

# **NEW NATIONAL PARKS**

Supporting Nominating Groups



Prepared by Lateral North  
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## Introduction

The following report is prepared by Lateral North reflecting the work they undertook between November 2023 and February 2024. The work primarily focused on supporting the various nominating groups who were engaged in the process to be considered to be (one of) Scotland's next national park(s).

The report is broken down as follows:

### **Introduction**

- New National Parks: Process
- New National Parks: Nominating Groups
- New National Parks: Support for Groups
- Lateral North: Experience
- Lateral North: Approach

### **Meeting and Learning**

- Initial Stages of Project
- Developing Support Offering
- Overview of Scope of Works
- Developing Resources

### **Engagement**

- Promotion and Marketing
- Online Surveys
- Engagement Sessions

### **Reflections and Feedback**

- Reflections of The Different Nominating Areas
- Lessons Learned

### **Overall Analysis**

- Analysis of the Process
- Analysis and Lessons Learned for the Next Stages

## INTRODUCTION

### **New National Parks: Process**

The Scottish Government has committed to designating at least one new National Park in Scotland by the end of this parliamentary session in 2026. An open and public invitation for expressions of interest in new National Parks was launched in May 2023.

Communities and organisations who wish to put their area forward for designation as a National Park were invited to develop and submit their 'nomination'. These nominations have now closed as of 29th February 2024 after the process was officially launched on 12 October 2023.

Moving forward, the broad selection criteria that will be used to help assess nominations for new National Parks are:

- outstanding national importance
- size, character and coherence
- meeting the special needs of the area
- strategic contribution
- visitor management and tourism
- local support

## INTRODUCTION

### **New National Parks: Nominating Groups**

11 Nominating Groups from throughout Scotland expressed an interest in being considered for national park status - or being involved in the process. The open nature of the process meant that some nominating groups were constituted groups formed specifically for the purpose of gaining national park status (Galloway National Park Association and Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park, for example), while other groups were made up of individuals coming together to consider their landscape for designation or others who were put forward by community councils, development trusts or other designated groups.

The original 11 Nominating Groups were as follows (going from south to north):

- Borders
- Galloway
- Lammermuirs
- Loch Awe
- Largo Bay
- Lochaber
- Tay Forest
- Glen Affric

- Affric to Alledale
- Wester Ross
- Skye, Raasay and Rona

## INTRODUCTION

### **New National Parks: Support for Groups**

In October 2023 our organisation, Lateral North, won a competitive tender to support the different Nominating Groups with the inception meeting taking place on 2nd November 2023.

The support which was to be provided to all nominating Groups was to be completely impartial and focus on how they each developed their bid over the course of November 2023 - February 2024. As such, the support primarily was to focus around how each of the groups engaged with their local communities, people and organisations.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Lateral North: Experience**

Lateral North have a wealth of experience of working in rural Scotland and have delivered projects throughout Scotland since their inception in 2013. Lateral North work on projects within the landscape, rural communities and at a strategic level and, as such, have a key understanding of the conflicting challenges, opportunities and potential solutions that are at play at a local, regional and national level.

Through previous work Lateral North also acutely understands policies in place locally and nationally, how these are seen by different stakeholder groups, and how they are being implemented within different parts of the country.

Lateral North's work primarily focuses across two key strands:

- *Developing Ideas Alongside Communities*  
By undertaking extensive community engagement within communities Lateral North help shape ideas that are reflective of the needs and wants of each of the local communities they work with.
- *Mapping Ideas*  
Cartography has been a key part of the work Lateral North have delivered over the past 10 years and how mapping can be a key driver in understanding the landscape, area or communities within a particular geography also plays a key role in every project Lateral North undertakes.

