

# A Galloway National Park?

The proposers of a national park in Galloway claim that its establishment will result in a better future for people, communities, economy, culture and the environment in the area.

Is this likely? What are the real issues that need to be addressed during this consultation? Who is best placed to provide the solutions we need? How can the friction and concern in our communities be minimised? And what's the hurry?

All these are legitimate questions to be put in dialogue with NatureScot, the official statutory Reporter on the proposals. And remember, it is just a proposal and our views as communities and individuals in the Glenkens really matter.

## What are the real issues in our area?

It is obvious that availability and cost of housing, jobs for young people, continuation of locally provided schools education, access to the vital services that people need, especially health and welfare, as well as continuing concerns about the extent of commercial afforestation and wind farms, and the future of farming, and the lack of effective consultation are all issues concerning us.

## What do we expect government bodies to be doing about them?

In the Glenkens a lot of thinking

has been done and action taken about our futures, more than in most rural areas in Scotland. We want to build on these excellent local initiatives, but it needs adequate resources to bring benefits locally.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is responsible for social services, transport, education, housing and more. How can it be more effective in addressing our needs and concerns? For example, we should expect them to work with the NHS for the care services, with Loreburn Housing Association for the provision of affordable homes and with further and higher education providers for training and skills development of locals.

There is a relatively new government agency, South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE), with its broad remit to support not just the economy but to play a formative role on social provision and environmental care.

They should be challenged to do more given their sizeable budget and remit. The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere with its locally appointed Partnership Board has passed the 10 year test from UNESCO. However, it is struggling to find guaranteed long-term support to continue and expand its activities. Surely, the Scottish Government directly, or as currently via SoSE, should be helping with the modest sums that are needed for its work.

NatureScot and Forest and Land Scotland are doing a great

deal on state owned land, for example on Cairnmore of Fleet and in the Galloway Forest Park, respectively to improve the natural environment and promote community interest, so what more is needed? And why can't the agriculture support regime be tweaked to help local farmers more in looking after the land as well as producing

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food?

### Do we really need another government body?

Put this way, there is already activity and the potential for more to address our area's problems. So do we really need a separate agency? Even the government group who scrutinised the proposals by the Galloway National Park Association questioned the duplication and confusion that would occur with another authority being established. Furthermore, that group questioned the role of a national park authority compared with the clear mandates that existing bodies should have. All fair questions which need to be addressed.

### Who would be in charge?

A national park authority established under an Act of the Scottish Parliament would be a government agency without independence of action as its terms of reference, strategies and funding would all be determined by the Scottish Government.

Although some of its members would be locally elected, the First Minister would appoint others. Is this what the area needs?

### What's the rush?

Many people are asking why the rush to complete the consultation on these far ranging proposals. The answer is simple. The Scottish Government has decided it wishes to establish a new national park before

the elections to the Scottish Parliament to be held in May 2026.

To achieve this it plans to update the basic national parks legislation approved in 2000 and to have the Designation Order for the new park approved by the parliament before the elections.

All of this is very worrying to many of us in the area. From my experience of establishing national parks around the world, rushing creates disputes and

disagreements within communities that can take many years to repair.

### Is there another way forward?

Yes, there is another way. In the early 1990s,

the government in Edinburgh agreed to the establishment of working parties for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs and for the Cairngorms. This allowed time for debate, sharing of common concerns, gradual resolution of disagreements and identifying the most appropriate solutions.

A similar approach could be undertaken in Galloway bringing together the government bodies locally and regionally and nationally – the Council, SoSE, NatureScot, Scottish Forestry, Forest and Land Scotland and the Biosphere Partnership, and most importantly the local interests around this large area, to carefully identify what the issues are and the options for moving forward.

A concerted approach like this would put the communities and the people of the area at the heart of the matter. It is worth a try. Actions and resources to help resolve them are needed, but a single new agency is hardly going to solve them all.

Roger Crofts, Dalry

Roger was CEO for Scottish Natural Heritage leading on the establishment of Scotland's two National Parks, chair for Europe of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas 2000-2008, chair of the Durban Accord World Parks Congress 2003 and a recipient of the Fred M Packard International Parks Merit Award 2016

**Pictured is the view over Dalry from the Mulloch Hill by Roger Crofts**

