

HISTORIC SCOTLAND BOARD

BEHIND THE SCENES DOCUMENTARIES

Purpose

1. To seek agreement that Historic Scotland Properties in Care, maintains its policy of not agreeing to behind the scenes documentaries; so called “fly-on-the-wall” programmes.

Background

2. Historic Scotland PIC historically has and continues to receive requests to allow access to film companies to Edinburgh Castle to produce so called fly-on-the-wall documentaries about the background workings of the castle. (In the recent past, we have received no requests for other sites or our work in general).

3. The number of requests, whilst not high, consistently come from the same UK production companies and we have, to date, refused these requests. Companies requesting productions are frequently working on behalf of a television network – e.g. BBC or Channel 4 in the UK. Within the last 24 months we have indicated that we would re-visit the policy and assess this position. This has been done and this paper sets out the reasons for strongly recommending that we maintain the current position.

Implications of the Proposals

4. The rationale for refusal breaks down into four broad elements: the absence of any clear and priority benefits; potential loss of and damage to reputation; the resources needed to manage the programmes and the presence of proven alternatives.

5. Edinburgh Castle is already Scotland’s most visited (paid) visitor attraction, a must-see attraction with an international reputation. It benefits from a large amount of very positive editorial and media coverage. This coverage is dealt with pro-actively and re-actively by our PR team to best positive effect. It is difficult to see how this position will be improved by a resource-hungry production.

Lack of clear benefits

6. Our marketing for the castle (and indeed all sites) is based on clear targeting of specific audiences, from overseas markets to local families and education groups. There is no evidence that a documentary of this kind could specifically target any of our priority audiences. Indeed research commissioned by English Heritage around their recent fly-on-the-wall series showed that for those already dis-engaged from the organisation’s work, their levels of awareness or desire to visit did not change. In other words, there was no benefit in raised appreciation or potential growth in visitor numbers amongst ‘new’ audiences (the impact on sympathetic and target audiences was different; see below).

7. This also indicates that market segmentation by any programme remains at best un-proven. Without full editorial control and production control (which simply would not happen), we cannot guarantee that any existing audiences or desired new audiences would be

reached and the evidence from the recent case is that targeting is at best scattered. Any impact could be indifferent to negative. Historic Scotland uses much more effective and targeted media and marketing, examples of which are given below.

8. The key audiences and markets for Edinburgh Castle, particularly during the height of the season, are visitors to Scotland (of varying profiles) and travel trade operators. The evidence from English Heritage, together with a simple assessment, suggests we would not necessarily reach those key audiences in a manner that would work to our advantage. Any impact on other audiences could in large part be negative.

Risk

9. In terms of the potential risk, there is evidence that programmes which are critical or potentially confrontational have a negative effect on reputation and existing visitors.

10. Following the recent English Heritage series, for example, there was an 'unprecedented' series of resignations from members of English Heritage (equivalent to our membership group) on the basis of the programmes themselves and the surrounding press coverage both before and after broadcasts. Indeed, English Heritage have advised us not to consider taking a project of this kind forward.

11. Anecdotally, the impact to the reputation of English Heritage amongst peer organisations was also negative. In terms of the broader reputation of Historic Scotland, it is with such peer groups that we are striving to improve our reputation and relationships.

Resources

12. Managing the production of any media event is time-consuming. A long-term commitment to continuous filming requires intense management. Historic Scotland does not have the resources to manage such an event and what resources we do have are committed to delivering core priorities.

In the case of Properties in Care this is positive PR generation and media liaison which in turn delivers visitors, income and enhanced reputation. An assessment of resources needed suggests that they would be significant. The recent BBC Series led by Neil Oliver suggests that a 1-2 minute piece requires half a day's filming, which will include cultural resources staff, operational staff and media staff. This does not, of course, include the lead in and preparation time.

We have estimated the resources required for a fly-on-the-wall documentary series, using our own expertise and figures supplied by an external production company. For a series of 6 half-hour episodes we would expect to commit, at a minimum, around 120 days. This would require a 100% commitment by a member of the marketing and media team. On top of that would be the involvement of many other members of staff across PIC to provide access, background information, interviews and so on.

