



## Reimagining storytelling for a millennial tourism audience



# Overview

Interviewee:

Melanie Sensicle, project director, England's Historic Cities

[www.englandoriginals.com](http://www.englandoriginals.com)

This case study provides insight into the strategic impetus that led to the development of the England Originals application (app), and the process of its design as a collaboration among 13 key cities, made possible by a grant from the Discover England Fund. The resulting app provides a model for the development of Experience Economy projects in the digital space, specifically in its targeting of a non-traditional audience demographic to broaden the appeal of England's Historic Cities consortium and its properties. The app aims to provide lasting impact as an educational marketing platform with global reach.



# About England Originals

England Originals is a free-to-download app developed by the 13-member England's Historic Cities consortium. The project was funded by a £1.4 million grant from the Discover England Fund (2017), and forms a broad cross-regional strategy to 're-present' the depth and breadth of potential visitor experiences available in the selected cities and regions (16).

The app was published in Q4 2018 and will be further updated in 2022 to include additional partners and organisations, and an expanded directory.

Both domestic and international 'heritage tourists' tend to span the 50+ age bracket and have specific interests that are distinct from those that would appeal to a younger audience.

The primary aim of the project is to increase the appeal of historic cities and English Heritage properties to both a millennial and an international tourist demographic.

More specifically, the project focused on looking at ways to increase engagement with travellers aged 25 to 50, in particular those travelling from the United States as an initial market.

Extensive consultation took place to reimagine and reposition editorial and narrative content for target locations. The app was also designed to provide options to:

- book travel itineraries
- engage with local businesses across the regional hotel and hospitality sector
- support onward revenue generation for the participating cities.

England Originals also provides a rich package of bespoke content for each of the participating cities and regions, including:

- city guides
- a directory of places to eat and stay
- narrative-driven augmented reality (AR) tabletop experiences linked to historic sites
- site-specific virtual portals which can be accessed in person.

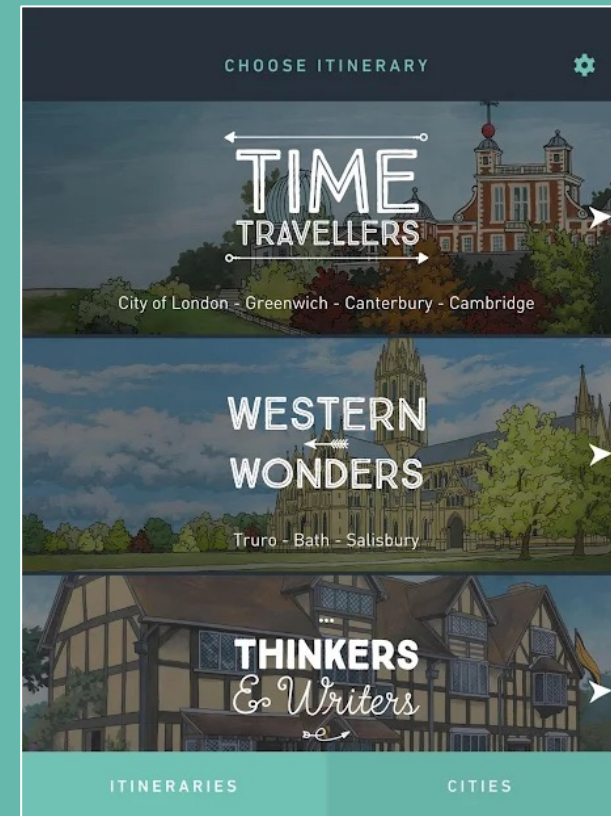


# Production participants

England Originals was developed by the England's Historic Cities consortium and a team of commissioned and partner organisations and individuals including:

- [English Heritage](#) — selected 14 heritage properties for inclusion in the app
- [London & Partners](#) — provided strategic guidance and input into customer journey mapping
- [Hex Digital](#) — led development of the app content
- [One Minute to Midnight](#) — conducted the international market research and focus group testing
- Jonathan Foyle — the renowned historian was commissioned to narrate audio content.

