

THE ENGLISH NATIONAL PARKS EXPERIENCE COLLECTION – APPLICATION TO YEAR 5 DISCOVER ENGLAND FUND 2020/21

1. Purpose of the report

To seek approval from Programme and Resources Committee to finalise and make a bid to the Visit England Discover England Fund round 5 to further develop the English National Parks Experience Collection and, if the bid is successful, to seek approval to accept the funding and appoint as necessary the resources to implement the work programme.

Key Issues

- On 19 May 2017 the Audit Resources and Performance Committee approved the proposal from a partnership of nine National Park Authorities (NPAs), led by the Peak District National Park Authority, to submit and accept funding from Visit England to develop the “Make Great Memories in England’s National Parks” project (Minute 22/17).
- This bid was successful and between January 2018 to March 2019 the English NPAs worked together, with the Peak District National Park Authority as the accountable body, to develop and deliver what became the English National Parks Experience Collection. The collection was launched in January 2019 and since then, has been promoted to the international travel trade. Additional Visit England amplification funding was received to continue the project from April to September 2019 (RMM minute 9/19a) and since then there has been ongoing support from National Park Authorities to support travel trade engagement to the end of March 2020.
- Together, this work has created 72 new visitor experiences along with 85 accommodation providers curated into a new branded travel-trade focussed ‘National Park Experience Collection’ which showcases the unique offer of England’s National Parks, a model for delivering ranger experiences in 6 National Parks, upskilled staff within businesses in National Parks and enhanced the brand perceptions of National Parks in England.
- There is an opportunity to apply for further funding, of up to £250k, from Visit England for the period April 2020 to March 2021 to develop further traction in the market and develop a plan for long-term sustainability. Visit England opened the application round for Discover England Fund (DEF) year 5 projects on 18 December 2019, with a deadline for applications to be submitted by 17 January 2020. As a current large-scale DEF project, we are able to apply for funding of up to £250k, with £75k match funding (a minimum of which must be £37.5k cash match).
- In kind and cash support has been offered from amongst the English National Park Authorities for the Peak District National Park Authority to make an application to this Fund. There is a meeting of a number of sustainable tourism officers from National Park Authorities on Monday 13 January to help finalise the bid.
- This paper seeks approval to make a bid to this application round and, if successful, to accept the grant and undertake the necessary work and appointments to implement the actions within the bid.

2. Recommendations(s)

- 1. The Committee delegates to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Heads of Law and Finance and the Sustainable Tourism Officers Group of the**

National Park Authorities, the finalising and submitting of an application by the Peak District National Park Authority, as the accountable body, to the Visit England Discover England Year 5 projects of a value up to £250k.

2. **That, if the bid is successful, the Committee delegates:**
 - **acceptance of the grant and entry into a grant agreement with Visit England to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Heads of Law and Finance**
 - **entry into partnership arrangements and all necessary work to implement the actions within the bid (including recruitment of fixed term posts) to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Sustainable Tourism Officers Group of the National Park Authorities and Director of Commercial Development and Engagement, and on recruitment matters the Head of Human Resources.**
3. **That the Authority may, subject to compliance with procurement standing orders, enter into contracts for the delivery of the programme**

How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

3. Providing access to our National Parks and promoting enjoyment is part of our core purpose so that people can understand and enjoy the special qualities of the National Park. This project aims to develop an appeal to the domestic market, as well as international market, and offers an opportunity to develop the National Parks sustainable tourism offer. The project fits with the outcome to increase audience connection with the Peak District National Park (KPI12)

Background Information

4. The English National Parks Experience Collection has been created from new, from a standing start in January 2018. It has been supported by the Discover England Fund offered and administered by VisitEngland. The collection was delivered by a new central team working with officers across nine of the National Parks – this was the first time that the parks have ever worked together in this way. Work was overseen by a Programme Board chaired by the lead National Park Officer for sustainable tourism, who is also Chief Executive of the Peak District National Park Authority (the accountable body for the project), the Visit England relationship manager and members representing the participating NPAs, Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and more recently businesses within the collection. Monthly steering group telecom calls with all Sustainable Tourism Officers kept the NPAs well connected to delivery.
5. In spring 2018, businesses across the nine participating parks could apply to create new experiences and be supporting accommodation providers, we had over 400 applicants.
6. We supported many more businesses (therefore experiences) through the project than we had originally planned and gave assistance to over 150 businesses across the nine national parks. That support included developing their experiences with help from our newly created toolkits and research. Businesses have been able to create new experiences that tell the stories of our national parks and their special qualities. We had 250 training workshops for those businesses to become travel trade ready – therefore bookable to the trade.
7. Together, we have created 72 new visitor experiences along with 85 accommodation providers.

