

Midlothian Tourism Action Plan 2016-2020



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Introduction

Tourism is one of Scotland's most important industries, touching on every part of the country including, of course, Midlothian. A huge amount of activity has been undertaken since the last Midlothian Tourism Action Plan, covering 2013-15, and this strategy is a natural follow-up to that.

In our fast-moving world, it is impossible to predict the future but this strategy sets out the direction for tourism in Midlothian up to 2020. It has been compiled following very wide consultation with members and supporters across Midlothian, reinforcing the fact that tourism is, indeed, everyone's business.

Our plan for Midlothian makes links with the national tourism strategy Tourism Scotland 2020 and builds on the success of the opening of the Borders Railway in September 2015, which put Midlothian firmly in the spotlight. Our priorities capitalise on Midlothian's strengths and opportunities and, each year, we will

agree an action plan showing how the strategy will be implemented in more detail.

Midlothian Tourism Forum, a membership organisation, enjoys the ongoing support of Midlothian Council and VisitScotland and, as members, we are extremely grateful for that. Accordingly, this strategy will be implemented in partnership with them and others who share our aim of making the most of tourism across the area. We hope that this strategy, covering 2016-2020, will encourage more people to visit Midlothian, enjoy a better experience in Midlothian and return to Midlothian, and we look forward to working through the priorities over the next five years.

IAN GARDNER

Chairman

Midlothian Tourism Forum

1. Visitor Experience and Product Development

TOURISM AUDIT

As part of the preparation for the opening of the Borders Railway, a tourism audit of Midlothian and the Borders was carried out by Tourism and Leisure Solutions in early 2015. The audit included a comprehensive analysis

of Midlothian's strengths and opportunities and its findings are summarised below. The opportunities identified provide a robust context, and basis for, this action plan.

CURRENT STRENGTHS

- ♦ Key magnet attractions with some close to the railway
- ♦ Activity facilities for the youth and family markets
- ♦ Heritage properties offering accommodation and/or small scale meeting facilities
- ♦ Major retail facilities attracting visitors into the area
- ♦ Proximity to and ease of access from Edinburgh

POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES

- ♦ Large scale events attracted into the area
- ♦ Sporting and active events for less committed participants & spectators
- ♦ Outdoor activities for less committed markets looking for "soft" exercise.
- ♦ Joint marketing of heritage properties offering accommodation and/or meeting facilities
- ♦ Food & Drink: Increase participation in independent accreditation schemes and support new related events.
- ♦ Local heritage in our towns and villages
- ♦ Business Tourism: develop markets for conferences & seminars.

PRODUCT GAPS AND WEAKNESSES

- ♦ No large scale serviced or self-catering accommodation for business and leisure tourism groups
- ♦ No dedicated and high quality meeting facilities capable of accommodating larger events of over 200 delegates
- ♦ No dedicated indoor facilities for live indoor cultural events like theatre or music.
- ♦ Few independent retailers and limited crafts and visual art studios and galleries.
- ♦ Lack of a clear identity for local towns that may be viewed simply as suburbs of Edinburgh.
- ♦ Some town centres lack animation or vibrancy to attract and retain visitors.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ♦ Position Midlothian as an exciting destination for younger visitors and family groups
- ♦ Activity around a "Midlothian Meetings" brand to highlight the unique heritage ambience of participating venues
- ♦ Additional promotion of visitor facilities in the area at the main retail complexes in Midlothian.
- ♦ Better planning, co-ordination and promotion of events to bring people into Midlothian
- ♦ Promoting the range of food and drink establishments in operation, encouraging high standards and promoting local suppliers
- ♦ Celebrating Midlothian's rural nature and encouraging safe access
- ♦ Using key iconic heritage sites to draw more people to and around Midlothian



THEMED YEARS

The Scottish Government has identified a series of themes as part of the strategy of 'focus years'. Over the lifespan of this strategy, the themes include

- ♦ 2016 – Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design
- ♦ 2017 – Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology
- ♦ 2018 – Year of Young People

