

RAPC 442/21**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY****RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 1 February 2021****Discover England Fund**

Report by Paul Walton, Head of Environment & Rural Economy

1 Summary

- 1.1 The New Forest NPA has been invited to engage with a campaign to promote the 'National Parks Experience Collection' to domestic audiences. The "Collection" has been developed by nine of England's National Parks as part of a programme originally aimed at international visitors which is now being repurposed to help the recovery of tourism businesses in National Parks following the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2017 we decided not to join the campaign. This paper outlines how the programme has changed and highlights how we could work with selected businesses in the New Forest National Park to benefit from and be part of this campaign.

2 Recommendation

The New Forest National Park Authority agrees to work with selected New Forest businesses to develop a New Forest offer within the National Parks UK Experience Collection.

3 Background

- 3.1 In March 2017, we considered the opportunity to join other National Parks in submitting a joint application to a five-year £40million Discover England Fund (launched in 2016 and managed by VisitEngland), to make it simpler and easier for international visitors to enjoy the 10 National Parks and the wider English countryside, learning about it and exploring it in sustainable ways. The bid was regarded as a way of implementing the 8 Point Plan for National Parks that had been published by Government the previous year. The Plan recognised the role of National Parks as drivers of the rural economy and the role that sustainable tourism plays in supporting the rural economy and safeguarding the environment.
- 3.2 After due consideration by the RAPC, and with concern about encouraging visitors from target audiences in Australia and Germany it was decided that we would not join the campaign.
- 3.3 The bid, led by the Peak District NPA, was submitted by nine of the English National Parks and was successful. This led to the development through local businesses of bespoke 'Experience' Packages, marketed by the National Parks to both domestic and international visitors, and business training and support.
<https://www.nationalparkexperiences.co.uk>

1 February 2021

- 3.4 The nine National Parks have continued to work together and in 2020 submitted a further bid for a final year of funding. Since the outbreak of Covid-19 and the consequential major disruption to international markets and travel, the focus of this bid has changed to the domestic market and the need to develop products that will aid the recovery of tourism businesses impacted by the pandemic. The programme has been offered additional funding that will lead to the promotion of selected businesses on the National Parks UK website and a campaign to drive interest to the website where visitors to National Parks can book specific activities delivered by local businesses which provide authentic, sustainable experiences linked to the landscape.
- 3.5 What is different to first-time around? Rather than working to promote the collection to the travel trade in three international areas, the programme team is focusing on promoting the collection in the UK. The experiences are focussed on target audiences currently coming to National Parks, in particular families and “pre-nesters” rather than tour groups or international travellers who may want slightly different things from an experience. Another change is that the collection will be bookable on the nationalparks.uk. website.

4 Local context

- 4.1 The third lockdown has triggered a more intense focus on domestic tourism market by VisitEngland and the Discover England Fund has moved away from the original international market. It may now be considered that the programme would benefit key New Forest businesses given the impact of the pandemic on the local economy and support the need for authentic, sustainable experiences linked to the landscape, minimising impacts and directing visitors to quality experiences.
- 4.2 The online presence would provide an opportunity for businesses to develop their offer beyond the summer season, helping to make their business more resilient and recover losses incurred through 2020. As well as supporting local businesses, providing bespoke experiences in this way could influence the type of activities visitors do when they are here, promote messages about why the New Forest is special and how they can respect and care for it.

5 The offer

- 5.1 We have been offered the opportunity to include some New Forest National Park businesses in the 'Experience Collection' on the National Parks UK website. Businesses would need to meet a set of criteria join the campaign. Subject to time constraints the NPUK project team might be able to host a short webinar for any businesses, to introduce them to the project. The selected New Forest businesses would receive the benefit of an online booking facility for their product, managed by the project's booking platform partner Beyonk. Throughout the pandemic the National Park Authority has provided support to New Forest Marque businesses, promoting them through our social media channels and offering support from Rangers to help with the logistics of delivering products during periods of lockdown. This offer would provide additional support to some visitor related New Forest businesses whose activities and products meet the criteria of the project and reflect a sustainable use of the National Park.

1 February 2021

The output from this opportunity would be a bespoke New Forest Experience that could be booked by a visitor to the National Park and would be promoted via the National Parks UK website as part of their “National Parks Experience Collection”.

6 Resources

- 6.1 There will be no additional funding associated with this opportunity as all the grant funds have been allocated. The assistance required to get the New Forest ‘experiences’ on to the National Parks UK website will be provided by Beyonk once the other participating National Parks have been completed if time allows. Our contribution would be officer time to work with a small group of businesses who may be able to develop a suitable “experience” package.

Papers:

RAPC 442/21 Discover England Fund

NFPA RAPC 328/17 Discover England Fund (previous paper)

Contact:

Paul Walton

Head of Environment & Rural Economy

Tel: 01590 646631