvements to projects tackling skills, employment and isolation issues: “I am hoping to encourage groups by taking inspiration and examples of best practice from elsewhere and adapting them to the region to make best use of the opportunity presented by injection of windfarm funds directly to community groups. Communities are in a position to make lasting changes and improvements as a result of this unprecedented influx of funds to rural areas. I hope to enable local people to make the most of these resources.”



For more information, contact Jamie Dent (jamie@decbg.org.uk)

www.decbg.org.uk

South West Scotland Coastal Way

The development of a coastal path along the North Solway Coast has long been mooted and is the missing link between coastal routes in Ayrshire and Cumbria. A route would offer residents and visitors alike the opportunity to experience in full the region’s spectacular and varied coastline, while at the same time potentially generating economic, health and environmental benefits. In January 2022, Richard Clarke was appointed as the South West Scotland Coastal Way Development Officer, with the project being supported by the People’s Project and Dumfries and Galloway Council.



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The general concept of the route, is that it will start/finish in Gretna and start/finish in Portpatrick. This would then link with the two other long-distance routes, being the Cumbrian Coastal Path, and to the north, the Ayrshire Coastal Path, which would plug this missing gap. To accomplish this additional leg on to Ayrshire, the route would be able to utilise the Southern Upland Way which would lead users onwards towards Cairnryan to form the link. The route will be concentrated along the coastline as much as possible, using the existing core path network, and then piecing together the jigsaw of missing sections, and working alongside landowners to develop new sections of access, to create a seamless transition along the coast.

In the short period that the project has been running, key achievements have been made in establishing a route, and in getting the project visible to the wider communities and stakeholders that will be key in the delivery of this project:



- Surveys conducted on core path from Gretna to Powfoot.
- Scoping work carried out on the options of connecting the missing links.
- Trail reports and costings completed for all sections from Gretna to Powfoot.
- Meetings with stakeholders and local landowners.
- Applications for funding submitted for improvements to current core paths, and also future events.
- Appointments to visit local Community Councils and agencies to promote the project, and get feedback on the proposals.

There has also been promotion of the project in the local press, social media and presenting the vision of the South West Scotland Coastal Way to over 180 delegates at the South Scotland Destination Alliance's (SSDA) conference in March. Discussions have also been developing with various stakeholders and local landowners on the possibilities of utilising their areas of operation to formally recognise an access right across their lands, which has been met with only positive responses.

The plan going forward is to continue with on the ground surveys to establish a route that will be feasible to develop, with buy-in from the respective land owners and local communities, and to work closely with the various stakeholders and funders that will be key in helping this vision become reality.

For more information, contact Richard Clarke (richard@sup.org.uk)



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Connecting Threads

Connecting Threads, the cultural strand of the landscape-scale initiative, Destination Tweed, has recently begun a new chapter. After 16 months of intense research and consultation, and a lively programme of pilot activities, Rachel and Emily successfully submitted their proposals for a five-year cultural programme to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, as part of the wider Destination Tweed application.

The project's development phase has made clear the benefits that art and culture can bring to the south of Scotland's rural communities. Feedback from the pilot programme of workshops and events showed that participants gained new perspectives, felt connected to their local and wider communities, learned new skills, made friends, were inspired to take forward new creative projects and left with a greater sense of mental wellbeing.



Connecting Threads Handbook



Yellow Rattle (Rhinanthus minor) study III and Grasses in the Meadow, bleaching. 2021, Jules Bradbury, produced as part of Connecting Threads' pilot artist residency at Merlindale Meadow.



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Connecting Threads will work creatively with communities to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies through the lens of the river Tweed. Using the river as a universal connector, the project can promote an understanding of the region's environment as an integrated land and water scape and can explore the place of communities within the catchment's ecosystems.



Gathering Together, community event conceived by Jules Bradbury as part of her residency at Merlindale Meadow, September 2021

Through a network of community partners, the project can reach those who need support; to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, to nurture personal health and wellbeing and to combat social or geographic isolation and loneliness. At the same time, Connecting Threads will create opportunities for employment and professional development for the cultural sector and will connect creative people with the communities that they live and work within.

