

10. SUBMISSION TO THE DISCOVER ENGLAND FUND BY THE 10 ENGLISH NATIONAL PARKS (SF)

1. Purpose of the report

Providing access to our National Parks is part of our core purpose, and the tourism economy is a key part of the economy in National Parks that has the opportunity to be fostered and developed further.

The Government's 8-point plan for National Parks, published in 2016, emphasised the importance of National Parks as '*drivers of the Rural Economy*' and specifically '*driving growth in international tourism*'.

This report outlines how the Peak District National Park Authority can work with other National Park Authorities across England to submit a joint application to the new £40million Discover England Fund, to make it simpler and easier for international visitors and domestic visitors to enjoy the ten National Parks and the wider English countryside in sustainable ways.

Key Issues

- On 13 January 2017 an Expression of Interest (see appendix 1) was submitted by the Tourism officers across the 10 National Parks in England to the Discover England Fund (years 2 and 3) to help us develop our international appeal by creating high quality visitor experiences in England's 10 National Parks. The working title of the project is "Make great memories in England's National Parks and Countryside".
- This Expression of Interest was successful and, as the lead partner, the Peak District National Park Authority was offered a grant of £20,000 seed funding to help prepare a business case for submission by 12 April 2017 and a decision by Visit England by end April 2017
- If successful implementation will be from July 2017 until March 2019.
- The project is the result of great partnership liaison between the 10 English National Park Authorities all with a joint ambition to develop the visitor experience across the 10 National Parks.
- The total project cost, if successful, will be c. £1 million with 40% match funding (which equates to 20% cash match and 20% in-kind match)
- This report seeks support for the Peak District National Park Authority to act as lead partner in the submission of the business case to the Discover England fund on 12 April 2017.
- A further report will be presented to the Audit, Resources and Performance Committee should this submission be successful and the Authority be asked to act as the lead partner to implement the business case.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 1. To approve the Peak District National Park Authority to act a lead body in the submission of a bid on behalf of the 10 English National Park Authorities for a circa £1million bid to the £40 million Discover England Fund**

3. How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

Providing access to our National Parks is part of our core purpose to promote opportunities for people to understand and enjoy the special qualities of the Park.

This project will offer an appeal to domestic, as well as international visitors, and offers the opportunity for the 10 National Parks to work better together to promote

opportunities for visitors to understand and enjoy the unique special qualities of each National Park in England. In doing this, it offers a way to boost the tourism economy in each National Park.

The project will support the Visitor Experiences shift in our Corporate Strategy 2016-19 in that it will:

- help provide a quality experience for anybody who uses our visitor services that people are willing to pay for; and,
- offer an opportunity to develop the provision of new quality experiences that will generate new income to fund the place.

4. Background

National Parks in England are major contributors to the tourism economy currently accounting for more than £4bn of visitor spending (a quarter of spending on rural tourism). National Parks have a key role to play in promotion of our national visitor offer as they are an internationally recognised brand and provide high quality visitor experiences in iconic landscapes. These internationally recognised landscapes attract over 90 million visitors a year. Much more could be done nationally, regionally and locally to promote our best landscapes and support the rural economies and communities based in them.

The Government's 8-Point Plan for National Parks highlights the importance of '*National Parks as world-class destinations*', '*offering more people the benefits of visiting a National Park without damaging their special qualities*' and '*sustainable tourism which is good for the rural economy and safeguards the environment*'.

National Park Authorities (through National Parks England and National Parks UK) work with Visit England and VisitBritain to promote National Parks as part of the UK visitor offer. National Parks have been part of the 'Countryside is GREAT' campaign led by VisitBritain and we welcome the work done through this campaign. This has allowed a different focus from the more traditional focus of in-bound marketing by VisitBritain which has been predominantly urban, focusing on cities (London, York, Edinburgh), and on large rural attractions rather than on the beautiful countryside in between and the wonderful experiences people can have there. Given the value of tourism to the rural economy of National Parks, there is a value in VisitBritain in marketing all of the UK's National Parks, which are a known international brand, and not implied through generic words such as 'countryside'.

In 2016 Visit England announced the opening of the Discover England Fund which aims to:

- develop world-class bookable English tourism products, targeted at the right international customers, at the right time and through the right channels
- join-up the product offering across large geographies or nationwide through a thematic approach for the benefit of the customer
- drive a collaborative and partnership approach to delivery across Destination Management Organisations and Local Enterprise Partnership boundaries for the longer term.

A series of two-year projects will be awarded funding of a minimum value of £1million. They must set out an ambitious and innovative approach that responds to a clearly identified and evidence-based market demand and customer-centric challenge

In support of the ambition in the 8 point plan for National Parks and of working better together across the National Parks, on 13 January 2017 an Expression of Interest (see

appendix 1) was submitted by the Tourism officers to the Discover England Fund (years 2 and 3) to help us develop our international appeal by creating high quality visitor experiences in England's 10 National Parks. The working title of the project is "Make great memories in England's National Parks and Countryside".

The Expression of Interest was the form of a partnership submission led by the tourism officers across the 10 English National Parks, with a number of other potential partners identified.

Visit England informed us in late January 2017 that this Expression of Interest to develop this business case had been successful. They offered a grant of £20,000 seed funding to prepare a business case for submission and a decision by Visit England by end April 2017. If this business case is successful, implementation will commence in July 2017 to March 2019. As the lead partner, the seed funding grant is held by the Peak District National Park Authority.

