

East Dunbartonshire Tourism Strategy & Action Plan

Consultation Response from Jo Swinson MP

The preparation of a Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for East Dunbartonshire is very welcome, as the area boasts many attractions but has not made the most of the tourism opportunity they offer due to a lack of a coherent vision and plan involving VisitScotland, local businesses, East Dunbartonshire Council and the community.

I hope that the comments below will be taken into consideration as the tourism action plan is developed.

Developing the Plan

Reference is made to a review of the 2003 – 2007 Tourism Strategy in drawing up the current Plan. It does not explicitly state what that review concluded about how the current Plan should be different. I would hope that creating a **clearer umbrella brand for what East Dunbartonshire offers** is one learning point, and that dedicating resource to co-ordinating tourism is also important.

East Dunbartonshire's Tourism Product

The main attractions are listed, but I would suggest further thought needs to be given to the likely award of World Heritage Site status to the **Antonine Wall**, and how its tourism potential can be maximised. The main visitor attractions for which numbers are given does not seem to include the **West Highland Way**, which surely should be up there as one of the key attractions in terms of footfall?

Branding and Marketing

There needs to be a clear vision for what the area is offering. Given my experience of people not knowing where my constituency is, I am not convinced that "East Dunbartonshire" necessarily needs to be part of the brand. Proximity to Glasgow's transport links and our location as a gateway to the Trossachs should be stressed.

One idea would be to focus on **active holidays and short breaks** that people can take here, with such a variety of sports and outdoor pursuits on the doorstep: walking, watersports, snowsports, horse riding, cycling, hiking, camping, boat trips – the list goes on. East Dunbartonshire offers as wide an array of active pursuits as areas in the Highlands, but is much more accessible and easy to get to.

It is also important to build on existing brands, events and festivals to develop them further – for example **Kirkintilloch's canal heritage** and associated annual festival and **Milngavie's arts and books festival**.

Action Plan

The proposal to investigate having one or more **information centres** is welcome, but I think this needs to be brought forward as a priority rather than being only for the medium term. Even starting out with using sections of existing shops or other premises before moving to a dedicated information centre should be looked at, as well as finding out what models have worked elsewhere.

Looking at funding options for a **tourism officer** is also an excellent idea, and if possible should be done in conjunction with VisitScotland who I understand are looking to set up an Area Tourism Partnership. Working across all interested groups and co-ordinating existing activity is vital, and the ATP if successful could provide an excellent vehicle for this.

The Plan mentions the **2014 Commonwealth Games** opportunity. I would welcome further discussion with the Council about how East Dunbartonshire can maximise the benefit for the area of the Games, not just from a tourism perspective but also including education, commercial opportunities and obviously benefits for local sport too. Looking at how Stockport Council capitalised on the Manchester 2002 Commonwealth Games would be a useful model. Given the London **2012 Olympics**, East Dunbartonshire should also be thinking about how to link the 2012 and 2014 Games in terms of visiting teams, training bases and so on, as the benefit of coming back to a familiar place 2 years later could make East Dunbartonshire an even more attractive place for a team to base themselves for both events.

Finally, there are a couple of simple things which could be added to the Action Plan at little or no cost. One is to reinstate the **West Highland Way information board** at the start, which was removed months ago and is in storage at Mugdock Country Park. The other is to enable information about **local walks to be listed on the VisitScotland website**, in the absence of current funds to reprint the walking booklets "Explore and Enjoy" and "Meandering Around Milngavie".

Jo Swinson MP

17 April 2008