

DO YOU REALLY WANT A GALLOWAY NATIONAL PARK?

The report commissioned by Dumfries and Galloway Council from the Southern Upland partnership on the possibility of a national park for Galloway requires careful scrutiny as it contains many challengeable assumptions about how national park status can resolve the rural economic and social problems of the area.

I set out 6 challenges for local residents to consider in debating the external proposition for a national park:

1. The best national parks globally are those established by a compact between local residents and external interests led by government. The report on the other hand imposes arguments to persuade local residents without even consulting them. Do you want this external imposition?
2. The proposal cuts across the developing, locally driven and bottom up approach of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere. It should be allowed to prove its worth before being summarily set aside. Do you agree that the Biosphere is worth allowing to come to fruition under local ownership?
3. A national park under the Scottish legislation of 2000 will take control out of local community hands and place it entirely with the Scottish Parliament and Government: to approve primary legislation, establish the park authority, appoint its members, determine its budget, approve its plan and operating budget. Control will rest in Edinburgh and Holyrood, not locally. Is this what you really want to happen?
4. Northern Galloway does need a special injection of resources and effort to improve its economic and social prospects. Why not designate it as a Rural Development Zone with the Scottish Government instructing all of its agencies to help in its delivery. This approach will focus on the issues which small communities are most concerned about. Would you agree?
5. The national parks act makes it clear that when there is conflict between the aims, the aim to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage must be favoured. This will not be the case if the demand is to improve the economic prospects of the area. Do you prefer this approach or a more balanced approach?
6. Finally, will a national park be able to ignore the major threats to the land and landscape of the area when Scottish Government policies demand more forestry and more renewable energy installations without any plan? There is no evidence that the two existing national parks in Scotland have been able to do so. So, what's the point?

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