To add National Park experience Lateral North also collaborated with Carron Tobin of ruralDimensions for this project due to her experience of helping establish the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and being one of its original directors.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Lateral North: Approach**

The approach proposed by Lateral North focused around the following key stages:

- *Inception*  
Initial desktop research and understanding of the overall project, process and furthering knowledge on what a new national park within Scotland could be.
- *Mobilisation*  
Meeting with each of the Nominating Groups to understand the stage they are at, what their approach is and what level of support is required.
- *Preparation*  
Preparing appropriate materials, maps and information alongside each nominating group to be used as part of the engagement work.
- *Engagement*  
Working alongside each of the groups to engage with their local communities to understand their hopes, aspirations, concerns and opinions.

The level of support eventually provided to each Nominating Group differed depending on their capacity and resource. In some cases no or little support was provided while in other cases considerable support was provided.

## MEETING AND LEARNING

### **Initial Stages of Project**

The inception meeting with the Scottish Government on the 2nd of November introduced the conversations which had so far taken place with each of the Nominating Groups as well as highlight best contact points, overall timetable for the project, aspirations for the new national park, other relevant information and administrative duties.

The priority from a Lateral North perspective was to meet each of the Nominating Groups and as such an initial digital meeting was arranged with each of the groups within the two weeks of the inception meeting while a physical meeting and ideas session was also arranged to take place within the first four weeks of the project.\*

Each of these digital meetings were a good way to understand who the key people were that were involved in each area, what work they had undertaken so far and what they wanted to achieve moving forward.

\*This offering was made to each of the Nominating Groups however in some cases (Lammermuirs, for example) the offer was not taken up.

## MEETING AND LEARNING

### **Developing Support Offering**

The development of the support offering primarily took place as part of the first physical meeting by which time Lateral North had a much clearer understanding of what could be offered and what could not.

The support offering was different per group and primarily was shaped by how much resource the respective group had. It was identified early on that, for example, Tay Forest required little support as they had already commissioned a series of engagement sessions through a landscape consultant, while Affric to Alledale, for example, was the complete opposite to this as it was being shaped by a small group of individuals rather than a constituted group. While the same level of support was available to all groups, the level of support began to shape itself depending on the group itself and how well they were resourced.

The level of support was also shaped by how much each group asked for and requested of us - Lateral North - to help them with their bid. In Galloway, for example, the nominating group wanted to ensure that any future engagement had clear reference to the creative and cultural sector as they believed this to be a key element missing from their bid, meanwhile Largo Bay, for example, were extremely keen to expand their network and focus on stakeholder engagement to begin with.

All of these conversations led to what was eventually offered to the different nominating bids.

## MEETING AND LEARNING

### **Overview of Scope of Works**

The support that was eventually agreed with the different nominating groups was primarily split into the following three areas of work:

1. *Development of Materials*

A series of standard resources were developed for the nominating groups - such as information packs and frequently asked questions - while other resources were also developed that were more specific to each of the groups. These included maps, posters and other information sheets that each group requested.

2. *Engagement Support*

Throughout January and February 2024 engagement sessions were held within each of the nominating groups areas to understand what local people thought of the proposal for their area to be considered to be a new national park. Lateral North supported this engagement work for each of the areas that requested it and prepared appropriate materials that were displayed / handed out at each of these sessions.

3. *Mapping*

Maps were created for a number of the nominating groups to support their final bid and based on the engagement work which had taken place as well as other information each of the groups wanted to be mapped.

## MEETING AND LEARNING

### **Developing Resources**

To provide people - both nominating groups and the people they were engaging with - as much information as possible Lateral North developed a number of resources to help people understand what a national park is and what the process is that is currently ongoing to create a new national park(s) within Scotland.

These resources were as follows:

- [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document
- [Information Notes](#) document
- [Statutory Process](#) document
- Introductory Film: <https://vimeo.com/891769602/21862dde93?share=copy>

These resources were used extensively throughout the process and both physical and digital copies of all documents were made available to ensure they were accessible to all.

