

Draft Scottish Borders Cycle Tourism Strategy 2016-2021

'Keeping up the momentum'

1. Purpose of Document

The purpose of this document is to set out a proposed five year strategy for cycle tourism in the Scottish Borders until 2021. It details the product strengths, the challenges and the ambitions of using cycling as a means to deliver economic benefit to the area. It also highlights key issues needing to be addressed. A proposed Action Plan details how three key objectives will be achieved through the support of collaborative working. This document will be used as part of a consultation exercise ensuring that all relevant partners and interested groups are fully engaged with prior to progressing an agreed Action Plan.

2. Introduction

The Scottish Borders has a long-established and substantial leisure cycling offer along with world-class mountain biking at the 7stanes sites at Glentress, Innerleithen, Newcastleton, and also a series of natural trails. The natural assets of the Scottish Borders provides a wonderful cycling playground and a range of cycle friendly services. Unlike other activities, cycling¹ is available throughout the Borders offering a good opportunity for geographic spread.

Following the development of the 7stanes and a concerted effort to promote leisure cycling from 2009 via the Scottish Borders Recreational Cycling Group (SBRCG), cycling has become a key tourism product for the area. The SBRCG comprised a number of organisations and interests with either a remit for, or an interest in, the promotion of leisure cycling. This period of activity coincided with a growth in the number of cycling and mountain biking events with TweedLove, the Tour de Lauder, the Tour o' the Borders and the Enduro World Series exploding on to the scene helping to promote the area and firmly putting it on the 'map'.

Activity to date has mostly relied on funding from sources such as LEADER or LUPS, or as support activity around the regular hosting of the Tour of Britain, resulting in infrequent bursts of activity and momentum. Some of this funding supported a Project Manager working a few days each month delivering planned activity. As part of the LEADER-funded projects by the SBRCG a website was developed under the heading of Cycle Scottish Borders. On the completion of the second LEADER project the final report concluded that going forward both leisure cycling and mountain biking should be promoted together, i.e. in an 'all wheels' project. Due to a lack of funding this idea has not been progressed.

There is now a need to consider activity to date whilst looking at the bigger opportunity and to develop an Action Plan using cycle tourism as a means to increase economic benefit to the Scottish Borders.

¹ Unless otherwise specified and for the purposes of this document, 'cycling' refers to both leisure cycling and mountain biking.

3. Value of Cycle Tourism

Cycling is a thriving sector of Scotland's tourism industry. VisitScotland's research shows that in the first nine months of 2015 alone, GB residents who took part in cycling and mountain biking during overnight or day trips to Scotland spent almost £155 million. There is fantastic potential to build on that to increase the impact and benefits for the whole country and for the Scottish Borders, which offers some of Scotland's most exceptional landscapes and outstanding routes and trails for the activity.

Little or no data exists specifically for the Scottish Borders, and this has been identified as an issue going forward. Without baseline data it is difficult to identify growth targets or to measure what success may look like.

Issue – there is a requirement to better understand the cycle
tourism market

4. Strategic Considerations

Ambitious for the Borders sets out that the Council administration will ensure that economic development is the key driver by:

- Supporting our communities through a focused programme of regeneration and rural development with an emphasis on working with the Scottish Government
- Strengthening our targeted marketing strategy to attract business into the Scottish Borders and building on the opportunities provided by the Borders Railway

Furthermore the ***Scottish Borders Economic Strategy 2023*** has four key strategic aims:

- Creating the conditions for business to compete
- Building on our assets
- Developing the workforce of the future
- Providing Leadership

In addition SBC's ***Corporate Plan*** has eight priorities, which relate to both external and internal facing services. The two that are most relevant to this Action Plan are:

- Encouraging sustainable economic growth
- Developing our assets and resources

Furthermore, consideration must be given to the need to

- Maximising the Place – town centres, activity tourism and location
- Focusing on our competitive advantage and also our natural assets
- Encouraging entrepreneurial activity.
- Opportunities for economic diversification and further development of the rural economy.

4.1 Local Access and Transport Strategy

This consultation document contains a section on cycling and walking and suggests a long term future cycling network, primarily utilising the existing former rail network. Specifically it acknowledges that cycling and walking are fundamental elements of any integrated transport

system offering a wide range of benefits including cheap flexible transport, increased health benefits and pollution-free travel.