Travel itineraries linked to each of the thematic in-app experiences are also available through selected [Destination Management Organisations](#).



Screenshots from the England Originals app highlighting a selection of the available itineraries and city profiles

# Place-based context

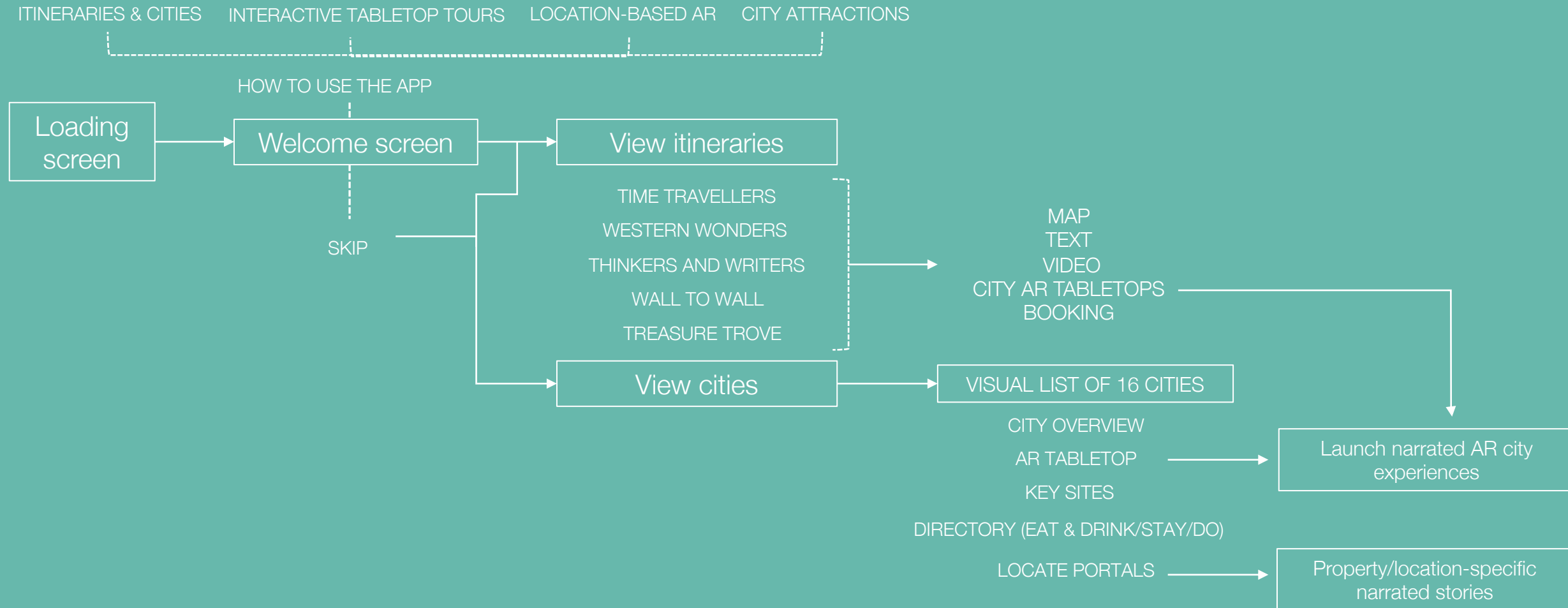
A strategic goal of broadening and modernising the appeal of England's heritage travel sector was an underlying drive to generate awareness of sites and cities beyond the most commonly visited by international travellers, e.g. Bath Spa, York Cathedral and Manchester United's grounds and museum at Old Trafford.

Five thematic multicity travel itineraries were developed, enriched by a breadth of interactive and narrative content. By presenting various cities in clusters of three or four locations, all connected by rail travel as an option, the project sought to reconfigure a more dynamic and original approach to promoting short breaks, connecting each city through a shared overarching narrative such as Time Travellers and Thinkers and Writers.

