

The Great Tapestry of Scotland has a new home

The new £6.7 million Great Tapestry of Scotland Centre has opened in Galashiels.

One of the world's largest tapestries and community arts projects, the Great Tapestry of Scotland was hand stitched by over 1,000 people across Scotland. Now the new purpose-built Great Tapestry of Scotland gallery, visitor centre, cafe and workshop space has been revealed in its permanent home in Galashiels, the heartland of the Scottish Borders, ahead of its public opening on Thursday 26 August.

The latest addition to Scotland's national cultural scene was unveiled as world-renowned author Alexander McCall Smith, whose vision it was to create a tapestry telling the history of Scotland, carefully positioned the 160th and final tapestry panel in place with chief stitcher Dorie Wilkie.



Alexander McCall Smith and Dorie Wilkie

Those who would like the opportunity to be among the first to enjoy this compelling new visitor experience, telling the people's story of Scotland, are urged to book ahead at greattapestryofscotland.com and travel responsibly. The Great Tapestry of Scotland is located in the centre of Galashiels, less than an hour by train from Edinburgh on the Borders Railway, and close to Galashiels Transport Interchange.

The tapestry was the bright idea of Alexander McCall Smith and designed by artist Andrew Crummy, and is one of the world's largest community arts projects. Hand-stitched by a team of

1,000 stitchers from across Scotland led by Dorie Wilkie, over 300 miles of wool was used in creating the 160 linen panels (enough to lay the entire length of Scotland from the border with England to the tip of Shetland). The design of the panels is based on a narrative written by Scottish Borders-based award-winning writer and historian Alistair Moffat.

The visitor centre, designed by architects PagePark and built by contractors Ogilvie Construction for Scottish Borders Council, is a critical town centre regeneration project which has received investment from the Scottish Government through its Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, the Borders Railway Blueprint programme and the Council. It will help to regenerate the once thriving textile town of Galashiels and deliver an economic boost across the Scottish Borders and south of Scotland at a vital time following the devastating impact of Covid-19. There is evidence that it is already supporting the local economy and generating significant interest from future visitors from around the globe. It will also provide a range of social and educational benefits.

Speaking on the news of the centre's opening, Alexander McCall Smith said: "The opening of this wonderful gallery marks the end of a long period of hard work by all of those who have created this astonishing tapestry and its permanent home. But it also marks the beginning of the public life of one of the great artistic creations of our time."

Councillor Mark Rowley, Scottish Borders Council's Executive Member for Economic Regeneration and Finance, said: "The Great Tapestry of Scotland truly is a national asset and we are exceptionally proud to be able to open this phenomenal gallery to house it in the Scottish Borders. I have absolutely no doubt that this will draw in visitors from far and wide and will be an incredibly important development for this region.

"The addition of new world class museums and galleries like The Great Tapestry of Scotland, the Trimontium museum and the

Jim Clark Motorsport Museum add to our impressive array of visitor attractions across the beautiful Scottish Borders.

“Alongside Scotland’s Year of Stories in 2022 and the Scott 250 celebrations to mark the anniversary of Sir Walter Scott, our region’s incredible visitor assets, including our landscape, will provide a springboard for economic recovery post Covid-19, attracting tens of thousands of visitors and supporting local businesses and the creation of new jobs.

“Having exhibitions and events of such national historical and cultural significance based in the south of Scotland is an extremely positive development and will deliver wider benefits to the local economy and place the area firmly on the map.”

Sandy Maxwell-Forbes, Centre Director for The Great Tapestry of Scotland added: “We are absolutely delighted to be opening the doors of our new purpose built visitor centre, with its stunning architectural ceiling sculptured to reflect the town’s Victorian roofscape, on Thursday 26 August. This presents an exciting opportunity to support the economy, create local jobs and enhance the cultural and educational opportunities in the south of Scotland. And it offers a fantastic day out for locals and visitors alike.

“We have already received significant interest from tour operators around the globe and we’re frequently contacted by some of the 350,000 people who have already seen the Great Tapestry of Scotland, who want to know when they can visit us again. They tell us that just viewing the Tapestry is such a powerfully enriching experience that they want to visit time and time again. We look forward to welcoming them alongside many others who will be seeing it for the first time in our new permanent home in Galashiels, just a short distance from Edinburgh and Newcastle.

“As we encourage people to book ahead and travel responsibly to enjoy our exciting new visitor experience,

we are also recommending they visit some of the other amazing local experiences, events and businesses in the area. This wonderful new building really does provide a fantastic opportunity to highlight all that is great about Galashiels, the Scottish Borders and the south of Scotland.”

Culture Minister Jenny Gilruth said: “It is fantastic that the new world-class Great Tapestry of Scotland visitor experience, which has been designed to support regeneration and wellbeing, is opening in Galashiels.

“The Scottish Government has been a strong supporter of The Great Tapestry of Scotland from its inception, and the creation of the new visitor centre is part of a wider economic and social regeneration across the south of Scotland.

“Just three miles from Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott, it is incredibly fitting that this is where Scotland’s story will begin for many people visiting the area, and its opening is an inspiring moment as we look forward to the celebration of the Year of Stories in 2022.”

VisitScotland Chief Executive Malcolm Roughead said: “The opening of The Great Tapestry of Scotland later this month is a fantastic addition to the region’s tourism offering. This unique and exciting new story-telling attraction will celebrate the history of our country and, as we look towards the Year of Stories 2022, will play a significant role in supporting Scotland’s economic recovery, helping to grow the region’s tourism offering, creating new jobs and attracting visitors to the south of Scotland.

“Tourism is a force for good – creating economic and social value in every corner of Scotland and enhancing the wellbeing of everyone who experiences it. With the right support, tourism and events can lead the economic recovery and boost inward investment where it is needed most. We will continue to work with, and support, businesses to ensure we rebuild this

vital part of Scotland's economy."

In addition to the funding to develop The Great Tapestry of Scotland in Galashiels, a further £1.18m of connected funding from the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund was secured for the town. This has enabled Scottish Borders Council and community groups such as Energise Galashiels and Galashiels Community Council to take forward a number of regeneration projects, such as the new Galashiels town trail which includes a sculpture dedicated to local sweet seller Robert Coltart who wrote the world-famous children's lullaby Coulter's Candy (Ali Bali Bee).

As well as permanently displaying the Great Tapestry of Scotland itself, the facility will be home to a workshop space – where visitors can meet the makers, a café showcasing Scotland's larder, a shop and Gallery 1420, which will host a series of visiting exhibitions.

Gallery 1420's opening exhibit is Iconic Scotland, which features written and photographic contributions from 40 iconic, inspiring and pioneering individuals including rugby legend Doddie Weir, Outlander stars Sam Heughan and Grant O'Rourke, Frightened Rabbit's Scott Hutchison, human rights champion and academic Sir Geoff Palmer, actress Joanna Lumley, the first British and Scottish champion in WWE history Drew McIntyre and Sir Walter Scott. In 2021/22, the attraction is also partnering in Abbotsford's Scott 250 celebrations.

The Great Tapestry of Scotland is operated by the charity Live Borders, which manages many of the cultural and leisure facilities in the Scottish Borders, including the five-star Jim Clark Motorsport Museum and the Heart of Hawick entertainment venue.

To help deliver a safe visitor experience, those planning on visiting are advised to book ahead through the website, where full opening times can be found along with details of Covid-19

measures in place. If spaces are still available on the day, tickets can also be purchased at the door.

greattapestryofscotland.com

