A number of relevant discussion points are raised in this document including a potential pilot project to develop and promote 'Sections of Quiet Road'. This section of quieter road at a selected location would be specifically linked to the development of a strategic shared access network for the Scottish Borders. Such an initiative would deliver economic and tourism related benefits for the area.

Another discussion point within this document includes safeguarding the 125 mile network of former railway lines, which have the potential to be used as safer walking, cycling and horse riding routes.

4.2 Cycling Action Plan for Scotland

This document by Cycling Scotland contains 19 actions, and outlines how through working in partnership the shared vision that by 2020, 10% of everyday journeys taken in Scotland will be by bike, will be achieved.

These actions include Borders specific approaches to supporting functional cycling, the promotion and support of community-led cycling initiatives and the development of the National Cycling Network.

4.3 Abellio ScotRail Cycle Innovation Plan

This details Abellio ScotRail's vision and approach to sustainable transport. Specifically it details plans to include a Bike & Go service at Tweedbank, their intention to support feature cycle events and also develop a leisure programme for popular cycle destinations such as the Scottish Borders. Furthermore cycle events will be a mandatory item on the agenda of the ScotRail Cycle Forum.

4.4 The South East Scotland Strategic Development Plan Authority

SESplan is a partnership of six Member Authorities comprising the City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, Fife, Scottish Borders and West Lothian, working together on strategic development planning matters. SESplan's key role is to prepare and maintain an up to date Strategic Development Plan (SDP) for the South East Scotland area. This process involves engaging key stakeholders and the wider community. The first SDP was approved by Scottish Ministers in June 2013.

4.5 Green Networks

Scottish Natural Heritage encourages a green network. Such a network has multiple objectives, often with a primary aim of improving the environment for people, and usually to help to improve the economic status of an area, by making it more attractive place to live and work. SBC has fed into this network

4.6 The Tourism Development Framework

Published by VisitScotland with input from many parties, including SBC, the Tourism Development Framework for Scotland looks at the role of the planning system in delivering the visitor economy. It contains a specific section on leisure cycling and mountain biking and reference is made to the Glentworth Masterplan. This document also contains development priorities for the Scottish Borders across a number of areas including transport, accommodation and activities with specific reference included on mountain biking and the railway.

4.7 The National Tourism Strategy

The National Strategy: *Tourism Scotland 2020* was developed to target markets offering the greatest growth potential, focusing on developing key assets through collaboration in order to offer visitors a diverse range of authentic experiences. The Strategy states 'playing' to Scotland's strengths is one half of the step change required. In order to develop quality and authentic tourism experiences we must also build the capability of our businesses and the industry as a whole in the following key areas:

- Leadership and collaboration
- Sustainable tourism
- Quality and skills
- Marketing

4.8 Regional Tourism Context

The Scottish Borders Area Tourism Partnership's vision up until 2020 is to grow tourism visits and spend in the Scottish Borders, through positioning and promotion as, a sustainable, year-round destination, which capitalises on its unique geography, heritage, natural environment and people. Cycling features as a key action within the ATP's plan.

4.9 Event Strategies

With the increase in cycling events in the area it is worth noting that VisitScotland's Events Strategy states the need:

- to utilise and develop the assets that Scotland has which make it The Perfect Stage for events
- to deliver a portfolio of events which provide world leading authentic experiences for residents and visitors

SBC's Events Plan 2014-2020 has the following objectives:

- To support the development of events
- To encourage effective event promotion and marketing
- To ensure events are evaluated so we understand their economic impact

5. Competitive Positioning

In a previous LEADER-funded project for leisure cycling the Scottish Borders was positioned as 'Scotland's leading cycling destination'. It should be noted that although mountain biking was not explicitly promoted as part of this project the world class status of 7stanes was implied, or 'borrowed', to help reinforce this positioning.

Furthermore, as a result of a pilot project to expand VisitScotland's Cyclists Welcome Scheme the Borders is well served with scheme members and this adds weight to the Scottish Borders being the most friendly cycling destination in Scotland.

The growth in the number of cycling events continues to help raise the profile and provide plenty of content for social media. In short, the area has a wealth of cycle tourism assets.

Although very little specific marketing activity currently takes place, the 'leading' positioning continues to be used as and when the opportunity arises e.g. during the promotion of the Tour of

Britain to promote Cycle Scottish Borders, and where relevant in VisitScotland's regional marketing activity.