## ENGAGEMENT

### **Promotion and Marketing**

The promotion and marketing of the engagement sessions were primarily undertaken at a local level by the nominating group itself. Lateral North provided appropriate posters and booked spaces for the events where requested.

The promotion and marketing of the engagement events took place through printed versions of the posters being pinned up in local shops and notice boards, or digitally through social media pages and local newspaper articles.

Given the short time frame the promotion and marketing of specific engagement events were in some cases only given two weeks and moving forward it should be ensured that more time is provided than two weeks to promote engagement events around the new national park process.

The success of the promotion and marketing of engagement events was very much dependent on the resource available to each team.

## ENGAGEMENT

### **Online Surveys**

A standard online survey template was created and shared with all of the nominating groups with the option of them using it as it is or updating it and changing it as they desired. The online survey template offer was taken up by some groups, however, in other cases (Galloway, Tay Forest, for example) they already had existing surveys that were already gathering information and decided to not confuse matters by maintaining just one survey.

## ENGAGEMENT

### **Engagement Sessions**

Throughout January and February 2024 Lateral North supported a number of the nominating groups by facilitating and coordinating - alongside that respective nominating group - a series of engagement exercises. In most cases these engagement sessions took place in a concentrated period of time (usually 3-5 days) within the local area.

The engagement sessions primarily focused around a series of maps of the area (to highlight the area being considered as part of the bid) with pop-up banners, information sheets and other material available for people to read, look at and take away to consider their opinion on the matter. All of this information was also made available to each person who came through the door digitally and they were also able to ask Lateral North and the nominating groups themselves questions about the bid.

More detail on each of the engagement sessions is provided below.

## Galloway

Lateral North worked alongside the Galloway nominating group to develop a series of maps and graphics which focused on the area as well as develop the survey and other information that was used at the drop in sessions from 30th January - 2nd February. The sessions were attended by 197 people over the four days. Lateral North collated peoples opinions at the request of the Galloway bid group and as such the survey results were provided to the Galloway bid for inclusion in their nomination.





Glen Affric

Lateral North worked alongside the Glen Affric team to organise and book locations for the drop-in sessions as well as prepare data and information for the maps and information sheets that were presented as part of the drop-in sessions on the w/c 22nd January. Support has also been provided towards the development of the online survey, posters and printing/supply of other information for meetings and engagement events. The events (hosted on the 24th/26th/27th/28th of January and 1st February) were attended by a total of 428 people over the five sessions.



### Affric to Alledale

Lateral North worked alongside the Affric to Alledale team to organise and book locations for the drop-in sessions as well as prepare data and information for the maps and information sheets that were presented as part of the drop-in sessions on the w/c 29th January. Support has also been provided towards the development of the online survey, posters and printing/supply of other information for meetings and engagement events. The events held on 31st of January and 1st/2nd of February were attended by 125 people in total.



## Wester Ross

Lateral North worked alongside the Wester Ross team to organise and book locations for the drop-in sessions as well as prepare data and information for the maps and information sheets. These were all presented at the drop in sessions throughout the area on the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st January. The drop-in sessions were hindered by the weather and as such an additional two sessions were agreed with the nominating group for the w/c 12th February to address the two locations most affected by the weather - Kyle of Lochalsh and Ullapool. Support has also been provided towards the development of the online survey, posters and printing/supply of other information for meetings and engagement events. An additional engagement session with Gairloch High School was also undertaken on 26th January. A total of 171 people attended all of the sessions.



## Lochaber

Lateral North worked alongside the Lochaber team to organise and book locations for the drop-in sessions as well as prepare data and information for the maps and information sheets. These were all presented at the drop in sessions throughout the area on the 16th, 18th and 19th January. The drop-in sessions were hindered by the weather with the event on the 16th January cancelled an hour before beginning. The events on the 18th and 19th January were attended by 12 and 14 people respectively. An additional engagement opportunity took place on the 27th January in Kinlochleven and was attended by 57 people.