ACTIONS

To maximise the opportunities from the tourism audit and themed years, we will prioritise key areas, for product and experience development. We have identified 'champions' from Midlothian Tourism Forum to lead consultations with other members and partners to propose plans and develop ideas in these areas -

- ♦ Outdoors and nature
- ♦ Built and local heritage
- ♦ Food and drink
- ♦ Events
- ♦ Cycling

- ♦ Young people/ youth tourism
- ♦ Business tourism
- ♦ Town Centres

For each year of this strategy, an action plan will be developed to outline activity to be undertaken or planned in each area. The action plan will be discussed by members and agreed in spring each year.





OUTDOORS AND NATURE

Nature-based tourism is estimated to be worth £1.4bn (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2010) to the Scottish economy. Visitors constantly say our scenery and landscape are among the main reasons for visiting and an increasing number are enjoying the many different outdoor activities available, such as walking, cycling, mountain biking, sailing, wild-life watching and fishing whilst they are here. (Tourism Scotland 2020).

Midlothian, located in close proximity to Scotland's capital city, offers a beautiful rural landscape of countryside, parklands and rolling hills to enjoy.

Midlothian Snowsports Centre is a unique venue, popular with outdoor enthusiasts and thrill seekers. Investment has allowed for an expanded programme of activities which continues to grow and which will be supported. 2016 will see the long awaited re-launch of Dalkeith Country Park after £3.5million investment. The Park will boast a new adventure play park, event space, along with dining and shopping facilities; a hub of new activity and visitor gateway for the area.

Midlothian also boasts the Pentland Hills and country parks including Vogrie and Roslin; all ideal to host a variety of events and outdoor activities.

KEY ACTIONS FOR 2016-20

- Support and encourage an expanded programme of outdoor events to help showcase our key attractions, natural



assets, towns and villages and help promote the area as a location for outdoor activities.

- Encourage collaboration between providers and develop outdoor activity itineraries to help identify and promote the range of attractions and activities on offer within the area.
- Help improve the awareness of pathways and networks around the area linking to towns, villages and places of interest and with which to enjoy outdoor activities such as walking and cycling. We will support proposals which aim to improve these path networks and those which improve access between visitor attractions or neighbouring local authority areas.
- Outdoor activities will be promoted as a key feature within ongoing digital and social media marketing campaigns and targeted marketing opportunities will be identified.



BUILT AND LOCAL HERITAGE

"By 2020 Scotland will continue to be a prime destination for outstanding heritage experiences, delivered by skilled and passionate people enjoyed by Scots and tourists alike" (Tourism Scotland 2020).

A distinctive strength for Midlothian is the range of historic properties that have been converted into high quality hotels catering for high yield guests, functions and smaller corporate events – Dalhousie, Melville and the recently refurbished Borthwick Castle. Newbattle Abbey, Oxenfoord Castle and the Mansion House of Kirkhill are also historic properties used for events or exclusive use only.

Within Midlothian is the iconic and internationally renowned Rosslyn Chapel, a magnet attraction continuing to bring visitors into Midlothian. Key to Midlothian's industrial heritage is the National Mining Museum Scotland, which benefits from being located on the new Borders Railway line bringing passengers into Midlothian. 2016 will see the opening of the new Dalkeith Museum which forms part of the eagerly anticipated multi million pounds redevelopment of Dalkeith Corn Exchange. And within Gorebridge, also served by a new rail station, their town centre is part way through a conservation scheme to repair historic buildings and spaces.

KEY ACTIONS FOR 2016-20

- Develop closer links with local history groups and heritage societies to discover more on the history of



Midlothian, our towns, villages, people and properties which could help enhance the visitor experience through interpretation or used to create new products, services or unique experiences.

- Support the promotion and encourage opportunities for collaboration and joint marketing between some of our key historic and heritage properties and spaces either within the local area and/or linking with neighbouring local authority areas.
- Doors Open Day is an annual event which takes place across the United Kingdom and Europe each September. Midlothian Doors Open Day attracts national publicity and provides an opportunity to showcase our buildings and attractions. Building on the success of the annual Doors Open Day event, link with the 2017 themed year of History, Heritage and Archaeology to develop a "Midlothian Heritage Week" which will take place in Spring 2017.

