

# Title: Possible Galloway National Park – Reporter progress update

**Date: 27 November 2024**

| **Purpose:** | For decision |
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| **Which of the current Business or Corporate Plan priorities does this topic drive forward and in what way?:** | The reporting work on the new National Park proposal for Galloway is part of our 30x30 delivery plan, though National Parks have an important contribution to make across NatureScot priorities to protect, restore and value nature. |
| **Summary:** | This paper provides an update on the Reporter process for the National Park proposal as we move into the formal consultation phase. |
| **Actions:** | The Board is asked to note this update and confirm support for the proposals for ongoing Board involvement in the Reporter work. |
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| **Appendices**: Please note all appendices. | Annex A - Overview of the main elements of the pre-consultation phase of reporting work |

## Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on progress with the Reporter process for the statutory proposal for a National Park in Galloway.

## Pre-consultation phase

1. The pre-consultation phase has now concluded. Our focus in this phase was on speaking to key stakeholders, listening to concerns and aspirations, encouraging engagement with the proposal, and explaining the process and our role as Reporter. This has helped us understand the issues that matter to communities and interest groups and this, as well as our own extensive fieldwork, has enabled us to shape a well-informed formal consultation.
2. During this period, we:
   1. Contacted and met with key stakeholders (eg local authorities, community councils, elected members) directly to seek discussion on the proposals. This has included ongoing engagement with local authority officials and over 30 meetings with over 400 people from local and national groups to explain the process and discuss the issues it raised.
   2. Launched an online hub to gauge opinions via regular surveys and share information with the general public. The online Reporter hub has had over 1,000 individual respondents with almost 3,000 comments.
   3. Distributed leaflets to 52,000 households and businesses in and close to the indicative area.
3. The proposal has attracted much interest and attention, with strong feelings expressed by interested parties with a range of views. We have sought to enable respectful debate and remain committed to listening to all thoughts, opinions, reasoning and views on the proposal and reporting on these in an open and transparent manner.
4. There were reported difficulties in getting the leaflet distributed to all households. We used a recommended Royal Mail service. We hope we can overcome this for future deliveries, e.g. by informing households in advance of the consultation leaflet distribution. The opportunities for events and online input will complement all materials delivered by post.
5. We have had constructive dialogue with the regional representatives of the farming and land management sector and are continuing to explore how we can work with this sector to ensure representatives are fully engaged in the consultation.
6. Overall, we consider the aims of this phase of work have been met and provide a solid foundation for the consultation phase to come. Further detail on the detailed aspects of this work is provided in Annex A.

## Consultation phase

1. We have now started the formal consultation phase with the publication of the consultation document on 7 November 2024. We would like to thank the PAC members for their engagement with preparing the consultation.
2. The formal consultation phase has been extended to 14 weeks and will now run until 14 February 2025. We are discussing with Scottish Government if this requires an extension to the timetable for our advice.
3. The consultation invites views on a number of areas, including location and size of the potential National Park and options for functions, powers and governance arrangements and name.
4. A programme of nearly 30 open public events across the region will be independently delivered and reported on by the consultancy Outside the Box from November to January to support this process (for latest details see the [online Reporter hub](https://newnationalparkgalloway.commonplace.is/en-GB/proposals/events/step1)). Outside the Box will also be hosting three or four online events which will be open to people throughout Scotland.
5. In addition to these formal open events, we have circa 10 bespoke meetings being organised by key sectors including agriculture, forestry and tourism and others, including the three local authorities. We are also planning a small number (circa 5) of drop-in surgeries which NatureScot staff will deliver to complement the formal open events.
6. We will keep this programme under review in response to suggestions and ideas from all interest groups.

## Board involvement and next steps

1. We have invited Board members to indicate their availability for the events hosted by the external facilitators and would welcome attendees at these events. We have good uptake already and will continue to promote opportunities for further meetings.
2. The Board will have the opportunity to discuss the National Park proposal at its upcoming meetings in February and March, prior to considering the advice to Ministers at an exceptional Board meeting in April.
3. Following consideration of our advice, if Ministers decide to go ahead with designation, a further consultation would take place on a draft designation order which would include a detailed boundary.
4. Through their contacts and network, all Board members have a role to play in explaining this work and championing our approach as Reporter during this process.

## Conclusion

1. The Board is asked to note this update and confirm support for the proposals for ongoing Board involvement in the Reporter work.

## Annex A - Overview of the main elements of the pre-consultation phase of reporting work

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| **Action** | **Key outputs** |
| 1. Write to all local authorities, community councils and community development organisations in the area proposed in the Bid alerting them of the proposal and seeking meetings with them | Provided briefing to the three local authorities, 52 community councils and 39 community groups across the area. |
| 1. Provide information, such as details of the process, Frequently Asked Questions and updates on progress, on the [national park pages](https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-areas/national-designations/national-parks) of our website. These will be updated throughout the reporting work. | Published monthly updates on our website on key developments. |
| 1. Provide an [online engagement platform](https://newnationalparkgalloway.commonplace.is/) from the end of August 2024. This will provide information and also surveys and map-based interaction. Information on forthcoming events will be here too. | 5 polls about the proposal were published on the hub in addition to 1 ‘How are we doing survey’. These generated nearly 3000 comments from over 1000 respondents, with over 1200 people subscribing for updates from the hub. |
| 1. Distribute an introductory, explanatory leaflet to household and business addresses in, and near, the area proposed in the nomination. | Distributed 52,000 leaflets to households and businesses within and close to the indicative area (though it is clear not all of these were delivered) |
| 1. Hold a series of online and in-person meetings with local, regional and national stakeholders. | Held or inputted to over 30 meetings online and in person with circa people 400 attending. |
| 1. Hold a series of drop-in surgeries across the area and at relevant meetings and events. | Postponed until the consultation so they supported the detailed proposals in the consultation. |
| 1. Connect with the range of businesses operating in the area – farming and forestry, tourism and renewables | Met and provided regular updates to representative bodies including CONFOR, NFUS, Scottish Renewables, SL&E and SSDA  Worked with SOSE and the South of Scotland team to scope and begin to develop a bespoke social, economic and environmental profile of the proposed area |
| 1. Scope and develop bespoke engagement with young people and under-represented people and groups. | Wrote to over 250 organisations across these sectors and published education resources for schools |
| 1. Issue press releases and social media content to raise the profile of the work. | Maintained our social media presence and dealt with press enquires |
| 1. Provide an email address for queries and aim to respond to them within five working days. | Responded to over 300 emails and letters and dealt with three FoI requests. |