As a culmination of the development phase, Rachel and Emily have produced a Handbook which sets out a clear vision and programme for the project and how it can make a positive contribution to place, people and the environment. You can access the Handbook via the Southern Uplands Partnership website [Connecting Threads: Tweed River Culture | Southern Uplands Partnership \(sup.org.uk\)](https://www.sup.org.uk)



Telling Tales, Birgham, October 2021



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Details from Edge Encounters, July 2021 and River Portrait No. 1, June 2021

At the time of going to print in late June, the team is delighted to have received positive news on the successful outcome of the National Lottery Heritage Fund application. Rachel is leading on the submission of match funding applications whilst Emily is continuing to work with communities and creative practitioners to edge forward initiatives and ideas. It is hoped that the project will start fully towards the end of the summer when the team will grow from two to five. Engaging two additional River Culture Animateurs and a River Messenger, the project will begin germinating activity along the whole length of the Tweed.

For more information, contact Rachel Hunter (rachel@sup.org.uk) or Emily Cropton (emily@sup.org.uk)

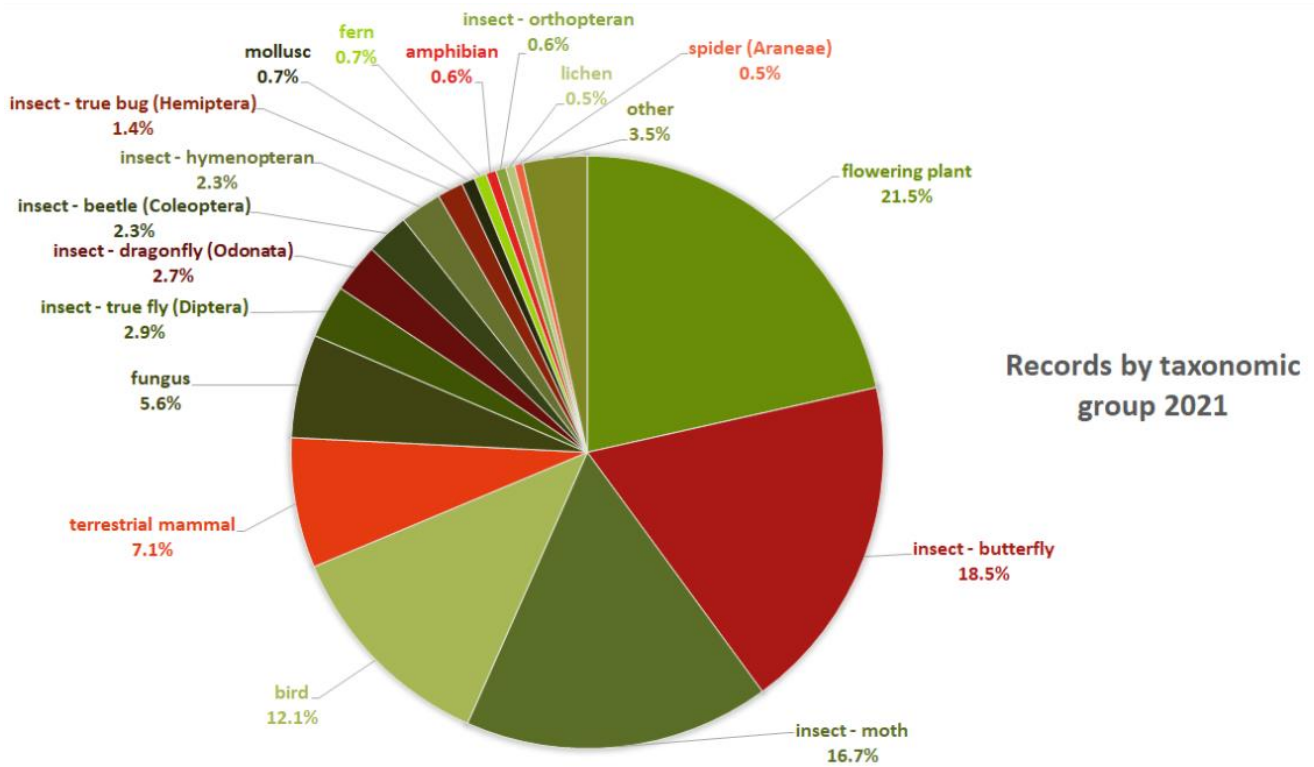
South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC)

South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre (SWSEIC) is the local environmental records centre for Dumfries and Galloway and Ayrshire, acting as a focal point for gathering and sharing local wildlife information. The Centre is hosted by SUP and is based, in non-Covid times, at a rural office in Kirkcubbin. The information we hold about the wildlife and habitats in south west Scotland continues to grow, with over 2.5 million records held on our central database. Huge thanks go to our local wildlife recorders whose efforts help to grow our understanding of the species, both common and rare, found throughout the region. We continue to promote the iRecord website and smartphone app as the best way to enter and share general wildlife records to both SWSEIC and to national recording schemes and societies, and over 24,000 records for our region were shared via this route in 2021.