FOOD AND DRINK

Food and drink is an essential component of any visit to Scotland. 21% (or £1 in every £5) of all visitor spend is on food and drink. The quality, variety, consistency and availability of the food and drink offering is of increasing importance in the development of a quality tourism destination. (Tourism Scotland 2020)

Midlothian plays host to an array of restaurants and food producers, some artisan in nature celebrating growing success and some enjoying success in the international market place. Each year the Midlothian Food & Drink Awards are held to help celebrate local success and raise the profile of our food and drink offering.

Food and drink activities in the area are growing, local craft brewery Stewart Brewing have expanded activities to offer unique “brew your own beer” visitor experiences along with brewery tours. Food and drink events have also been increasing – the annual Beer Festival held at the Paper Mill Restaurant and Stewart Brewing’s annual Food and Drink Festival. Penicuik Business Improvement District have successfully piloted a monthly farmers market with a focus on local produce. This event has now become a regular feature in the town’s event calendar. And there has been an increase of family friendly restaurants within the area, both within the Lasswade/Dobbies area and around Straiton Retail Park.



KEY ACTIONS FOR 2016-20

- Support and encourage an expanded programme of local food and drink events to help showcase the area and our local food and drink offering. This could include development of food trails, food festivals or unique experiences or events which promote the use of local or seasonal produce.
- Working alongside Business Gateway, develop a programme of activity to encourage raised standards across the industry. This will include delivery of a workshop to improve awareness of food and drink accreditation schemes, local produce and help create links with education.
- Encourage joint promotion of local food and drink providers in the area by collating business information and promoting on www.visitmidlothian.org.uk and through specific focused marketing to locals and visitors.
- Support the development of Midlothian Food and Drink Group to help explore opportunities for collaboration to help improve the integration of local food and drink into other elements of the visitor offer.



EVENTS

Tourism Scotland 2020 identifies festivals and events as two of the four key assets that provide ‘authentic experiences’ for Scotland’s visitors and which underpin the industry’s growth ambitions.

The events and festivals sector in Scotland is very diverse. Partnerships are vital to delivering events and crucial to maximising their impact and creating a legacy from each event and from the overall portfolio. (Tourism 2020)

Events and the desire to develop, enhance and expand them, has been a common theme throughout each of the strategy focus group areas. The 2015 tourism audit recognises expanding Midlothian’s event portfolio as a key opportunity for the sector.

There are a number of existing longer standing, larger scale events held on an annual basis; the Midlothian Science Festival continues to enjoy growth and 2016 will see a spotlight to celebrate the 20th birthday of Dolly the Sheep. Dalkeith Country Park plays host to a growing portfolio of events including Dalkeith Agricultural Show and the growing Midstock music event. On opening, this new facility will be a key event venue for the area and should be supported. The annual walking festival has become a key date in the local events diary and the snow sports centre is highlighted as a key venue for sporting and outdoor events.



KEY ACTIONS FOR 2016-20

- Establish an events group for Midlothian to help facilitate peer support, identify opportunities, share knowledge and develop programme of support to aid event development and growth.
- Develop a local events calendar which would help identify and promote the range of existing events and also identify gaps and opportunities.
- Work with event organisers and other providers to gather market intelligence and visitor information to help determine visitor activity and profiling which could be used to help shape event development and target marketing.
- Support event organisers and encourage collaboration and coordination across the sector and with neighbouring regions to help build Midlothian’s portfolio of local events.



CYCLE TOURISM

The Value of Cycle Tourism Report (Transform Scotland 2013) estimates the value of cycle tourism in Scotland as £117-£239 million per year. Launched by Sustrans and the Cycle Tourism Forum, the report offers a series of recommendations which include; clearer information on cycle routes and opportunities, improved marketing of cycle routes and events, promotion of Visit Scotland's Cyclists Welcome Scheme and continued development of cyclists routes.