It should be noted that at the time the 'leading destination' positioning was created few areas in Scotland were using cycling as a key product message and as a result the Scottish Borders was often cited as best practice in cycle tourism. These days there are other Local Authorities who are keen to do more to promote the cycling in their areas, however only a few have the mix of mountain biking and leisure cycling – e.g. Perthshire, Dumfries & Galloway and the Highlands. Fife has previously undertaken significant activity to promote their leisure cycle routes and more recently Edinburgh and the Lothian's Area Tourism Partnership has explored the possibility of working collaboratively to promote leisure cycling across the wider region. Midlothian has subsequently taken a further step by hosting a stand-alone workshop to develop their cycle tourism offer and have now published a factsheet on cycle-friendly businesses. They are also keen to maximise cycling and walking opportunities associated with the Borders Railway. Glasgow and Dundee also have broad cycling strategies that are not tourism specific.

Beyond Scotland, areas such as Yorkshire, the Lake District, the Peak District and Devon & Cornwall all have good cycling product and some have very good mountain biking. The hosting of the Grand Depart of the Tour de France in Yorkshire, and the high profile Tour de Yorkshire have done much to position Yorkshire as a key cycling destination in the UK. These areas (and many others) also host stages of the Tour of Britain which shine a media spotlight and help add credibility to a destination. Wales also has a good offering of both cycling and mountain biking and a range of cycling events such as the Velothon Wales with 18,000 riders taking part in this closed road sportive, and the Dragon Ride with four distances including the Dragon Devil offering a 305km route for more experienced riders. It is an increasingly competitive market from a domestic tourism perspective and without having a presence in the market place the Scottish Borders will be difficult to find and the potential to increase economic benefit will be greatly reduced.

Overseas competitors are many and varied and include Majorca, Italy, numerous alpine/mountain destinations in Europe, and also much further afield e.g. the USA, Canada or in New Zealand.

Issue – in an increasingly competitive environment the Scottish Borders needs to be promoted, however funding for this activity is limited

6. Scottish Borders Product Strengths

6.1 Leisure Cycling

There are hundreds of miles of leisure cycling routes on mainly quiet roads across the Borders, including a good range of long distance routes. Please refer to the map in the Appendix.

- The Borderloop is 250 miles long and provides a reasonably comprehensive tour of the area.
- The 4 Abbeys is 55 miles long and links the Borders' key abbeys
- Tweed Cycle Route follows the course of the Tweed along a 95 mile route
- The Coast & Castles route uses NCN1 and passes through the area from Newcastle to Edinburgh.
- The Southern Borders Loop, a recent addition to the long distance routes, links Hawick and Newcastleton over two distance choices; as yet not specifically signposted.

The area is also well served by an excellent range of shorter local cycling trails from:

Duns – 5 trails at 4.5, 10, 16, 16.5 and 25.5 mile distances

Eyemouth – 4 trails at 8.5, 14, 20 and 26 mile distances

Hawick – 4 trails at 7, 14, 14.5 and 19 mile distances

Innerleithen – 3 trails at 37, 42 and 53 mile distances, including the local favourite Megget & Talla

Jedburgh – 5 trails at 7, 11.5, 17.5, 19 and 20 mile distances

Kelso – 5 trails at 5.5, 14, 18.5, 20.5 and 24 mile distances

Melrose – 4 trails at 5, 8, 13.5 and 15.5 mile distances

Peebles – 5 trails at 7.5, 13, 20.5, 22.5 and 26 mile distances

Selkirk – 4 trails at 7, 8.5, 16 and 19.5 mile distances

The long distance routes are more suitable for confident, main purpose cyclists, whilst some of the trails from the towns provide plenty of cycling opportunities over a variety of distances.

SBC has recently developed an off-road route on the former railway line between Peebles and Innerleithen which has proven to be very popular with over 70,000 people using the path on an annual basis. Subsequently, a number of communities throughout the Scottish Borders have indicated a desire to see a strategic network of routes that would help to connect local towns and villages together.

Bike hire is available in a number of locations throughout the Borders, but predominantly in the Tweed Valley and also in Newcastleton. Electric bike hire is only available in the Tweed Valley.

Issue - although the area is well served by bike routes there is currently no bike hire in Berwickshire, and the potential for more electric bike hire also needs to be considered

6.2 Mountain Biking

The Scottish Borders can boast world-class mountain biking with the 7stanes at Glentress, Innerleithen and Newcastleton. The mountain biking options are varied and are suited to both beginners and more experienced either in cross country or downhill. The 7stanes trails are graded so users can identify the trail most suited to their ability and this provides the opportunity to either progress as their skills develop, or to participate as a family. Further details on developments in the Tweed Valley can be found in section 8.1.

