



NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4: CALL FOR IDEAS

The Galloway National Park Association (GNPA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute its thoughts to the development of this key policy document, which assumes even greater importance as Scotland faces up to the challenges posed by the climate emergency and the biodiversity crisis, and the daunting task of rebuilding its economy and societal confidence in the wake of the current Covid-19 epidemic.

GNPA

The GNPA is a small charitable body established in 2017 and recognised by OSCR (Reg No SC047398). It is run by volunteers based in the region and funded entirely by membership subscriptions and by donations, predominantly from private sources. Its membership currently stands at over 700. Over the three years of its existence to date GNPA has researched experience in setting up and running the two existing Scottish National Parks and others across the UK, and its relevance to the circumstances of, and challenges facing, South West Scotland. It has also investigated the current state of the society and the economy of the region, and the prospects for these, with a view to assess how these might be affected by the creation of a National Park.

The character of South West Scotland

South West Scotland is an area which has long relied heavily on its land-based industries, and which to this day remains significantly dependent upon them. Historically, agriculture predominated but with the expansion of commercial plantations over the past century these have increasingly involved a mix of farming and forestry. At the same time, the region has, in common with other rural areas, seen a diversification of business activity, often into sectors such as tourism, which also rely heavily on the quality of its natural resources and the way in which these are managed.

The relatively benign conditions for land-based industry for long ensured a degree of modest prosperity for much of the region, especially when compared to many rural areas north of the Central Belt and particularly north and west of the Great Glen. This, together with its geographical position cut off from Scotland's main population centres by the sparsely settled Southern Uplands and by-passed by the main north-south transport corridors, has resulted in the needs of its modest population (especially the one hundred thousand or so living west of the Nith) being very often overlooked in plans for Scotland's future. This tendency to neglect it has perhaps been reinforced by the strong economic and social links across the border with England and the fact

that the key function of its main traffic arteries is as links between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain and Europe.

Treatment in previous National Planning Frameworks

The region's low profile has been reflected in its limited coverage in previous iterations of the National Planning Framework. Many of the aspirations set out have related to projects designed primarily to benefit other areas: the afore-mentioned trunk roads, the High Voltage Transmission line proposed in NPF3 and the renewable energy potential identified in the Solway. Beyond that, references have been confined largely to Dumfries (variously described as a regional centre, gateway town and "Learning Town"), to Stranraer as a town at the mercy of changing ferry logistics, and to ambitions to develop coastal walking routes. Biosphere reserves and Dark Skies Parks are acknowledged to be "distinctive assets" but without mention of the fact that Scotland's two prime examples are situated in Galloway.

Changing the game: the case for a Galloway National Park

In common with the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP), which has already submitted evidence to that effect, GNPA believes that the designation of more National Parks could do more than any other single initiative to transform the fortunes of many of Scotland's remoter rural communities. This potential is particularly pronounced in regions of high environmental quality and cultural interest which, partly because of the country's wealth of fine landscapes, are less well-known and appreciated. These often happen also to be areas of economic disadvantage and social deprivation, frequently increasingly so. The need to boost their flagging economies, with their growing dependence on the leisure and hospitality sectors as jobs have drained out of the land-based industries and public bodies, will be particularly acute in the wake of the current Covid-19 epidemic.

Galloway is one of these areas. It currently endures Scotland's lowest average wage rates and its communities have featured increasingly prominently in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Partly as a consequence, it has amongst the most worrying demographic profiles in Scotland. This relative decline has been in train for decades now and has occurred despite the region's many attractions as a place to live and work, most notably its rich natural and cultural heritage and a wealth of appealing small towns and villages scarcely matched elsewhere in the country.

GNPA strongly believes that these are assets which can and should be turned to advantage – and urgently. It is also convinced that the establishment of a National Park would be by far the most effective means of doing so. Such a National Park would complement and build upon the excellent work of the existing Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere, and add to it the unique internationally recognised profile and image that the title confers. The resources, status and long-term commitment that go with the designation would also enable it to play a crucial,

central role in guiding the future evolution of land use in a region that can expect to see more changes than most in response to the challenges that the country now faces. It would also be in a better position than existing bodies to deliver some of the ambitions for its development articulated in NPF3, such as those for a Solway Coastal Path.

GNPA has already set out the case for such a National Park in the report that it presented to ministers in April last year: “Galloway National Park: It’s Our Time”. This not only spelt out the arguments in favour but also demonstrated the widespread support for the proposal amongst the public and local authorities across the region. The socio-economic arguments are elaborated in a further document “The Potential Socio-economic Impacts of a New National Park for Galloway” published by SCNP in September 2019. Both documents are accessible through GNPA’s website: www.gallowaynationalpark.org

Conclusion

On the basis of the evidence and arguments summarised in these reports, and in SCNP’s separate submission to this consultation, GNPA urges Ministers most strongly to make the establishment of a Galloway National Park a key plank in their strategy for the sustainable development of south west Scotland and as such to identify it as a National Development in NPF4.



Galloway National Park Association is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered with OSCR SC047398