Midlothian currently benefits from a good network of local paths, some of which pass through picturesque towns, villages and countryside rural settings. Two longer-distance routes connect with the National Cycle Network, and in 2015 the Forum published a map and guide to the North Esk Cycle Loop, a circular ride aimed at attracting visiting and local cyclists. The Forum continues to publish Cycle Midlothian!, an annual listing of local restaurants, cafes and visitor attractions that welcome cyclists, and the popularity of this continues to grow. Four businesses in Midlothian gained the Cyclists Welcome award during the lifetime of the previous tourism strategy. The tourism audit also specifically identified that the area has a sizeable cycling business sector.



KEY ACTIONS FOR 2016-20

- Encourage attractions, food and drink providers and bike hire businesses to develop their attractiveness to cyclists and participate in schemes such as "Cycle Midlothian!" and VisitScotland's Cyclists Welcome Scheme.
- Explore opportunities for improved marketing and branding of existing routes. Including interpretation or signposting to highlight specific themes, points of interest, links to history/heritage and between visitor attractions.
- Support collaboration between neighbouring towns/villages, groups and local authorities to explore opportunities for new route development, marketing and improved connectivity.
- Help improve the perception of Midlothian as a cycling destination by increasing the availability of local information available digitally and via social media channels.



YOUTH TOURISM

The youth tourism market is an important market to Scotland. Despite the recent tough economic climate the 16-24 year olds have remained a constant market. Trends show that although they may not be the most cash rich demographic to visit a destination, they are likely to spend longer in the destination than other tourists. And they show greater interest in themed activities such as theme parks, amusements, zoos, safari parks, aquariums, TV/film locations and high adventure activities. (The Youth Market to Scotland, Visit Scotland 2014)

The 2015 tourism audit identifies the range of innovative facilities for the active younger markets as a particular strength for the area. Specific examples of this include the Ryze indoor trampoline centre and Transgression Park indoor skate park and biking facility, Edinburgh Combat Centre, Midlothian Snowsports Centre and Edinburgh Butterfly and Insect World.

KEY ACTIONS FOR 2016-20

- Complete an audit of experiences most attractive to the youth tourism market which will be used to help promote Midlothian as a destination for youth travel.



- Support and develop a digitally focused marketing campaign i.e. through bloggers, social media, targeting youth market and working collaboratively with similar Midlothian providers.
- Develop links with the Youth Travel Edinburgh Group, Young Scot and educational groups, including schools, colleges and universities to encourage joint working, promotions and identify marketing opportunities.
- Encourage, facilitate and support collaboration with likeminded operators within Midlothian and neighbouring authorities in order to develop packages and itineraries of interest to this market.



BUSINESS TOURISM

Business tourism is identified as one of the main drivers for growth in the national strategy Tourism 2020. In 2012 business tourism accounted for 18% of the total tourism expenditure to Scotland. Spend per night by business visitors are on average 1.5 times higher than that of leisure visitors. (VisitScotland).

A key strength for Midlothian as identified in the 2015 Tourism Audit is the number of heritage hotels and properties with small scale meeting facilities. Whilst Midlothian lacks a sizeable event space to accommodate conferences and events of larger scale, a study conducted in 2013 shows that the majority of business events held in Scotland; (61%) were for 50 delegates or fewer with only 6% for more than 200. The average event size was 76 delegates. (Business Event Tourism in Scotland 2013).

Researching the market potential for developing larger dedicated conference and meeting facilities in Midlothian and linking with science sector is identified within the audit as a key opportunity and will be



supported. However in the shorter term, support will be offered to help attract and drive business towards the existing portfolio of venues.

KEY ACTIONS FOR 2016-20

- Strengthen Midlothian's business tourism offering by collating and providing comprehensive information on providers and make this more accessible to market.
- Encourage and facilitate collaboration between venues, activity providers and attractions to create packages to enhance the Midlothian offering.
- Forge links with the science and research sector in Midlothian to showcase venues, facilities and packages.
- Building on the strength of the previous "Meet in Midlothian" brand we will work collaboratively to develop a targeted programme of marketing aimed at the meeting and incentives market.



