



## Unprecedented support for local in D&G

A survey published today by Dumfries & Galloway food brand, Savour the Flavours, has found ‘unprecedented’ levels of support in the region for buying local, but it has also revealed widespread concern about the restart of the tourism economy.

1,450 people from every part of Dumfries & Galloway took part in the survey which ran from 2-11 June. Key findings were:

- Covid changed how almost everyone shopped for food and drink during lockdown.
- People shopped less frequently, but much more locally. This was partly driven by necessity.
- 84% said they’d like to buy more local food and drink than they currently do.
- 81% said they’d prioritise ‘local’ in their shopping as lockdown eases, but people generally want ‘buying local’ to be made easier and more convenient.
- Comments highlighted that people want local businesses to prioritise local communities above the needs of visitors.
- 79% said they were worried about tourism bringing Covid-19 back to D&G.

Lorna Young of Savour the Flavours, a marketing and economic development specialist, said:

“The survey provides a valuable snapshot of how shopping habits changed during lockdown and what people want as our region eases out of lockdown. It suggests unprecedented levels of support for local businesses within our communities, probably reflecting appreciation for the efforts of local businesses in keeping essential supplies flowing at the height of lockdown.

“From a local food and drink point of view, it’s clear that if people in Dumfries & Galloway are serious about supporting local businesses, then businesses in Dumfries & Galloway need to get serious about making it easier for people to buy their produce.

“The data also evidenced tension between the concerns of local people and the needs of Dumfries & Galloway’s visitor economy – as a region we need to acknowledge and address that tension. So businesses



need to reflect upon these concerns about covid and respond sensitively to them. Local businesses are perceived to be at the front line in defence against the virus. People expect local businesses to be cautious – not just responsible, but actively cautious - in introducing covid-careful measures and adaptations.”

Rachel Findlay of Savour the Flavours, a data analyst and digital expert, said:

“Restarting our local economy was always going to be more difficult than shutting it down, and the findings of this survey reflect that, but there’s also room for cautious optimism. The extraordinarily high level of support for local businesses appears to be more than just a lockdown response. Intention to buy local in the longer term was a consistent theme in both quantitative and qualitative responses.

“There’s a big opportunity for local businesses to respond to that change in buying behaviour by fast-tracking a transition to a more circular, local economy. For businesses in the foodservice sector, who have arguably been hardest hit by lockdown, the data suggests that customers will return. The purpose of this survey was to help local businesses plan for reopening, and the survey findings are invaluable in doing just that. Businesses can now work from a robust set of data to be able to make evidence based decisions as they reopen.”

The findings of the survey have been welcomed by local businesses. Denyse Boyle, General Manager of The Boathouse in Glencaple, commented:

“I’m pleased that a good number of our guests are keen to come back to a clean, organised, socially distanced Boathouse for food and drink, both inside and outside. We have diversified during the past 12 weeks and will be integrating many of these changes into how we operate going forwards. We intend to keep doing doorstep deliveries of good quality local products, restaurant prepared ready meals, and themed dining experiences. We are excited about welcoming our customers back, but we are taking a careful approach to a phased reopening. We hope to have an extended outside area ready for the 16th of July followed by our inside tables reopening in early August.”

After consultation with the community, Moffat Farmers’ Market is to return on Sunday 12th July with a range of new measures including physically distanced outside stalls, covid-careful hygiene measures and pre-ordering encouraged to minimise queues. Sarah Burchell, organiser of Moffat Farmers’ Market, said: “The survey results have reassured us that the measures we’re taking are what people want to see. Our goal is to create a safe trading environment but also an enjoyable way for people to shop and access local

food and drink, and we have really valued the advice we've received from Trading Standards on how to do this.

"The feedback from the survey highlights the importance of working with others, which is what the markets are all about. As a producer we've also seen an increase in local collaboration more generally, and we really enjoyed working with The Boathouse on a recent menu showcasing our lamb. Every small business has been affected by covid, but the more we can work together, the faster our recovery will be."

The survey findings also emphasised the need for local businesses to introduce new safety protocols. Wilma Finlay of Cream o' Galloway near Gatehouse of Fleet said that risk management is one of her top priorities as she prepares for re-opening, she said:

"The guidelines that have been published for our industry are helpful, but like many local businesses we are going a few steps further than what's required, following discussions with our staff and input from some regular customers.

"We could have opened our outdoor playground a few days ago, but we took the decision to delay. That's partly so that we can introduce new electrostatic cleaning regimes on all hard surfaces, which is the same type of cleaning system that's being used in hospitals. Being able to use technology like this reassures our staff and our customers that Cream o' Galloway will be a safe place to visit.

"At the moment we expect to reopen some areas of the business next week. The survey findings are very useful, we had already addressed many of the points raised, such as online ordering to minimise queues and introducing a one-way system. So it's reassuring to see that the data reflects the informal feedback we were already getting."

Not all local businesses are planning on reopening in July. Paul O'Keeffe of Thomas Tosh in Thornhill explained why:

"We're planning to reopen on the 5th August; we think it's the right thing for us and our community to wait a little while longer. This survey's findings are helping us make sure we fully address local customers' concerns about having safe surroundings. And it's great to know that there seems to be even bigger customer support for local food and hospitality businesses as we come out of lockdown."

The full report of the survey can be downloaded now on [www.savourtheflavours.co.uk](http://www.savourtheflavours.co.uk). It is being shared widely with industry partners, public agencies and other regional food groups to help inform recovery planning. Lorna Young added:

“While it’s clear that there are concerns about our rural economy reopening for business, survey comments suggested that people are pragmatic. There is widespread understanding that many communities, and local jobs, are economically dependent on food service and tourism.

“It’s worth remembering that our rural economy in Dumfries & Galloway is mainly small, locally owned businesses who really do want to get it right for their local community. The more we can pull together as a region, be sensitive to worries and look after each other, the more sustainable our economic recovery will be. The food and drink industry is so appreciative of the people of Dumfries & Galloway taking time to respond to this survey, the feedback from local people is absolutely invaluable.”

Ends

#### **Notes for Editors**

- Savour the Flavours was an industry-led food and drink project in Dumfries & Galloway that ran between 2009-2013 to boost the regional food and drink industry.
- The brand has been relaunched as a series of online industry discussion groups to support businesses.
- It is being done on a voluntary basis by the team who previously ran the organisation - Liz Ramsay, Lorna Young and Ian and Rachel Findlay - to provide a single voice for the industry.
- The industry-only online meetings are open to any business operating in the food and drink or hospitality sector in Dumfries & Galloway.
- Industry feedback from each meeting will be uploaded to the Savour the Flavours website.
- The full report of the survey can be downloaded now at: [www.savourtheflavours.co.uk/survey](http://www.savourtheflavours.co.uk/survey)