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One of the orchestrators of “despicable” stunts on the Scotland-England border has suggested the group took inspiration from SNP Westminster leader Ian Blackford.

Speaking to the *National*, Ian McNeil said of the protest: “For some weeks now the locals up north, including one [SNP](#) leader, have tried to discourage tourists from holidaying here until further notice ... that’s what the demo was all about.”

It has since emerged that Mr McNeil has been cheerily pictured with a number of senior SNP figures, including Nicola Sturgeon and Angus Robertson, as well as at SNP campaign events and conferences.

When challenged yesterday whether or not the protestors were SNP members, the First Minister refused to be drawn on the issue, and wouldn’t say if disciplinary action was being taken.

Mr Blackford was criticised earlier in the lockdown period for endorsing a tweet which used expletives to suggest English people should stay away from Scotland.

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Annie Wells said:

“This proves the point that, by deliberately stoking up divisive rhetoric, SNP leaders encourage the racist fringes of the party.

“One of the orchestrators of this despicable stunt is effectively saying they were inspired by Ian Blackford’s words.

“It’s bad enough that it took 48 hours for Nicola Sturgeon to grudgingly condemn this racist behaviour.

“But the fact these individuals are taking their lead from SNP leadership should be a matter of real shame for the party.”