Further mountain biking trails are to be found around Jedburgh, promoted locally as Jedforest Trails and comprise a unique mixture of waymarked mountain bike routes. They consist of an eclectic mix of natural and man-made surfaced trails linked by forest track and some tarmac roads. This includes the 40km Justice Trail and also three family routes.

The Duke of Roxburghe has recently provided consent for Kelso Wheelers to lease Angraflats plantation on the outskirts of Kelso for an off-road cycling area, which would provide improved local training facilities and encourage more people to take up the sport.

6.3 Welcoming Cyclists

There is excellent provision of services for cycle visitors with approximately 100 businesses in VisitScotland's Cyclists Welcome Scheme. Membership of this scheme provides these businesses with the opportunity to be listed on the Cycle Scottish Borders website for free. The Tweed Valley Tourism Consortium also promotes a Mountain Bike Hospitality Scheme for those businesses who specifically cater for the needs of mountain bikers to the area.

6.4 A Developing Events Calendar

The Scottish Borders has a very good range of cycling events to both participate in and to spectate at. Events such as TweedLove, the Tour o' the Borders, Tour de Lauder and the Enduro World Series all help to raise awareness of what the area has to offer.

The frequent hosting of the Tour of Britain brings a significant media spotlight with it and the traffic to the Cycle Scottish Borders site significantly increases when the event is in town, eg from 550 visits per week to almost 2,000.

New events continue to appear and be explored with 2016-17 looking as if it is going to have at least three new significant cycle events in the calendar (The Train Ride, The Gran Fonduro and a PoppyScotland charity cycle ride). The growth in the number of new events may have an impact on existing club events who have been experiencing a drop in participants.

In recent times the Tweed Valley has benefited from the growth in endurance events, hosting the Enduro Worlds Series twice. The market is predominantly private sector led and attracts a wide audience from both the UK and Internationally. The events are characterised by participants paying an entry fee which helps to offset the costs of the overall event. This as a new growth area which needs to be capitalised on and the Scottish Borders is a perfect location.

Issue – consider the implications in the growth in the number of cycling events given the drop off in established club events

6.5 Borders Railway

The Borders Railway provides an opportunity for more visitors to access the area with the Edinburgh catchment area alone representing a significant market. There is room for two bikes per train, if space allows more cyclists will be accommodated on each journey at the discretion of the staff. Anecdotally, travellers with bikes appear to be accommodated. As yet there is no bike hire available at any of the Borders' stations, but there is the potential for a Bike & Go facility operated in partnership with ScotRail at Tweedbank.

The nearest bike hire is available in Galashiels and also in Melrose. The railway provides an opportunity for spectators to travel and attend cycling events in the area, e.g. The Tour of Britain. Abellio ScotRail's Cycling Innovation Plan states that they will support/feature key cycle events in Scotland. Although early stages this has yet to manifest itself into anything meaningful.

There is good provision of cycle racks at the new stations and also throughout the area's towns.

Opportunities exist to work in partnership with Midlothian to promote the cycling (and walking) routes from the stations along the Borders Railway.

Issue – bike hire opportunities at the railway stations
have not yet been delivered

Issue – can the space on trains to carry bikes be
improved and incorporate the programme of cycling
related events?

7. Scottish Borders Product Challenges

A number of issues and actions were identified in the Tourism Destination Audit undertaken in 2015 as part of the activity surrounding the re-introduction of the Borders Railway. This included the need for the development of:

- additional hostel/bunkhouse style accommodation (favoured by those undertaking outdoor activities)
- bike hire at stations
- bike hire/drop off at attractions
- small group bike tours from stations
- extended opening hours of attractions
- extended opening hours for bike hire into the evening during summertime

Currently there are no packaged up attractions/ lunch and bike hire options to promote to potential visitors at present. The Borders only features in the programmes offered by a limited number of cycling tour operators – either for cycling holidays or for the purposes of training for participation in endurance events. There are also a number of operators based in the Tweed Valley offering guiding and skills coaching for mountain biking.

7.1 Infrastructure and Future Development

From consultation responses it is clear that the general public would like to see a network of custom made off-road cycle routes between our key towns and smaller settlements, providing a safer environment for cyclists of all ages and encouraging more people to park the car and use sustainable means of transport.