## Skye and Raasay

Lateral North worked alongside the Skye and Raasay team to organise and book locations for the drop-in sessions as well as prepare data and information for the maps and information sheets. These were all presented at the drop in sessions throughout the area on the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th January. The drop-in sessions were extremely well attended with over 350 people engaged as part of these four sessions. The sessions took place in Sleat, Portree, Dunvegan and Raasay with the highest attended event reaching 110 people and the lowest attended with 40 people.



### Tay Forest

Lateral North have engaged with the Tay Forest team through a series of online meetings regarding their bid as well as read up on their proposal and engagement strategy through engagement with the nominating bids appointed consultant. A meeting with their wider team was held in early February to give feedback on their proposal.

### Other Groups

Above and beyond the nominating groups mentioned above the following groups did not take up the offer of support to run engagement work within their area:

- Largo Bay (dropped out of the process in December 2023)
- Lammermuirs (dropped out of the process in January 2024)
- Borders

## REFLECTIONS AND FEEDBACK

### **Reflections of The Different Nominating Areas**

Based on the engagement work undertaken by Lateral North the following reflections are provided regarding each of the different nominating groups and what was said by the local people in attendance at the engagement events.

#### Galloway

Within the Galloway area there is a clear desire for there to be a national park within the area. The main point which continued to be brought up by local people was that “the area needs something” and a lot of people see the creation of a national park as a way of bringing more resources, people and change to the area.

Out of all of the areas that Lateral North facilitated engagement work alongside, Galloway was clearly the least divided with the conversation much more focused around exploring ideas and opportunities rather than asking questions about what a national park is or the process. This will without a shadow of a doubt be because the GNPA have been promoting their campaign for over 7 years now within the local area so a lot more people are aware of what a national park is and what the process is as well.

The engagement sessions were a mix of people of different backgrounds – farmers and landowners through to dog walkers and artists – which were reflected in their varied comments. The four engagement sessions took place in four very different communities, however there was an overall sense within each of those that the creation of a national park within the area is something that a majority of the community want to see happen.

#### Loch Awe

The Loch Awe bid focuses around the water catchment area of its namesake within Argyll and Bute with the bid being developed and proposed by Niall MacLeod, a local resident who is very passionate about protecting the local environment.

The Loch Awe bid has hit challenges due to it primarily being developed by one person (with the support of a few additional people). This was particularly reflected within the engagement sessions, which were all well attended, and, as such, with only one person answering questions from a local level, people were often unable to have any length of time understanding the local bid itself which left people frustrated. There was also the concern that the bid had done little to bring on other partners or stakeholders and that further engagement work with local groups and organisations should be done first to establish whether it was something that should be taken forward.

Within the engagement sessions there was a strong presence from local land owners, farmers and crofters who were (almost unanimously) against the proposal for a national park for Loch Awe. In particular within Kilmartin - where one of the sessions were held - support was almost completely against by everyone who entered the engagement session.

However, other feedback which was given focused around how the bid should expand itself to include Oban to the west and Inverary to the east.

### Glen Affric

The group running the Glen Affric bid were all members of the Strathglass & Affric Community Company and undertook extensive local stakeholder engagement before undertaking their programme of public engagement within the local area.

Overall the engagement sessions were extremely well attended with one drop-in session seeing over 150 people come in through the door within the space of three hours. The conversations which took place at these sessions generally focused on people wanting to know more information about the process and what the local bid entailed.

The group running the bid were well versed on the process, clear in why they were championing the bid and thorough in their answers to questions.

Much like the other nominating bids within the Highland council area, a demographic of the local population were generally opposed to the bid and highlighted their concerns throughout each of the engagement sessions.

Based on the survey results the nominating group received - which was roughly 50/50 within their local area - the team decided against submitting a bid as they felt this did not constitute a clear desire to proceed to the next stage of the process.