8. There then followed engagement with the travel trade industry to promote the experiences to get this new product contracted. This work was supported by amplification funding from Visits England between April – September 2019 inclusive and is ongoing. Key partners have been Hotels and More, Abbey and JAC travel other operators contracting the product include One World Travel (Germ) and Authentic Vacations (US)
9. The headline outcomes from this programme are:
 - Brand new experiential product in nine of the National Parks which meets the needs of our markets – 72 new visitor experiences and 85 accommodation providers
 - A new branded, travel-trade focussed ‘National Park Experience Collection’ which showcases the unique offer of England’s National Parks
 - A successful model for delivering ranger experiences in 6 National Parks
 - More product sold overseas, more international visitors and higher visitor spend
 - Upskilled staff within businesses and NPAs
 - Enhanced brand perceptions of UK National Parks
 - Closer working relationship with VisitBritain
10. The project video is available here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqZu2UnfYpl&feature=youtu.be> and more trade details are here - <https://trade.visitbritain.com/destination-uk/discover-england-fund/national-park-experience-collection/>
11. A video has also been produced with interviews with trade partners and others- <https://youtu.be/iZXoDyqjZX4>
12. The project team held a legacy workshop for the National Parks tourism leads on 31 July 2019 to form an agreed plan for continuing work on the project. A number of contracted consultants have been retained to 31 March 2020 to support a consolidation of the collection and to ensure opportunities for the products to be contracted with the trade are captured and progressed. This is not using internal resource to deliver the project.
13. From April 2020 to April 2021 there is an opportunity to secure further funding of up to £250k from Visit England to develop further traction in the market and develop a clear plan for long-term sustainability. The deadline for applications is 17 January 2020.
14. In opening up this application round on 18 December 2019 Visit England have said “It has been inspiring to see the industry react so positively to the challenge of scaling up the inbound offer in regional England through the Discover England Fund, with over 700 products created or reimagined for the international visitor. These new tourism products have increased England’s competitiveness for the consumer and the travel trade, with early sales showing promising growth. There is a need to remain focused on amplifying this immense variety of high quality tourism product both domestically and internationally, to support long term sustainability and drive return on investment.”
15. The guidance from Visit England for the project is that applicants “should consider what activity can be delivered to embed and amplify their products. There will be a key focus on those that can demonstrate traction in target markets and a clear plan for long term sustainability. Funds are expected to be heavily competed for and tough choices will therefore need to be made. We are also looking for projects to consider how they can work together at a practical level. Whilst opportunities will vary from project to project we would positively encourage collaborative approaches where appropriate. This is outlined further in the coordination section. Amplification could take a number of forms, depending on the nature and stage of your project and how activity fits within the

criteria:

- To scale up your product across a wider geographical area, including collaboration with other DEF projects
- To adapt and/or further develop product (deepen and broaden the offer) and consider approaches that extend the season, addressing low and shoulder periods
- To continue to embed your products with Travel Trade through trade engagement activity
- To undertake additional market penetration in existing markets. This could be deepening existing work for greater impact, or considering new market segments
- To amplify in a new market e.g. international, domestic, accessible”

16. As a current large-scale Discover England Fund project, the English National Parks Experience Collection will be eligible for bid for up to £250k, with a requirement for £75k match funding (minimum of £37.5k cash match)

Proposals

17. Our focus with this application will be on consolidating and growing the Collection. We will aim to keep the collection refreshed and, where possible, add new businesses to the existing collection. We will continue our focus on the German, Australian and USA markets, and will add Canada and New Zealand to our market focus. We aim to prepare a business to consumer offer that will focus on the domestic market to ensure that we are encouraging sustainable tourism in all its guises. We would also like to consider what is possible in term of extending towards full UK coverage and to develop a business case for this work to be put on a more sustainable footing across the National Parks.
18. An underpinning purpose to this application is to move National Parks to become leaders on sustainable (regenerative) tourism. We want to work with businesses to develop visitor experiences that focus on securing care for, and inspiration in, our National Parks.
19. Support has been offered from all the current nine participating English National Park Authorities, as well as an interest from our Welsh and Scottish colleagues to see what is possible to expand the concept beyond England. Cash support of c. £25k has also been offered from five of the participating National Park Authorities, including from the Peak District National Park Authority.
20. There is a meeting of a number of sustainable tourism officers from National Park Authorities on Monday 13 January to help finalise the bid and project activities, in anticipation that the bid will be finalised for submission on 17 January 2020. The bid will be submitted by Peak District National Park Authority, who will act as the accountable body.
21. If successful, resources will need to be sourced/recruited to implement the work programme and similar governance arrangement will be set up to oversee the implementation of the project.

Are there any corporate implications members should be concerned about?

Financial:

22. The budget applied for will be to meet the full project costs, to be spent over the period from 1 April 2020 to end March 2021. Of the £37.5k of cash match funding required, £25k has been offered by five participating National Park Authorities. This includes the

Peak District National Park Authority, with a £5k one-off budget available for allocation should the bid be successful. The remaining £12.5k can be met from the current project budget should it not be forthcoming from other partners. The required £37.5k of in-kind support has been offered by all nine participating English National Park Authorities.

Risk Management:

23. Project risks will be identified in the application to Visit England and will be overseen by the Programme Board.

Sustainability:

24. All partners will be asked to sign a partnership agreement should the bid be successful. This project is an opportunity to continue the partnership that has been created between the English National Parks and develop a business case for future continuation of the partnership.

Equality:

25. There are no significant equality issues.

26. **Background papers (not previously published)**

27. **Appendices**

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

Sarah Fowler, Chief Executive, 7 January 2020
sarah.fowler@peakdistrict.gov.uk