

## NFNPA RAPC 328/17

### NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### RESOURCES, AUDIT & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 6 March 2017

#### DISCOVER ENGLAND FUND

**Report by:** Mark Holroyd, Transport, Access & Sustainable Tourism Manager

#### 1 Purpose

- 1.1 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 New Forest 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 to enjoy the ten National Parks and the wider English countryside in sustainable ways.

#### 2 Background

- 2.1 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'*. These latter statements are particularly relevant to the New Forest.
- 2.2 To help implement the 8-point plan, the English National Park family is preparing a bid to the Discover England Fund to be submitted in mid-April 2017. The Fund 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.
- 2.3 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.

#### 3 The National Park Family Bid

- 3.1 The bid 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 the Peak District NPA and VisitEngland/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). In our case, we would work closely with the New Forest Tourism Association and the new GoNewForest Community Interest Company). 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.

- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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.

#### **4 An Opportunity for the New Forest**

4.1 The New Forest National Park is believed to be one of the most visited within the National Park family, particularly when considering its size. It is estimated that in 2015, the value of the visitor economy of the National Park was £256.8million, supporting 3315 FTEs. Currently international visitors make just a small percentage of visitors (estimated to be around 6% in our summer 2015 visitor survey).

4.2 There is understandable local concern about the ability of the New Forest to absorb substantially more visitors (especially short day visits resulting from housing growth in neighbouring areas). However, in general terms, international visitors are more likely to:

- arrive by public transport from London and airport gateways than by car.
- go to advertised attractions with more visitor facilities
- remain on main and waymarked tracks when visiting the open Forest.
- stay overnight within the National Park or nearby and spend more in the local economy.

4.3 There is an opportunity to use this bid to support existing ambitions within the Authority:

- Increase usage of the New Forest Tour by international visitors, and provide multi-lingual resources for these customers so that they can learn more about the things that make the Forest special and how we can all care for it.
- Improve the availability, booking ability and commercial viability of providing guided experiences within the New Forest utilising Rangers, Seasonal Rangers, Volunteers and existing private tour guides. Guided experiences are a useful way of delivering our second purpose in a managed way and we have long-felt there is a commercial opportunity for the Authority in the area, as well as supporting existing private providers.
- Support the growth in food tourism and the New Forest Marque. While food & drink is not generally perceived as a generator of international visits to England, there is scope to 'package' our local food & drink offer alongside experiences and accommodation.

4.4 The detailed business case for the national bid is currently being developed, but is likely to focus on:

- 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.

**Recommendation:**

**Members support the national bid to the Discover England Fund being led by the Peak District National Park Authority.**

An update will be supplied to all members in the member's bulletin. The detail of the final bid will be shared with the Chair of the Authority, the Chair of the Resources, Audit & Performance Committee for comment prior to submission.

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**Equality Impact Assessment:**

If successful, the programme activities will require an equality impact assessment to be undertaken by the national programme board.