

750th Anniversary celebration of the Bruce's birth

Launching the brand

A year-long programme of events and community celebrations in 2024 will highlight the story of Robert The Bruce, a key icon of Scottish history and the Earl of Carrick, marking the 750th anniversary of his birth.

There is considerable opportunity to build on the numbers and length of stay of tourists, increasing income to local businesses. Promoting the area as "Birthplace of Robert The Bruce" (or similar), will resonate with local, national and international travellers, highlighting the importance of North Carrick in the history and identity of modern Scotland. The anniversary of The Bruce's birth provides an ideal launch pad for the brand, and for a wider programme of building on tourism assets.

Goals

Critical to success will be planning the year as a step in a process of building community-led sustainable tourism. This means building on the existing strengths of the area but also taking account of its limitations, such as the current low supply of hotel accommodation. In destination and event tourism planning, the development and maintenance of an event portfolio is seen as good strategic practice. So the anniversary celebrations should be seen in this context – as a permanent boost to events in the area.

Key goals should therefore be to:

- Increase community pride and cohesion;
- Increase awareness of Ayrshire and North Carrick as a place to visit; and
- Leave a legacy of annual events for the future

Target markets

The target market for tourists should reflect the wider profile of visitors to Ayrshire – largely from West Central Scotland and others from further afield including a modest number of international tourists. Seeking to attract a very different profile would take more time and more investment than is realistically available – and should be seen as a longer-term goal. The key target visitors are independent travellers (camping, motor homes, bed and breakfast, self-catering stayers). Day visitors will be important too, but overnight visitors spend more and thus have a greater economic impact. And raising awareness more widely to increase the future tourist numbers will be as, or perhaps more, important as the numbers of visitors during the year. Social media engagements and participation in virtual activity will be key measures of success.

Importantly the target demographic will overlap with many who will attend The Open at Troon in 2024 – which overlaps with the date of Bruce's birth. This provides a significant opportunity to attract visitors and also capitalise on wider media coverage. Plans will link in with wider action including: Scotland Outlook 2030 strategy, Destination South Ayrshire, South Ayrshire Local Development Plan, Ayrshire and Arran Tourism Strategy, Ayrshire Growth Deal, and local community development plans published by NCCBC.

Outline programme

The 'Year of The Bruce' will run from January to December 2024, and will aim to deliver a steady stream of activity and awareness. As far as possible events will build on community events held in 2023 (and planned to repeat in 2025) but there will be some 'one-off' elements. The following is an illustrative programme.

Figure 1 Examples of potential activity and dates

Jan	Burns and The Bruce	Support and promotion for Bruce themed Burns nights across the world (tapping into Tamfest contacts, see below)
Feb	Year of the Bruce launch	Virtual event trailing the year ahead
Mar	The Bruce Play	A play celebrating the life and impact of The Bruce to touring across Ayrshire
Apr	Easter community events	Historical dress events, food festivals, galas, re-enactments of battles/historical scenes and pageants etc
May	The Bruce Trail challenge	A gentle challenge event to walk/cycle the 'new' Bruce Trail(s)
Jun	Community events	Local galas
Jul	Unveiling of the Lion of Alba – celebratory event	A spectacular sculpture, embellished by a mix of audio-visual, digital media and outdoor projection (digital outputs).
Aug	Bruce treasure hunt	Augmented reality enabled trail across North Carrick
Sep	Community events	Local galas
Oct	Bruce themed Tamfest	Extended Ayr's Halloween event across North Carrick (and beyond) with a theme of Bruce meets Burns (echoing the January events)
Nov	Academic seminar	Live-streamed event in conjunction with UWS
Dec	Bruce's Christmas Feast	An end of year local celebration for everyone who has been involved
Year long	Track and report	Genealogical DNA testing to determine information about ancestry linked to the Scottish diaspora.
	Village art/public markers	Art Trail between villages and spaces and an Artists Trail (of living/past artists).

Budget

Current estimates for this full programme are around £588,958 (excluding the creation of artwork, sculpture, signage and so on), which may be sought from a variety of sources:

- Event Scotland
- South Ayrshire Council
- Business sponsorship
- Ticket/admission sales
- Donations