The English National Park family is now preparing a business case to the Discover England Fund to be submitted on 12 April 2017. All 10 English National Parks are supporting the development of the business bid, which is being led by a steering group chaired by the Chief Executive of the Peak District National Park Authority, as the lead National Parks Officer for sustainable tourism. The proposition and the business case is being developed by officers commissioned from the New Forest National Park Authority and the South Downs National Park Authority, under the leadership of the CEO of the PDNPA. Other members of the Steering Group are from the North York Moors National Park Authority, Dartmoor National Park Authority, Exmoor National Park Authority and Northumberland National Park Authority.

The project will require strong partnership liaison, working closely with other National Park Authorities, Destination Management Organisations, Local Enterprise Partnerships, national commercial partners and local tourism businesses to develop the visitor experience across the 10 National Parks. The partnership arrangements will be developed as part of the business case development.

The total project cost, if successful, will be c. £1 million with 40% match funding (which equates to 20% cash match and 20% in-kind match)

This report seeks support and approval for the Peak District National Park Authority to act as lead partner in making the submission of the business case to the Discover England fund on 12 April 2017

5. Proposals

The deadline for the bid to the Discover England fund to Visit England is 12 April 2017.

The proposal is that the project will be led by the Peak District National Park Authority which, if the bid is successful, will act as the accountable body for funds. It is expected that the majority of activity will be co-ordinated centrally by staff appointed to lead the project by the Peak District NPA and Visit England/VisitBritain over a two-year period, with input from sustainable tourism officers in each of the National Parks and their respective Destination Management Organisations (DMOs).

Governance arrangements will be set up to ensure that each of the other nine National Park Authorities will work closely with the PDNPA to deliver the bid in partnership with local partners. The governance structure for bid delivery is being finalised at present, but is likely to consist of a National Programme board and three regional boards to ensure the project meets local needs.

Given the scale of the bid (£1million across ten National Parks) and the need for this to cover central delivery costs and overseas activities, it is unlikely that significant funds will be passed to individual NPAs. However, it is expected that all National Parks would be included and would feature as the ten flagship destinations for England's countryside – and for the bid to be successful it is important that all ten English National Parks are involved.

The bid is also expected to contribute towards the global strength of the UK National Parks brand, which will support our work through National Parks Partnerships to secure significant national corporate partnerships.

The rationale for the PDNPA to be the lead partner in submitting, and if successful leading implementation of, the business case and project is:

- Leadership – the UK and England tourism officers groups are led on behalf of all the National Park Officers (NPO) by the NPO in the Peak District National Park
- Geography – this is a country wide initiative and the Peak District sits at the heart of the country
- Track record – the Peak District is one of the larger National Park Authority's with a strong track record in leading external funding projects
- Collaboration with others bids - Marketing Peak District and Marketing Manchester are both progressing successful Expression Of Interest to business case submission which link well with, and will require liaison with during the development of the business case. The PDNPA have, and is developing, good links with these DMOs.

This is an opportunity for the PDNPA to be pioneering in boosting the visitor economy in National Parks, and as one of the most visited within the National Park family, an opportunity to promote responsible and sustainable visiting.

In encouraging enjoyment, and so visitors, to the National Park we recognise the importance of maximising the benefits to the National Park and promoting a sense of harmony and shared responsibility. In general terms, international visitors are more likely to stay overnight and spend more in the local economy. Developing the proposition and business case is an opportunity to support such existing ambitions within the Authority.

The detailed business case for the bid is in development and will consider the following opportunities/offers:

- An online portal for bookable experiences in England's National Parks and their influence areas; integrating guided experiences with high quality accommodation, locally distinctive food & drink and transport.
- Identify and enhance existing guided experiences in the National Parks delivered by the private sector, ensuring it is easily bookable online by independents and through the international travel trade.
- Create new bookable guided experiences in each National Park led by National Park Rangers and volunteers, maximising the value of international Ranger brand and utilising the people who keep the Parks special as authentic ambassadors for our places.
- Local ambassador training to improve the welcome for international visitors in our communities. Sense of place marketing toolkits which focus on international audiences and improve provision of multi-lingual resources for visitors.
- Awareness-raising activity in international markets. Working with VisitBritain and DMOs to engage with the travel trade and a global technology partner to create a virtual experience which generates wider global awareness.

As the proposition is developed it will be refined further and throughout the process we will continuously hone down the proposition to a very simple and focussed offer.

If the business case is successful the grant offer process and project set-up phase will be between May and June 2017. Project delivery is expected to run from July 2017 until March 2019.

Approval being sought is to submit the business case to Visit England by 12 April 2017.

If successful, officers will submit a further paper to the Audit, Resources and Performance Committee to seek approval to accept the grant offer for implementation of the project. This paper will outline in greater detail the project governance arrangements, financial arrangements and outputs to be delivered. RMT was consulted on the submission of the Expression of Interest and will be consulted before the final business case is submitted to Visit England.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

6. Financial:

The costs analysis and funding will be developed during the development of the business case. During the business case development stage we will seek advice and assurance on state aid implications, EU Package Travel Regulations, procurement requirements and ability to cover business support costs.

7. Risk Management:

There is a risk that the unknowns in the project at this time will result in the Peak District National Park Authority not being considered as the best organisation to lead the project. As the proposition is developed and refined further we will continuously monitor the risks and a report bought to RMT before the business case is submitted.

8. Sustainability:

There are no issues to highlight.

9. Equality:

There are no issues to highlight.

10. Background papers (not previously published)

None

Appendices

Appendix 1: Expression of Interest to the Discover England Fund

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

Sarah Fowler, Chief Executive, 9 March 2017