Editorial content for the app was created in partnership with local heritage site curators, to ensure a rigorous historical underpinning for each of the stories offered. This process was supported by a robust programme of market research and focus group testing to establish the types of stories, thematic passion points and cultural perspectives of the intended millennial audience.

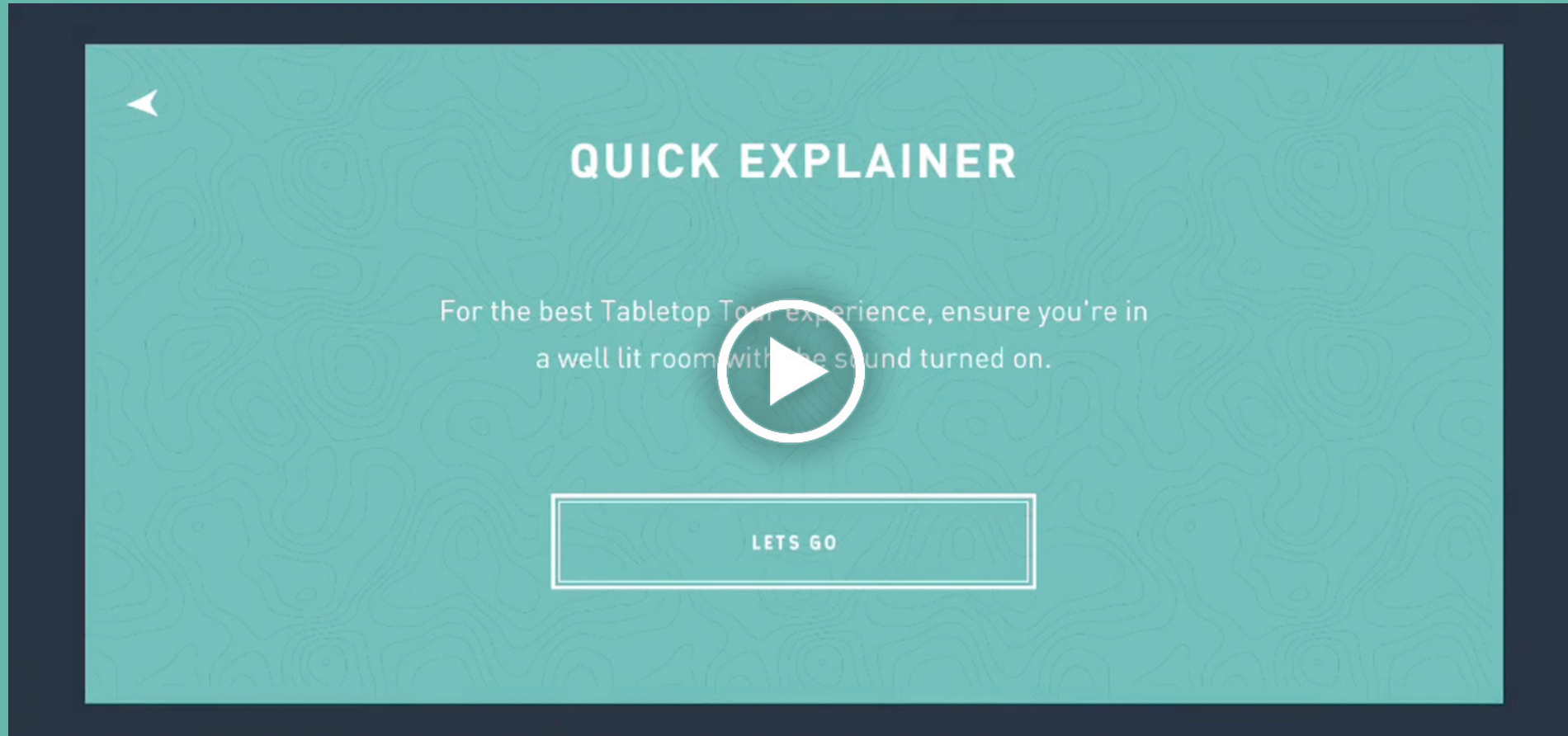
# User journey

A DIAGRAMMATIC ILLUSTRATION OF DECISION BRANCHES AND AVAILABLE CONTENT WITHIN THE APP



# In-app augmented reality city guide demo

(Click to play)