TOWN CENTRES

Cutting across many of these areas will be additional work to enhance town centres. Within the national strategy Tourism 2020, Destination Towns and Cities have been recognized as an opportunity for which to offer authentic experiences for visitors. Projects which make our town centres an attractive place to work, set up business and help increase their appeal to visitors will be supported.

Midlothian's town centres provide shopping, as well as commercial, leisure and office facilities. Opportunities to improve town centres and to support growth and diversification are supported through the Midlothian Local Development Plan.

In Midlothian we have seen some strong examples of success within our town centres. The Borders Railway has improved links to our town centres, provided opportunities to reach new markets and potential to increase accommodation for visitors. Dalkeith Town Centre has undergone major regeneration with improvements to historic buildings and spaces with funding made available through the Townscape Heritage Initiative and Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme. A similar scheme is currently ongoing in Gorebridge Town Centre. Penicuik Town Centre has become the first Business Improvement District in Midlothian after a successful ballot in May 2015.



Schemes which encourage town centre improvements and increased vibrancy will be supported. This may include improved signage or interpretation projects, events within town centres which encourage increased visitors, initiatives which improve retail footfall and develop the evening economy or improvements to spaces or public realm.

The tourism audit also specifically notes the lack of specialist retailers within our town centres.



2. Marketing

Midlothian is often overshadowed by Edinburgh, or assumed to be simply an extension of the capital. Recurring feedback suggests that Midlothian should have a stronger identity of its own and more cohesive and focused marketing to promote its visitor proposition.

Although not primarily a marketing organisation, by working collaboratively, Midlothian Tourism Forum will help to establish a stronger sense of identity and stronger brand, reinforcing the key attributes of Midlothian and promoting year-round tourism.

We will seek to determine more information on our visitor markets by working with members and providers to gather local market intelligence and customer profiling. By identifying the variety of tourism experiences offered by businesses and matching them to target markets, Midlothian Tourism Forum will work closely with VisitScotland and Midlothian Council to ensure that all consumer marketing and PR has a strong customer focus and is in line with customer needs and business expectations rather than a blanket message of 'Visit Midlothian'.

The Forum will lead on

- Website – www.visitmidlothian.org.uk with particular emphasis on developing content, improve the overall attractiveness of the site and promoting it.
- Social media activity including increasing the number

of followers on Facebook and Twitter, identifying other channels such as Instagram, and encouraging bloggers to visit Midlothian.

- Identifying the variety of tourism experiences offered by businesses and matching them to target markets.
- Developing partnerships between Midlothian businesses, Midlothian Council, VisitScotland and other regions which complements or help strengthen our tourism products and services.
- Identify opportunities for packaging and collaborating with likeminded providers within the region or with neighbouring regions to improve the attractiveness of our tourism experience or offering.

Particular focus will be placed on digital and helping to provide members with the skills to improve their on-line presence and ensure they are offering customers an excellent on-line experience. We will link specifically with support programmes such as Digital Tourism Scotland and services offered by Business Gateway to determine need and help build capacity.

ACTION

The existing visitor information sub-group will co-ordinate this activity and regular updates will be given to members.

3. Accessibility

There are very good reasons for businesses and organisations to become as accessible as possible. Legally, the Equality Act expects businesses to make reasonable adjustments to become as accessible as possible. Commercially, it is a large market with over 12.2 million disabled people plus over 6.5 million carers in the UK and, importantly, it is a very loyal market, with many people very likely to return to venues that have good accessibility. There are probably some differences to the market from the way we perceive it – for example, only 8% of disabled people use a wheelchair, far more people

are partially sighted than blind and many more have a hearing impairment than are totally deaf.

Midlothian Tourism Forum will work with members to

- improve awareness of accessibility issues
- share good practice in making adjustments and improvements, both to places and in customer service
- help to promote 'Accessible Midlothian', including through an online access guide on the Visit Midlothian website.

