

Nominations for new National Park in Scotland – draft appraisal framework consultation

Consultation closes 4 August 2023

Consultation overview

Trust responded to two earlier rounds of consultation 1) Spring 2022's 'call for ideas' for 'future of Scotland's National Parks' and 2) Autumn 2023's selection criteria for new National Park in Scotland

The Scottish Government has now published a [nominations process and a draft appraisal framework](#) for selecting a new National Park in Scotland.

Key related policies – Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, community wealth building, wellbeing economies, net zero and a just transition, access and visitor management.

This consultation is about how nominations for new National Parks should be appraised.

In Ministerial Consultation Paper's Foreword, the Scottish Government are consulting on the draft appraisal framework because they 'want to ensure that the nominations and appraisal process is open, fair and transparent.'

From the introduction:

'Scotland's National Parks are more important now than ever before. Working with partners and their local communities, they can be exemplars in their work to protect and restore nature. They can develop and test nature based solutions – such as restoring peatland and expanding woodland – in order to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change in a way that is fair and inclusive to those living and working in their areas. They can help to encourage nature-friendly farming, forestry and marine use. They can support sustainable tourism and visitor management. They can create new employment opportunities and support sustainable growth of the local economy by promoting green skills and jobs. And they can help to generate and channel inward investment in the area's precious natural resources.'

We stated in response to previous consultation on selection criteria that National Parks should be exemplars for nature restoration and progressive land management. The repeated use of 'can' in paragraph above suggests that there is a lot of emphasis on the future!

Evidence informing the framework: NatureScot's published report, Feb 2023. NatureScot's report included recommendations for amendments to existing legislation regarding the role of National Parks in Scotland and recommendations for the nomination process and selection criteria for new National Parks in Scotland. They also suggested changes to the powers and functions of National Parks, which would be subject to a future consultation.

The main aspects of this consultation are:

- Appraisal framework – no consultation question about this
- Proposed criteria for new National Parks – 7 criteria are being proposed and consultation questions relate to the criteria
- Nomination form – no consultation question about this

Route to designation

1. Nominations submitted

2. Appraisal, resulting in at least one proposal being selected.
3. Ministers appoint a reporter (likely to be NatureScot) to investigate and report on the proposal (report will answer set of questions). The report stage would be a legal process – outlined in National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000.
4. Report 'laid before' Scottish Parliament
5. Designation - Scottish Ministers may decide to make a "designation order" following the process set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 (Sections 6-7). This will include sending a copy of the draft designation order to every local authority within the proposed area, laying the proposed draft order before parliament and a further phase of public consultation on the proposed draft order.

Support for communities to submit nominations

Expected to be some non-financial support to help communities workshop/meet to discuss their nomination.

Appraisal Framework – a set of criteria to guide evaluation of each nomination (once finalised it will include info about how each criterion will be scored).

Criterion 1 - outstanding national importance

Is the area of outstanding national importance because of its natural heritage or the combination of its natural and cultural heritage?

- Component 1 - Is the proposed area of outstanding national importance due its natural heritage, including biodiversity, geodiversity and landscapes?
- Component 2 - Is the proposed area of outstanding national importance due to the area's cultural heritage, including the historic environment?

Criterion 2 - size, character and coherence

- Component 1 Does the area have a distinctive character and a coherent identity?
- Component 2 Is the proposed area of a sufficient size to justify integrated management as a National Park?

Criterion 3 - meeting the special needs of the area

How would designating the area as a National Park meet the special needs of the area? What difference would National Park designation make to the area for nature restoration, cultural heritage, sustainable use of natural resources, public enjoyment and sustainable communities?

- Component 1 How would National Park designation support the conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage and the historic environment?
- Component 2 How would National Park designation support nature recovery and restoration in the area, including ecosystem restoration, protection and recovery of vulnerable and important species and wildlife management?
- Component 3 How would National Park designation help to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the area by Scotland's people?
- Component 4 How would National Park designation support the sustainable development and well-being of local communities?

- Component 5 How would National Park designation support the sustainable use of the area's natural resources and how it would make a significant contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation?

Criterion 4 visitor management and experience

How would designating the area as a National Park support visitor management and the area's offer for education, recreation and enjoyment by all of Scotland's people?

- Component 1 How would National Park designation enhance opportunities for enjoyment, recreation and understanding of the area's natural and cultural heritage?
- Component 2 How would National Park designation support visitor management in the area?
- Component 3 How could National Park designation support current and potential future transport infrastructure in and around the proposed area?
- Component 4 How could National Park designation support access to nature for Scotland's people?

Criterion 5 – added value

Why is the investment required to create and operate a new National Park for this area justified?

- Component 1 How would the benefits of a National Park in the area justify the investment required?
- Component 2 What is the added value that National Park designation would bring to the area?