# Production

The England's Historic Cities team had not previously undertaken a digital transformation project of this scale. Partnerships with experienced external agencies to oversee core elements of the app development and delivery were critical — each commercial partner was formally invited to tender.

Hex Digital produced digital and video content for each heritage subject (approximately 2 minutes duration), shot at a variety of locations across the cities and sites featured. One Minute to Midnight provided deep research into audience needs and preferences.

Audience feedback was conducted at a highly granular level. Many aspects such as visual style and design were tested in focus groups. The content was consequently adapted and refined according to the qualitative research.

For example, a range of visualisation and illustration approaches were tested covering diverse styles such as manga, nostalgic storybook, and other more refined graphical aesthetics. User testing revealed that, contrary to initial assumption, audiences overwhelmingly preferred the nostalgic storybook look and feel over more contemporary or youth culture-focused manga comic book styles.



# Production

Several respondents to the tender process misunderstood the challenge as being development of a marketing strategy, rather than the goal of modernising storytelling and audience engagement in places via digital methods. The tender process helped to determine the necessary approach toward achieving strategic insight to meet the interests of the target audience.

The project team spanned expertise in heritage tourism, editorial direction, digital development, video production, user insights and testing. This multidisciplinary project team worked collaboratively across outputs, with a centralised approach to editorial content approval, and in consultation with local curators and historic properties recommended by English Heritage.

A cohort of millennials worked with the partner Destination Management Organisations throughout development of the app, to ensure their quest for experience and cultural outlook was realised in the final iteration.

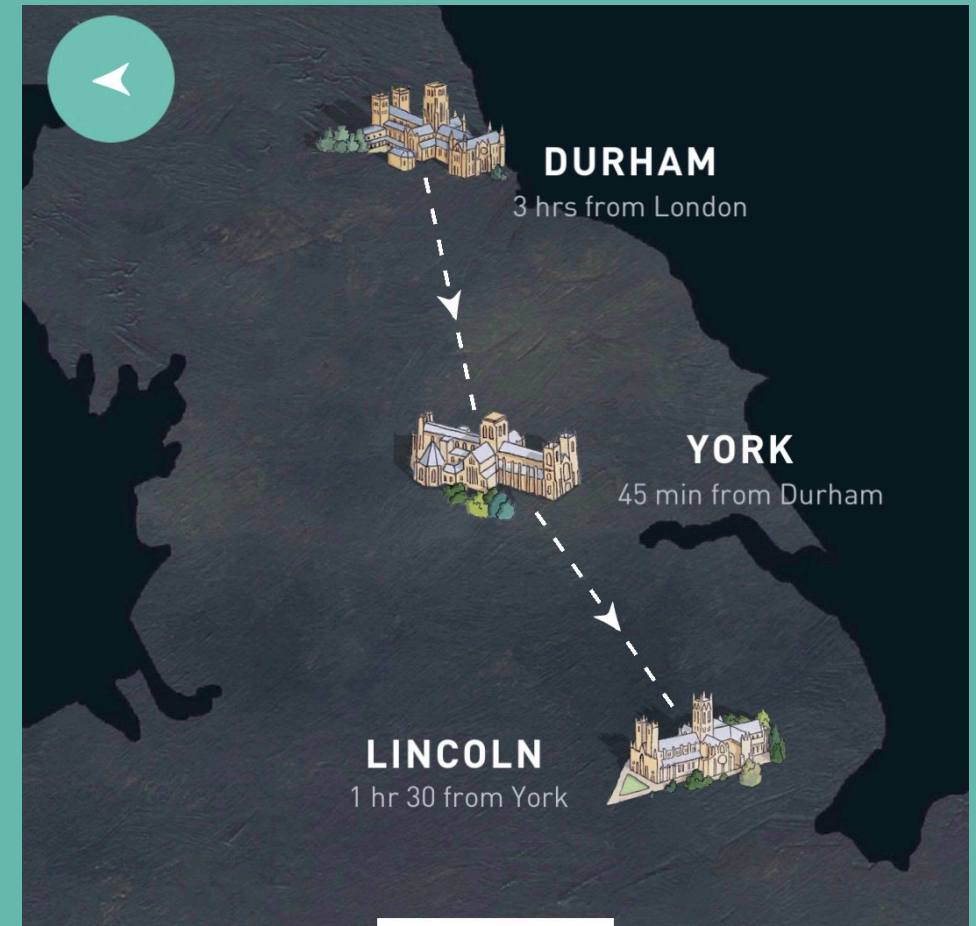
The app includes a range of interactive virtual portals, generating AR content that is triggered at key points around historic sites and properties. This rich media experience is unlocked when a user is physically present at one of the participating heritage locations, providing an additional layer of experience and value, and further incentive to include these attractions as part of a visit.