The key to the development of this network is the utilisation of the former railway lines that cross our area, although the promotion and development of these routes can be expensive to provide and normally require strong political support in order to succeed.

In some towns where bike trails are developed and new entry points made into towns the signage starts to become confusing, for example in Innerleithen. Existing signage needs to be considered and, if new trails are created, this needs a signage review process.

7.2 Cycle Scottish Borders

The Cycle Scottish Borders website has recently been re-developed to ensure that it is mobile responsive and easily accessed by those on phones, tablets or from interactive screens at stations and in towns. The content will continue to focus on leisure cycling with mountain biking content being provided by way of links to the 7stanes site and Jedforest Trails. Future consideration needs to be given to how best to integrate mountain biking content going forward.

The content for this site is currently kept up to date on a freelance basis when budget can be found to pay for this service. This also applies to the upkeep of the social media presence on Twitter and Facebook. There is a need to explore options to ensure that the upkeep of these services can be maintained longer term.

Issue – the main focus of the Cycle Scottish Borders website is leisure cycling, mountain biking will need to be made more prominent

Issue – is there a long term resource to manage the online presence of Cycle Scottish Borders?

7.3 Current Events

With an increase in the number of cycling events on offer across the UK there is a need to ensure that the events in the Scottish Borders are sustainable. The origin of the events is often different – some are developed by professional event organisers or charities, others by enthusiastic locals and others by established cycling clubs. Some of the events are more suited to locals or club members and others attract participants, spectators and the media from across the world.

The Tour of Britain in particular is in a class of its own; it sweeps in and out of the Borders bringing a significant entourage, thousands of spectators and considerable media coverage. The estimated EI for the area in 2015 was £307k. Average viewing figures for Stage 3 in 2015 from Cockermouth to Kelso were 250,000 for the live coverage, 385,000 for the highlights package and 36,000 from repeats. 13 TV broadcasters broadcast over 129 territories providing a total potential reach for the full event of 116,487,600.

There are also smaller cycling events that are included in the wider programmes of Common Ridings and Festivals throughout the Borders.

Some cycling events happen on one day and others last up to two weeks. Some of the events due to the size and scale have a requirement to go through the Safety Advisory Group. A number of events seek Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders and close roads – sometimes these road closures are considered an inconvenience to the local community.

Events secure funding from a variety of sources – mainly SBC and EventScotland - and others do not bother. Sponsorship is not often readily available. Each event has a different business model and some of these models are not as profitable as others. With some events outgrowing their original model there is a need for organisers to do more to monetise their events in order to develop a more sustainable model, however, this is not always easy to achieve.

Issue – events need to be developed to be sustainable in the longer term

7.4 7stanes

Following a reduction in public sector funding the 7stanes Community Interest Company (CIC) was established in 2009 and had responsibility for the promotion of all the 7stanes trail centres. Unfortunately, it has proved difficult to keep the CIC financially viable and it wound up on 31 March

2016. At this point the responsibility for the promotion of the 7stanes passed back to Forest Enterprise Scotland. Given the importance of 7stanes there is a need to ensure the promotion of the trails is maintained and that this fundamental change does not impact directly on the numbers visiting the mountain biking centres in the area.

Issue – adequate promotion of the 7stanes needs
to be in place

7.5 Collaboration and Communication

At the moment cycle tourism is often developed in isolation by the various stakeholders/groups and agencies. With the above points highlighted there needs to be a specific communication structure between the various departments within SBC and also engagement with key external agencies and partners so that the entire cycle tourism sector is catered for as changes occur and initiatives are developed.

8. The Opportunity

Looking at the wider cycle tourism market consideration needs to be given to what needs to be done to develop our facilities and welcome cycling visitors throughout the area. The Scottish Borders led the way in establishing itself as a cycle friendly destination, underpinned by an exciting event calendar, but the impetus behind this earlier initiative has fallen by the wayside due to a lack of resource. The re-introduction of the Borders Railway provides further opportunities for product development.

There is the potential for the Borders to achieve world class bike destination status and increase the economic benefit that this activity can bring to the area

There is the need to look at the many touch points cyclists come into contact with and identify areas for improvement – starting with the issues identified within the Destination Audit.