Criterion 6 - local support

Is there sufficient evidence of local support for this proposal?

- Component 1 What level of local support (with evidence) is there from local interests (community bodies, landowners and managers, businesses, third sector organisations, public bodies etc).
- Component 2 What level of support (with evidence) is there from the local authority/authorities in the area?

Criterion 7 - strategic contribution

Would the designation of the area bring benefits to Scotland as a whole and contribute to strategic priorities including nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptation action, green investment, skills and jobs and nature friendly farming?

- Component 1 How could National Park designation support the area's leadership on climate change mitigation and adaptation in a way that is fair and inclusive for local communities?
- Component 2 How could National Park designation support the area's contribution to commitments within the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, including ecosystem restoration, protection and recovery of vulnerable species, wildlife management, nature friendly farming, the expansion of areas that are protected for nature and the development of nature networks?
- Component 3 How could designation as a National Park support sustainable investment in the area's natural capital?
- Component 4 How could designation as a National Park support the development of green skills and jobs in the area?

- Component 5 How could designation as a National Park complement the contribution that Scotland's existing National Parks make to tackling the nature and biodiversity crises?

Consultation Questions

Trust responses in blue

1. Do you agree that '**outstanding national importance**' should be a criterion for assessing nominations for new National Parks?

Agree.

Comment: Whilst we agree with this criterion we recognise that 'outstanding' is open to interpretation. We support keeping this interpretation open so that nominees can explain what makes the area outstanding.

1. Do you agree with the components of criterion 1 (outstanding national importance)? If disagree, asked to explain.

Component 1 - Is the proposed area of outstanding national importance due its natural heritage, including biodiversity, geodiversity and landscapes? - agree

Component 2 - Is the proposed area of outstanding national importance due to the area's cultural heritage, including the historic environment? - agree

Comment: Whilst we agree with both of these components, we would like to see the potential of an area to meet Component 1 of this criterion included in its interpretation. The reason being, we don't want to see areas excluded which have huge potential for biodiversity recovery and for which a designation as a National Park could realise that potential. Recognising, too, that Scotland as a whole ranks very low on the Biodiversity Intactness Index - in 2022, it was reported¹ that nature in Scotland is more depleted than 88% of 240 countries and territories across the world. This means Scotland's natural heritage, whilst it has huge potential, is more commonly not of an outstanding level. A National Park designation for an area with huge natural heritage potential, could help to change that.

2. Do you agree that '**size, character and coherence**' should be a criterion for assessing nominations for new National Parks? If disagree, asked to explain

Agree.

3. Do you agree with the components of criterion 2 (size, character and coherence)? If disagree, asked to explain

Component 1 Does the area have a distinctive character and a coherent identity? - agree

¹ <https://www.scotlink.org/fostering-connection-between-parliament-and-nature/>

Component 2 Is the proposed area of a sufficient size to justify integrated management as a National Park? - [agree](#)

4. Do you agree that '**meeting the special needs of the area**' should be a criterion for assessing nominations for new National Parks? If disagree, asked to explain

[Agree](#)

[Comment: Whilst we agree with this criterion, we expect special needs of different areas to be wide ranging and sometimes expressed as opposites. For example some areas will want a National Park designation because they want to deal with existing visitor management pressures, whereas other areas will want a National Park designation to bring more people into an area, with associated economic and social and environmental benefits too.](#)

5. Do you agree with the components of criterion 3 (meeting the special needs of the area)? If disagree, asked to explain

Component 1 How would National Park designation support the conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage and the historic environment? - [agree](#)

Component 2 How would National Park designation support nature recovery and restoration in the area, including ecosystem restoration, protection and recovery of vulnerable and important species and wildlife management? - [agree](#)

Component 3 How would National Park designation help to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the area by Scotland's people? - [agree](#)

Component 4 How would National Park designation support the sustainable development and well-being of local communities? - [agree](#)

Component 5 How would National Park designation support the sustainable use of the area's natural resources and how it would make a significant contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation? - [agree](#)

6. Do you agree that '**visitor management and experience**' should be a criterion for assessing nominations for new National Parks? If disagree, asked to explain.

[Agree.](#)

[Comment: We agree with this criterion because it allows an area bidding for a National Park designation to explain how they will manage visitor numbers where they are already high, or conversely, allow an area to explain how visitors will be attracted to an area which they currently overlook.](#)

7. Do you agree with the components of criterion 4 (visitor management and experience)? If disagree, asked to explain.

Component 1 How would National Park designation enhance opportunities for enjoyment, recreation and understanding of the area's natural and cultural heritage? - [agree](#)

Component 2 How would National Park designation support visitor management in the area? - agree

Component 3 How could National Park designation support current and potential future transport infrastructure in and around the proposed area? - agree

Component 4 How could National Park designation support access to nature for Scotland's people? - agree

8. Do you agree that **'added value'** should be a criterion for assessing nominations for new National Parks? If disagree, asked to explain.