# Partnership

The funding allowed for a degree of flexibility in approach towards achieving the project deliverables, including an iterative working process that was responsive to knowledge acquired from audience insight and user testing. Year five of the funding will focus on broadening the target audience to include domestic tourism, adding a greater range of local experiences and services that exist alongside the core heritage offering.

A lasting impact of the project has been to achieve a greater sense of cohesion and collaboration among the consortium and participating cities, and recognition of the value of greater connectivity and mutually promoting and marketing complementary visitor attractions.

For many of the partners involved in the creation of the app, England Originals is their main or sole international marketing tool. Participation in a collective effort has achieved a high-quality, rich and engaging digital experience that would not have been achievable as a solo endeavour.



Multiplicity itineraries are just one of the ways in which the England Originals project has fostered a lasting sense of greater connectivity among consortium cities



# Monetisation

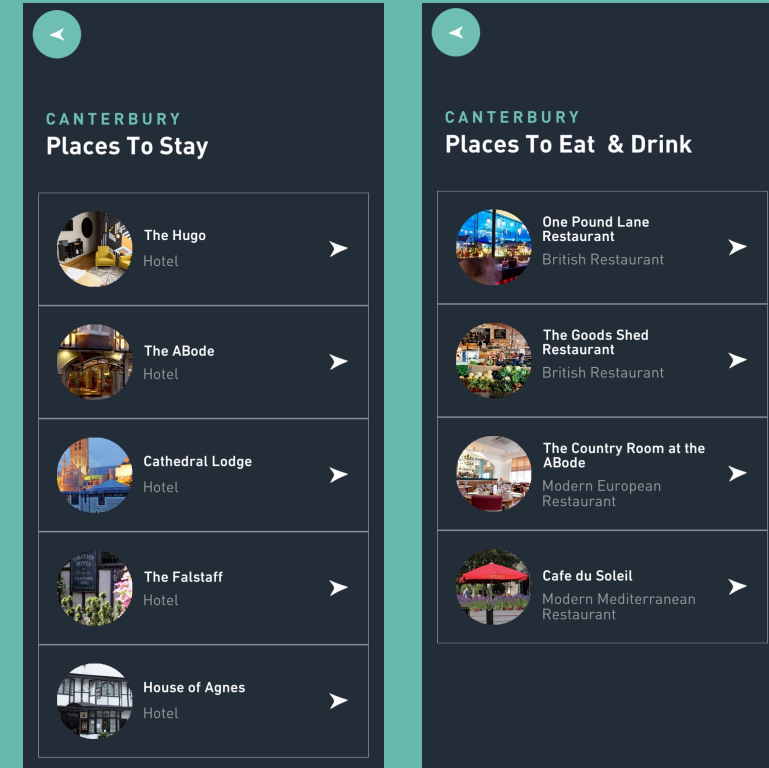
The project was fully funded by the [Discover England Fund](#). The app is free to download, with no subscription or pay-to-access additional features. The aim is to maximise digital access for app users with zero entry cost, while meeting the criteria associated with promoting the inbound international visitor economy required by the Discover England Fund.