Consideration of the Tweed Valley Destination Bike concept previously outlined by Hillside Outside should also be re-visited as should any strategic plans by the Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland initiative and the Scottish Cycle Tourism Forum. Ambitions of local communities such as Ettrick & Yarrow Valley and Selkirk to develop their cycling offer should also be explored. Collaboration with Midlothian to develop cycling options along the Railway corridor should also be considered.

Furthermore following the demise of the 7stanes CIC there is a need for close working with FES and VisitScotland to ensure that the 7stanes receive the appropriate level of promotion to encourage future visitors. The continued growth in cycling events will require close working with EventScotland to ensure that the Scottish Borders is considered as a key destination to host future international and national events.

An ambitious approach appropriately resourced is now required to underpin the proposition of the Scottish Borders actually *being* Scotland's leading cycling destination, rather than just laying claim to it.

Issue – is a lack of resource holding the Scottish
Borders back?

8.1 The Tweed Valley

Glentress Forest is at the heart of the Tweed Valley and forms a key component of the Scottish Borders Tourism offer, attracting over 300,000 visitors a year. Over the last 15 years Glentress has grown to become a premier mountain biking destinations, acting as the flagship 7stanes venue with over 50 miles of world class mountain bike trails.

The Glentress Masterplan, which has recently been approved, has been developed to guide the future sustainable development of the Glentress forest visitor attraction located in the Tweed Valley between Peebles and Innerleithen. The Masterplan presents a strategic context for this part of the valley and sets out proposals for development to enhance the visitor attraction. The Scottish Borders continues to suffer from a low average stay by visitors, at 2.2 days. With that in mind the Masterplan considers a wider programme of diversification and development that could be delivered, whilst protecting and enhancing the forest park setting. FES need to allow for any refresh or modest provision of additional trail development (this poses a challenge as public resources are under pressure), hence the desire to develop new income streams through diversification into more commercial enterprises and charging for secondary activities and attractions.

Furthermore the Tweed Valley Mountain Biking Stakeholder Group has agreed a number of key actions, which will aim to continue the growth of mountain biking in the area. The Tweed Valley MTB Action Plan highlights opportunities to invest in the Glentress and Innerleithen trails and facilities, which attract over 330,000 visitors per year to the Tweed Valley Forest Park. Development of additional outdoor and indoor activities, longer opening hours for local businesses and facilities and investment in accommodation and other facilities have also been identified by the Stakeholder Group as key to building on the efforts made so far.

Proposals for a mechanical uplift at Traquair Forest by Action for the Innerleithen Mechanical Uplift (AIMUp) were also considered. It was recognised that the best prospect for taking forward the proposal was through a private sector investment as it will not be possible to provide the necessary financial support from Scottish Borders Council (SBC) and public sector partners due to uncertainty about the projected visitor numbers and the ongoing sustainability of the project at a time when public money is very tight.

Issue – the Scottish Borders suffers from a low average stay of 2.2 nights. Cycle tourism can contribute to an increase in the length of stay.

9. The Ambition

As previously stated the Scottish Borders suffers from a low average stay of 2.2 nights. There is therefore a need to develop products that encourage visitors to stay longer, ie give them more things to do using a combination of existing assets and new products.

9.1 Routes & Infrastructure

The following would enhance the product offering:

- An extension of the Tweed Valley Railway Path from Innerleithen to Walkerburn;
- The development of a route from Peebles to Roslin;
- The development of an off-road route between Galashiels and Edinburgh via Peebles;
- A route between Melrose and Oxton utilising sections of off-road paths and quieter roads;

- The development of an off-road route between Newtown St Boswells and Coldstream via Kelso ;
- The development of an off-road route between Earlston and Eyemouth via Duns and Reston;

9.2 Tourism packaging

Future development of attractive tourism packages for cyclists requires investment and collaboration. The starting point will be the key actions identified in the Tourism Destination Audit.

9.2.1 Cycling Hubs

There is scope to develop a number of towns as cycling 'hubs'. A hub could have

- a range of good cycling routes to venture out from
- cycle hire opportunities (or car parking for those who have brought their own bikes)
- a good range of businesses welcoming cyclists both in the town and along the routes
- route maps/an App
- cycling tours on offer (see 9.2 .2 for further thoughts)
- cycle racks
- cycle events, where possible
- a pilot project for 'Quiet Roads' in the vicinity of a hub

The Stirling Cycle Hub offers much of the above, and could be used as a model to explore opportunities to develop a physical presence at a railway station. Other 'hubs' have the potential to be virtual without the need of a physical presence.