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The most frequently recorded species was a butterfly, Green-veined White *Pieris napi* with 479 records. In fact, ignoring bats recorded as a result of automatic detectors (which counts every flight pass as an individual record), all of the top 10 most frequently recorded species were butterflies. This demonstrates not only the popularity of these insects, but the popularity of iRecord amongst butterfly recorders.



South west Scotland records submitted to iRecord in 202, broken down by species group

Although the ongoing pandemic still affected our operations and SWSEIC staff continued to work from home, we were delighted to be able to mix online events with some in-person activities undertaken with the appropriate COVID precautions. In May we supported the Garnock Connections Landscape Partnership in holding a virtual BioBlitz, which saw over 400 records of 233 species recorded throughout the partnership area.

We were able to undertake some moth-trapping activities with local communities, where light traps were loaned out to people to place in their gardens. The results were collated digitally from photos rather than our usual community meet-up. We undertook a limited amount of recording for our Mammals at Home project, supported by the Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership. Our remote camera traps recorded footage of a range of mammal species, including Pine Marten and even a tiny Water Shrew. It was a pleasure to meet and chat to local wildlife enthusiasts at the superb Moffat Golden Eagle Festival.



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A recording day was held at the Mull of Galloway on 19th August, where SWSEIC staff and volunteer wildlife recorders gathered to record some of the species on the SSSI. Just under 250 different species were recorded.



Images, left-right, top-bottom: Golden Samphire @Peter Norman; Bulrush Wainscot @Mark Pollitt; 11-spot Ladybird @Peter Norman; Green Leaf-hopper Cicaella viridis @Alison Robertson; Common Lizard @Jon Noad; Linnet @Peter Norman

Whilst online was still the order of the day for some of our training courses, we managed to incorporate some outdoor training days, looking at fungi, birds and on general wildlife recording.

In November, in partnership with Garnock Connections, we ran our first online wildlife recorders conference. Although the event was reasonably successful, we hope to be able to resume in-person conferences again in 2022/23.

Our monthly e-newsletter remains popular, with 650 people on our mailing list. Copies of recent newsletters and a sign-up form to join our mailing list are available on the SWSEIC website

[South West Scotland Environmental Information Centre - SWSEIC](https://www.southwestscotland.org.uk)



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For more information, contact

Mark Pollitt (mpollitt@swseic.org.uk) or Peter Norman (pnorman@swseic.org.uk)



Mark Williams leading our 'Fungi for Beginners event' at Eglinton Country Park

Next Steps for the Southern Uplands Partnership

For now, Covid seems to have faded into the background allowing a new normal to become established. SUP has been involved in discussions with a wide range of its partners and new projects are taking shape. The growing acceptance that we face a climate and nature crisis is continuing to stimulate new thinking and we are well-placed to help on a number of fronts. Natural capital is increasingly seen as a concept to improve land management and drive change. The drive to net zero is also becoming mainstreamed, and this will impact us all. SUP Services Ltd is working with key partners to promote the opportunities that net zero offers to adaptable local businesses and to young people who are interested in the built environment. There will also be new opportunities for those who want to play a role in stopping the decline in nature and regenerative agriculture is a term we will be hearing more of in future.

SUP is significantly benefitting from the expanded core team, and we hope to enlarge it further in the coming months.

We are delighted that the Destination Tweed bid for lottery funding has been successful. We are now applying for match funding for the other 50% of the amount needed for us to extend the Connecting Threads project team and deliver a really exciting five-year programme.

We are also really pleased to be developing good working partnerships with new agencies such as South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) and South Scotland Destination Alliance (SSDA). The year ahead looks very positive.



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Thank You!

We could not do what we do without the support of our patrons, funders and members

Patrons of Southern Uplands Partnership



Funders and Partners

Creative Arts Business Network; Creative Carbon Scotland; Dumfriesshire East Community Benefit Group; Dumfries and Galloway Council; European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development; Forestry and Land Scotland; Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership Scheme; Inspiring Scotland; LEADER; National Heritage Lottery Fund; NatureScot; North Ayrshire Council; Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme; Rewilding Britain; RSPB Scotland; Rural Communities Testing Change Fund; Scottish Borders Council; Scottish Forestry; Scottish Land and Estates; ScottishPower Renewables; Scottish Rural Development Programme; South Ayrshire Council; South of Scotland Destination Alliance; South of Scotland Enterprise, The People's Project, The Scottish Government; Tweed Forum; Visit Kelso



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