In discussion with English Heritage, much of the negative content from the series came about as a result of their media team not having the human resource to manage, co-ordinate and liaise with the film crew throughout. They have a core media team of 16 people.

13. A further consideration is the time which the staff at the castle would be required to put in to the series. The series, as suggested to us, would cover a full year and this would require a huge commitment from castle staff. Edinburgh Castle is Scotland's largest paid visitor attraction with over 1 million visitors a year. Staff should not be deflected from attracting those people and then giving them a world-class service when they visit. The pressure will be greatest on key staff as their 'individual and personal characters' would play a key role. The Executive Manager and the various heads of service would be closely tracked. These are precisely the staff that need to devote all of their energy to conserving and managing the castle and welcoming visitors.

14. Finally, in terms of staff commitment, there is clear evidence that staff are unwilling to participate in such a programme. This is not only because of the potential damage it might do to Historic Scotland and the castle's reputation and the time commitment it might take. It is also due to personal reluctance to participate. This lack of support would make producing a series of this type very difficult, if not impossible. Personal invasion of an individual staff member's privacy is not something we can impose on staff – and we cannot guarantee it would not happen if a series went ahead.

Alternative Media Activity

15. The strong recommendation to continue to reject approaches for fly-on-the-wall documentaries is also based on our strong record of positive and continued success elsewhere.

16. Much of our media activity is based on speaking directly to our core audiences with visible and measurable positive outcomes. Our recent Homecoming membership marketing campaign, for example, targeted at Scots families has been closely monitored and has produced membership sales of over 3,700 against a target of 2,200. This integrated campaign included a variety of media including TV and radio advertising; a dedicated web site; text marketing, direct mail and significant PR activity. and did not just rely on a single medium.. This, in part, is the reason it was so successful.

In this particular campaign the PR element was assessed as generating:

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| PR value: Equivalent value achieved | £213,398 |
| ROI | £1:£12 |
| Opportunities to see/hear | 4,475,000 |

17. Our record within Properties in Care for positive PR and media coverage is impressive; 99% is the current rate of positive media coverage for PIC PR (*first quarter 2009-10 results*). This level has been consistently above 97% for the last 18 months. This is due to a pro-active, positive PR strategy, good media relations and liaison and a committed, specialist team. This has contributed to a growth in members, visits and income.

A recent example of successfully working with a film crew in a pro-active, PR-managed manner is a Russian film crew who came to Edinburgh Castle in June this year. Russia is one of our key developing markets – and one which our travel trade team have been concentrating on for at least the past 4 years.

It is one of the very many media visits that the PIC marketing and media team manage each year. We have already arranged 178 on-site media visits to PICs since 1st April this year. The details of the Russian visit are:

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| Visit dates | 20 th – 23 rd June |
| Media title | Neputivue Zamethi |
| Programme viewer volume | 20,000,000 viewers |
| HS time on screen | To be confirmed – to be aired. Minimum 3 minutes. |
| Cost to HS | 3 hours of staff liaison time |
| PR coverage: Equivalent value achieved | €120,000 per minute (£102,987.89, current exchange rate) |
| | Likely: €360,000 |

18. We have also spoken to media production companies about alternative options for programmes, including the work at Stirling Castle. There has been little if any interest in these propositions; Edinburgh Castle is the most attractive subject by far. Broadcasters know it is the most ‘gossip’ based for television and they may be in a position to sell it to populist mass-market channels or networks outside of the UK – i.e they can make more money on it. It is here that there is least justification in allowing a fly-on-the-wall documentary and where lack of benefits and risk to PIC and Scottish tourism is greatest.

Recommendation

19. From the foregoing assessment it is evident there is little support for a behind the scenes programme within Properties in Care at Edinburgh Castle or any other core operation. This is based on the resources needed; the reputational damage; the lack of positive return for a large investment; the presence of proven alternatives and the evidence from the recent English Heritage series..

20. It is therefore strongly recommended that the Board support the continuation of the policy to reject applications to film fly-on-the-wall documentaries at Historic Scotland sites.

PETER BROMLEY

Properties in Care

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