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Time to pause on plans for a new national park

The 'all things to all people' approach to establishing a consensus for proposals in Galloway is not working: we need discussions on neutral ground

To read some accounts, the local proposals for a national park in Galloway is a political done deal. Its proponents claim a transformation for nature and the land and solving affordable housing and jobs crises among others. But there is mounting opposition from farmers and many small businesses.


There is [deep concern in communities](#) that divisions occurring now will take a long time to repair, so that many residents are worried about even attending public meetings on the issue.

Is the apparent rush to have the park designated before the May 2026 parliamentary elections achievable to benefit communities, nature and land? Will the promised national parks statutory revision in the Natural Environment Bill change the scene?

International experience tells me that rushing these matters when there is not a settled will stores up disputes which take years to overcome. Neutral ground needs to be cultivated. That is exactly what was done from 1991 when the Conservative government – no lover of national parks – set up working parties for the Cairngorms and for Loch Lomond and the Trossachs to consider the way forward. Their members represented all relevant interests. [No such consensual group has been established in Galloway.](#)

NatureScot, as the statutory reporter, has so little time to untangle the many critical issues facing the area. These require resolution now. [Farmers and foresters](#) need novel support schemes to help address the climate and biodiversity crises. Rural communities need improved access to services.

Housing at affordable cost is required for local workers. Increased tourism must not result in house price escalation and negatively affect communities and nature. The Northern Ireland supply roads to the ferry ports need upgrading. Local training and job creation is needed for renewable energy and forestry industries. And more.



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None of these are primarily for a national park authority, despite claims to the contrary. There are existing public and charitable bodies who collectively should be leading from the front.

South of Scotland Enterprise (SoSE) with its environmental, social and economic remit, having led on a land-use strategy and established a natural capital innovation zone, has a central role.

The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere was recently re-accredited by Unesco and has achieved much in its first decade. With a firm financial future and refreshed leadership it could achieve even more. But it is common knowledge that SoSE has threatened to stop its funding, seemingly giving the biosphere partnership board no option but to support the national park proposition.

An “all things to all people” approach in the hope of consensus for a national park is not working. It is time to take breath, involve all parties on neutral ground to work out solution and to draw on experience both internationally and within Scotland.

Roger Crofts is a recipient of the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s Fred M. Packard International Parks Merit Award