4 Transport

Midlothian is well placed to encourage day visitors from Edinburgh, the Lothians, Borders and further afield, as well as overnight visitors staying in the area itself. The ease of access to the area by public transport, especially from Edinburgh, is a key strength.

Midlothian Tourism Forum will work with Midlothian Council and Forum members to

- Promote and enhance ease of access to the area as a whole and member businesses in particular.
- Continue to work with Borders Railway partners including Scotrail, Scottish Borders Council, City of Edinburgh Council, Scottish Enterprise, Visit Scotland and Transport Scotland to help maximise the opportunities from the new Railway and develop destinations and offers that will attract visitors into the area.
- Support improvements to public realm within town centres and rail stations to improve the visitor welcome on arrival in Midlothian. This could include measures which make our town centres more attractive to visitors.
- Promote and support transport integration projects from our rail stations to make onward travel as easy and cost-effective as possible. This includes supporting the pilot new visitor bus service in 2016 linking Newtongrange station and key local attractions.



5. Skills

A highly skilled industry is imperative for the success of tourism.

Building on industry research, we will seek to identify gaps and opportunities for improving skills across the industry. We will actively work with partners at local and regional level to influence the development of training programmes to help fill these gaps and ensure issues around tourism are heard.

We will also seek to develop links with partner agencies and organisations such as Edinburgh College, Scotlands Young Workforce Board and local High Schools to encourage

young people to see tourism as a career of choice.

ACTION:

A skills development programme will be developed by Midlothian Tourism Forum in partnership with Business Gateway, Midlothian Council and other appropriate community planning groups and providers.. This will cover topics such as enhancing skills in customer service, disability awareness, digital marketing and link with the Digital Tourism Scotland Programme.

6. Role of Midlothian Tourism Forum

The Forum is a non-profit making organisation whose overall aim is to promote tourism within Midlothian.

The Forum's main objectives are to:

1. Promote tourism within Midlothian
2. Provide a network for tourism operators and those with a commitment to tourism in Midlothian
3. Protect and promote the interests of Midlothian's tourism operators to government bodies and other organisations
4. Provide links with organisations outwith Midlothian whose interests coincide with those of the Forum
5. To foster and assist programmes which improve tourism within Midlothian

In order to improve the Forum's sustainability and impact, we will work to grow the membership by recruiting and retaining members. We will improve communication with members, raise awareness about the Forum within Midlothian, and continue to work in partnership with others, such as the Chamber of Commerce and Business Gateway.

ACTION:

The Forum's work will be led by a Steering Group, comprising the Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary and lead representatives from Midlothian Council and VisitScotland.



COMMUNICATING CLEARLY

We are happy to translate on request and provide information and publications in other formats, including Braille, tape or large print.

如有需要我們樂意提供翻譯本，和其他版本的資訊與刊物，包括盲人點字、錄音帶或大字體。

Zapewnimy tłumaczenie na żądanie oraz dostarczymy informacje i publikacje w innych formatach, w tym Braillem, na kasecie magnetofonowej lub dużym drukiem.

ਅਸੀਂ ਮੰਗ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਨਾਲ ਅਨੁਵਾਦ ਅਤੇ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰਾਂਗੇ, ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਰੇਲ, ਟੇਪ ਜਾਂ ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਹਨ।

Körler için kabartma yazılar, kaset ve büyük nüshalar da dahil olmak üzere, istenilen bilgileri sağlamak ve tercüme etmekten memnuniyet duyuyoruz.

اگر آپ چاہیں تو ہم خوشی سے آپ کو ترجمہ فراہم کر سکتے ہیں اور معلومات اور دستاویزات دیگر شکلوں میں مثلاً بریل (تایید افراد کے لیے) ہجڑے ہوئے حروف کی لکھائی) میں، ٹیپ پر یا بڑے حروف کی لکھائی میں فراہم کر سکتے ہیں۔

Contact 0131 270 7500 or email: enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk



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