Don't know.

Comment: We have said we 'don't know' in response to this question because we are not sure what 'added value' is supposed to mean. This seems too vague for a criterion. In the earlier consultation 'added value' was presented as a question of whether investment was justified. It was perhaps clearer then what added value was understood to mean. We are also not sure what this criterion adds to what the other criterion, plus their components, already cover?

9. Do you agree with the components of criterion 5 (added value)?

Component 1 How would the benefits of a National Park in the area justify the investment required? - don't know

Component 2 What is the added value that National Park designation would bring to the area? - don't know

Comment: We have said 'don't know' in response to this question as we are not sure how benefits would be measured, nor how 'added value' would be assessed. We are also not clear what additional information would be provided for these components that wasn't also provided for components of other criteria.

10. Do you agree that **'local support'** should be a criterion for assessing nominations for new National Parks? If disagree, asked to explain

Agree.

Comment: Whilst we agree with this criterion, we are of the view that local support does not require unanimous local support. Instead, we see general support locally and lack of widespread opposition as an essential foundation for a bid to progress.

11. Do you agree with the components of criterion 6 (local support)? If disagree, asked to explain

Component 1 What level of local support (with evidence) is there from local interests (community bodies, landowners and managers, businesses, third sector organisations, public bodies etc). - agree

Component 2 What level of support (with evidence) is there from the local authority/authorities in the area? - don't know

Comment: We have selected 'don't know' in response to component 2 because whilst we recognise that Local Authorities are democratically elected, and in most areas we would expect Local Authority support for a bid, there could be cases where the Local Authority might not support a bid but there is local community support for a bid. In those instances, we don't think Local Authority opinion should sway an outcome for a designation. There are examples where this has happened in the past. In 2013, a North Harris National Park proposal didn't proceed because the Local Authority objected. The Local Authority will have a view on a designation, so it would always be beneficial as part of the process, to consult the Local Authority, but not for the Local Authority view to sway the final decision.

12. Do you agree that '**strategic contribution**' should be a criterion for assessing nominations for new National Parks? If disagree, asked to explain

Agree.

13. Do you agree with the components of criterion 7 (strategic importance)? If disagree, asked to explain

Component 1 How could National Park designation support the area's leadership on climate change mitigation and adaptation in a way that is fair and inclusive for local communities? - agree

Component 2 How could National Park designation support the area's contribution to commitments within the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, including ecosystem restoration, protection and recovery of vulnerable species, wildlife management, nature friendly farming, the expansion of areas that are protected for nature and the development of nature networks? - agree

Component 3 How could designation as a National Park support sustainable investment in the area's natural capital? - agree

Component 4 How could designation as a National Park support the development of green skills and jobs in the area? - agree

Component 5 How could designation as a National Park complement the contribution that Scotland's existing National Parks make to tackling the nature and biodiversity crises? agree

14. Once finalised, the appraisal framework will include details of how each criterion will be scored. This will be published ahead of the nominations process being launched. Do you have any comments that you would like to make about how the selection criteria should be scored?

We support the points made by Scottish Environment LINK in response to this question.

In addition, considering that the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 could be amended to reflect the importance of the nature and climate emergencies in the purposes and objectives of Scotland's National Parks, it seems right that the scoring system for each criterion should consider, and award points for, evidence submitted in a bid for how a designation would enable nature to recover and accelerate the ability of an area to sequester carbon and significantly reduce the carbon emissions of enterprises, residents and visitors in an area.

15. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make about the draft appraisal framework and nominations process for new National Parks?

We support the points made by Scottish Environment LINK in their response to this question.

In addition, we think the criteria can underpin, and would benefit from, an overall primary purpose for the new National Park that is about protecting and restoring nature. National Parks can be the leading examples for the recovery of nature in Scotland and we would like to see the new National Park set an example for what land management for nature looks like in Scotland.

We have previously outlined two key criteria for determining whether an area should benefit from National Park status. These are as follows:

- a) The potential for the land to be managed in an exemplary way to protect and restore our finest wild places. The park must be based on a thriving natural ecosystem.
- b) The strength of interest and support from the local community for the area to be designated based on an appreciation of the added visitor numbers and associated economic opportunities that the designation would bring.

Criteria 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 and their component parts could between them accommodate a). In addition, 'outstanding national importance' could be interpreted in part as an area that has or could have a thriving natural ecosystem, which would make it of 'outstanding national importance' in reversing biodiversity loss and improving Scotland's rankings on the Biodiversity Intactness Index as well as in demonstrating exemplary land management in Scotland for nature and climate. As part of this, an area that is designated could provide a uniquely wild experience for those who visit, becoming of 'outstanding national importance' to Scotland's visitor economy.

Criterion 6 and its component parts could accommodate b).