Some towns already offer some of the above but are not promoted as a hub as such, although it should be noted that Newcastleton has previously been positioned as the most cycle friendly destination in Scotland linked to the number of CWS members in the village – in reality, this would now need to be re-visited.

Newcastleton and Hawick may also provide some opportunities to explore joint working with Kielder Forest.

9.2.2 The Borders Railway - Cycle Tours

As yet there is no operator offering visitors arriving by train with the opportunity to be met with a bike and taken on an afternoon/day tour of the adjacent area. These tours could visit key attractions and stop for lunch or afternoon tea thereby providing opportunities to showcase the best of the Borders Food and Drink offer and encourage geographic spread around the area.

A further, basic offering would be to have cycle hire on offer at Galashiels or Tweedbank with self-guided routes on offer.

9.2.3 Themed routes

Many other destinations have themed routes on offer and these routes can provide good hooks for promotional purposes. Consideration should be given to developing themed routes, eg Big Houses , food and drink, or Sir Walter Scott.

These routes could either be offered as cycle tour packages or as self-guided route options.

9.2.4 Events

Events provide content for promotional activity and increase traffic to the Cycle Scottish Borders website. With the range of events now on offer in the calendar, there is a need to maximise the opportunities to encourage those in attendance to stay longer, come with family/friends or do more whilst in the area. Businesses with an interest in the cycle tourism market should be encouraged to develop offers and packages and to work together. Packages around the 2017 Tour of Britain should specifically be considered.

Sponsorship of events should also be considered as opportunities for inward investment which might offer corporate hospitality packages.

9.3 Positioning

It is crucial for the Scottish Borders not to fall behind and continued product development is a priority in order to maintain a competitive position. Development of infrastructure and product development of the tourism offer are key (see above). The Scottish Borders must have a structured strategy and Action Plan with the appropriate investment in order to maintain and expand its position as Scotland's leading cycling destination.

10. The Vision

The following vision is proposed:

By 2021 the Scottish Borders will be the premier (*must visit, must return*) cycling destination in Scotland.

10.1 Strategic Aim

Scottish Borders Council will seek to deliver this vision by developing the cycle tourism product, including cycling events, by working across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The aim is:

To develop prioritised aspects of cycle tourism by capitalising on the Scottish Borders' unique selling points to increase awareness and, through the creation of packages, deliver strong economic impact.

10.2 Objectives

The overall aim is to develop the reputation of the Scottish Borders to maximise wider tourism benefits, working in partnership and leveraging the Borders Railway as opportunities arise. The following key objectives are desirable:

- Develop our cycle tourism assets – turn our assets into experiences and packages, and improve quality
- Event development – attract new, develop existing and leverage events to maximise wider tourism opportunities
- Build consumer demand – promote quality experiences to target markets

The lack of baseline data on the product and market currently restricts the opportunity to make these objectives – more specific or measurable. This is an issue needing to be addressed as the Action Plan is developed.

Issue –we need baseline data to ensure objectives are specific and measurable

11. Collaboration across public private and third sectors

In order to realise the potential and secure the Scottish Borders as the premier cycling destination within the UK, partnership working is essential. Once the cycling strategy has been completed it is imperative for Scottish Borders Council to identify methodologies to coordinate the delivery of the proposed outcomes along with the necessary management resources and funding options. The Council must facilitate effective communication across the cycle tourism sector.

11. 1 Consultation

Little can be achieved by working in isolation. It is important that the final strategy and action plan are informed with input from key stakeholders and those businesses who will be delivering the key elements of a Scottish Borders cycle tourism experience.

In order for this strategy to be effective a number of stakeholders should be part of the initial consultation process and will include, but not be limited to the following:

- Scottish Enterprise
- Borders Railway Blueprint
- Scottish Borders Chamber of Commerce
- VisitScotland
- EventScotland
- Forest Enterprise Scotland
- Abellio ScotRail
- Sustrans
- Border Sport and Leisure Trust
- Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland/Scottish Cycling
- Mountain Bike Centre of Scotland
- National Cycle Tourism Forum
- Cycling Scotland
- Tweed Valley Mountain Bike Stakeholder Group
- Private sector cycle tourism related businesses and clubs– eg event organisers, tour operators, skills/guiding companies, bike hire, accommodation providers, local cycling clubs, etc

It is hoped that the consultation with key stakeholders will be facilitated through a workshop and one to one discussions and formal feedback.