

Written response to: Members of the Business & Transformation Scrutiny Panel

Resolution: That the Town Clerk and Chief Executive provide the Panel with further information with regard to the request to close the Discover England Fund year two and the project activity that had been delivered

Written response from: Town Clerk & Chief Executive

Response:

This response sets out the key outcomes achieved by the Discover England Fund Year Two project as well as what has been done as part of the England's Historic Cities consortia to maintain some momentum with England Originals to benefit our historic cities.

England Originals has met, or exceeded, most of the targets we set ourselves in 2017 as we embarked upon our ambitious project to interpret our historic destinations and heritage product for millennials and raise awareness of the wealth of experiences that the US visitor could find in regional England.

The project partnership set itself three simple but ambitious aims:

- Increase the appeal of England's Heritage product for people under the age of 40
- Simplify the heritage product in regional England making it easier to navigate and to plan and book a trip
- Raise the profile of England's regional heritage offer.

A consumer survey of potential US visitors that had engaged with England Originals in 2019, conducted for us by London & Partners, validated the England Originals brand and showed our message was reaching the US consumer and that it resonated well.

- 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that England Originals has made it easier to explore England's Historic Cities
- 57% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that England Originals has increased awareness of England's Historic Cities
- 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that England Originals has increased their knowledge of England.

England Originals comprises 16 historic destinations that can be discovered by rail by following five themed itineraries covering the length and breadth of England. It involves 51 accommodation providers, 86 attractions and experiences and 29 hospitality providers that are promoted under 1 umbrella brand. It is supported by 3 strategic partners. Through one tour operator alone in just 2 months in 2019 it achieved \$35,000 of bookings.

With the support of The Discover England Fund, we have gathered together a partnership of destinations, tourism businesses, national heritage organisations, destination management companies, tour operators, journalists and a range of specialists to produce a new product that presents historic England in a new and fresh way, animating it through storytelling and technology and making it more accessible and bookable than ever before to meet the needs of younger US consumers.

The summary of key achievements includes:

Curation of the product

- Integrated mobile rail ticketing
- Integrated bed bank
- 16 destination packages

Business support

- 125 businesses product trained
- 53 businesses travel trade trained
- 166 businesses promoted via the England Originals app
- 80 additional businesses benefiting from the promotion halo

Interpretation and presentation

- 141 new stories narrated
- 16 virtual table top tours
- 80 virtual portals
- 13 new sets of photos
- 5 new films
- 1 upgraded and redesigned app
- 12,000 app downloads
- Bookability and distribution
- 3 DMC partnerships
- 5 tour operator partnerships
- 150+ home-based agents trained on England Originals
- 15 new packages on sale
- 8500 bookable bed spaces
- 67 bookable experiences

Promotion

- 27 US consumer media articles
- 16.5m estimated reach of press coverage
- 182k new website users with excellent targeting 94% in US, 55% under 44yrs
- 57.3m advert impressions
- 1.1m video views
- 139,000 click throughs across marketing 8 channels
- 250 Instagram followers
- 2000 Facebook followers

The project funding has been expended and activity under the DEF fund ceased however, in September 2019 the England Originals partnership agreed a bridging plan to continue investment in the new product and in particular embed it with the travel trade. The England's Historic Cities consortium has invested £30,000 into the plan since October 2019.

Our focus has been in three areas: trade engagement, social media, business support and TXGB.

Trade engagement has involved developing travel trade relationships where we had initial conversations, but further support was required to assist in the development of England Originals based packages. We attended all three Visitbritain virtual travel trade events and built up an extensive network of travel agents who we now communicate with on a regular basis, many of who were developing new tours and content following our engagement. Our Destination Management partners AC Tours and ASA were expanding their current product offering and engaging with new clients to put forward England's Historic Cities products. We hosted a trade visit with ASA and Sceptre travel agents to showcase our cities and a further visit with AC Tours and Avanti top selling agents, with Avanti developing a comprehensive programme based on our itineraries. In addition, Authentic Europe had developed and contracted our itineraries which were due to launch on the 1st April.

Social media work has built our presence on Instagram and Facebook to ensure we are engaging with the target market. Between October 19 and June 20, despite Covid-19 making it hard to engage with potential visitors, the total reach of Facebook is now 13.1k and Instagram 12.4k through proactive posting, liking and sharing England Originals content and news.

Business support saw the adaptation of our product familiarisation and welcome training programme to create a bespoke training manual and presentation that can be delivered in house by accommodation providers and attractions. This was 70% complete at the time that the pandemic caused companies to furlough staff and is being picked up in July/August with a view to completing it early Autumn.

Work on development of an England Originals hub within TXGB is ongoing, we have provided TXGB with product lists for all the cities and are supporting with contracting and integration with Golden Tours.

The England Originals project has been successful in bringing together England's Historic Cities and their products and experiences into five inspiring thematic itineraries, easily understandable by trade and consumer and now being taken to the market by 3 DMCs and their extensive network of travel agents and tour operators in the US. We will continue trade engagement work in the US, utilising our itineraries and existing relationships and increasing our reach into the agent network in particular. However the majority of an application for DEF Year 5 funding is about developing England Originals for the UK market, helping the UK visitor economy in regional England to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic by targeting visitors that are most likely to return in 2020 and early 2021 and spend money in our tourism businesses.

Though this project / England Originals, we have also learned a lot about our target market, our target audience (millennials), how to work effectively with destination management companies, tour operators and the US travel agent community, how to package product to make it attractive

to millennials and how to make history and heritage experiences trade ready. All of this learning has gone into shaping an application for further investment from the Discover England Fund so that we can consolidate and bed down the England Originals product with the US trade, pivot to the domestic market to support our businesses to recover from the Coronavirus pandemic and make the most of the opportunities Discover England presents for England's Historic Cities, regional England and UK tourism.

Date: 7.8.2020