The app's primary monetisation strategy is to drive revenue outward to the targeted cities and regions by amplifying user engagement with an individual city, generating bookings for activities and revenue for local businesses.

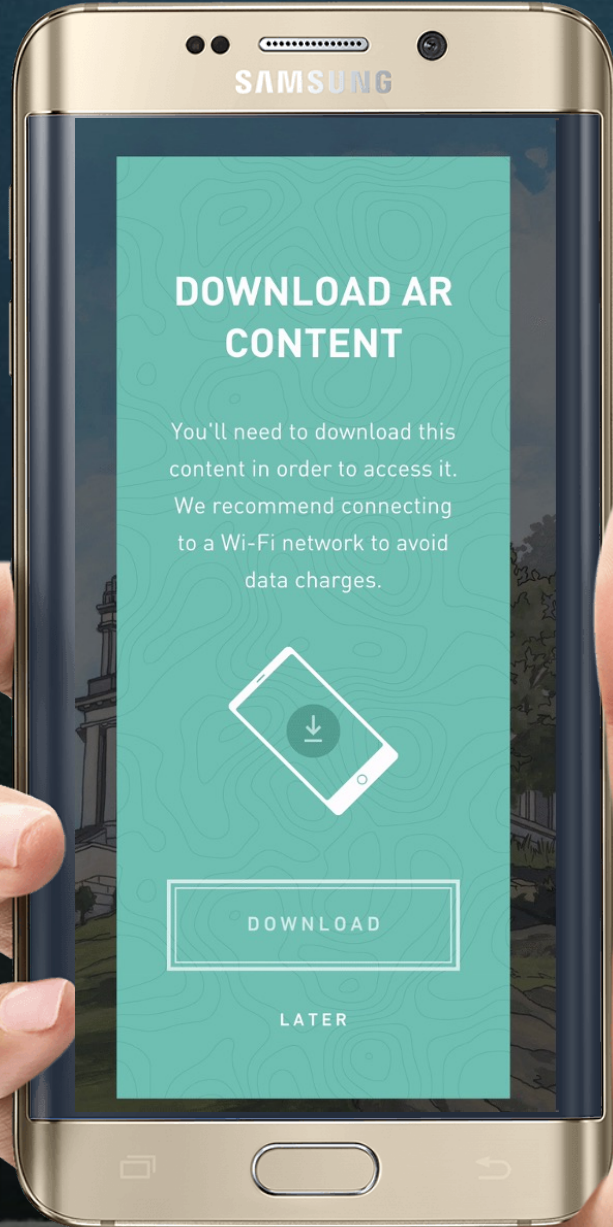
For each city featured on the England Originals app there is a directory of local places to eat and stay, with direct links to business websites, to enable onward booking of these services. The apps add additional value to the visitor experience and expand the number of businesses that benefit from placement within the app.

At present the app does not have backend capability to track this user flow, so no data exists around quantity or frequency of bookings made. There is a rigorous selection process in place to ensure consistently high-quality local offerings, in line with the strategic goal of appealing to the target audiences.

The 2022 app update will see additional service providers added to the current list.



Selected local hotels and dining establishments are promoted within the app



**150 regional experts, 140 local stories, a fully immersive experience that 're-presents' the stories of England's historic cities and sites for millennial and international audiences.**