### Affric to Alledale

The Affric to Alledale team straddled a similar geography to the Glen Affric bid, with the inclusion of Dingwall, Ben Wyvis and Strathpeffer within their proposed area. Unlike the Glen Affric bid, the Affric to Alledale team was made up of individuals who had come together to promote the idea of a national park for the area.

As such, the group had not undertaken as much stakeholder engagement within their local area as the other bid. This was then reflected in the engagement sessions whereby they were

questioned considerably as to how it was possible that they, as individuals, represented the desires of the local community. Overall, and based on their lesser resource, the sessions were not as well attended as those within the Glen Affric bid.

The group decided to remove themselves from the process once they had closed their online survey and their engagement sessions had been completed. The group highlighted that they were grateful for the opportunity to understand what people thought at a local level, however, given it was again roughly 50/50 in favour/against they felt that they could not move forward with the bid as they felt they did not have an overall consensus.

### Wester Ross

The process to consider whether Wester Ross would put forward a nomination for national park status was being coordinated by the Wester Ross Biosphere and it took a considerably different and more conservative approach to the others throughout Scotland.

First and foremost, the WRB was keen to understand whether there was local desire for even being involved in the process nevermind the bid itself and so it was through this route that they began discussions. Firstly they contacted local community councils and development trusts to see whether they wished to be involved in the process and then, upon there being a positive response from these groups, the WRB decided to host a series of public engagement events.

The public engagement events still ensured that the message was that the bid had to have the full backing of the local community and that WRB were solely there to facilitate the conversations and not to lead a bid. Even if it came back as a wholly positive response from the local people, WRB were keen to impress upon everyone that they would still not likely be the group that ended up submitting the bid and wanted to be seen as much more of a facilitator than anything else.

As was reflected in the community engagement events, and then confirmed in the online survey, the local Wester Ross population did not want to take forward a bid and as such they withdrew themselves from the process in the middle of February 2024.

### Lochaber

The Lochaber Working Group ran the nomination at a local level with the group made up of a series of individuals from different backgrounds including a local councillor, mountain guide, landscape consultant and others. As such, they had already undertaken a considerable amount

of engagement work before Lateral North met them in November 2023 with further engagement work planned which included visits to schools, presentations and online information sessions.

The nominating group have been proactive in their approach given their limited resources and managed to engage with a considerable number of people at a local level. The initial engagement sessions which were facilitated alongside Lateral North were unfortunately curtailed by severe weather (amber snow warnings with many roads closed postponed one event and affected attendance at the subsequent two) while an additional engagement opportunity in Kinlochleven was well attended with people generally interested in the proposal.

The nominating group has had considerable backlash from a portion of the community with lots of people highlighting their concerns about the process and what a national park would mean to an area which is already under considerable stress from tourism.

### Skye, Raasay and Rona

The Skye, Raasay and Rona bid was originally proposed by local councillors who subsequently enlisted a local person to run the engagement sessions and understand what people thought at a local level.

The engagement sessions were some of the best attended ones throughout Scotland with roughly 500 people attending events over the four days they took place in early January. Much like many of the other areas, local people wanted to understand more about the process and what it would mean to be a national park. Concerns were particularly raised regarding the fact that over-tourism is already a huge challenge for the area and that this would potentially exacerbate it further.

Additionally, the sessions were attended heavily by people from a crofting background who were vocally against the proposed national park. This was further emphasised when a vote was taken at a crofting event the week after the public engagement events with not a single hand raised in favour of national park status.

The bid for Skye, Raasay and Rona was officially removed from the process in February 2024.

### Tay Forest

The work undertaken by Lateral North alongside the Tay Forest bid was primarily through engagement with the local bid team. A landscape consultancy was commissioned to work alongside them and more information on the Tay Forest bid and process should be sought from them.

REFLECTIONS AND FEEDBACK**Lessons Learned**

Overall the engagement work undertaken within each of the nominating areas was more of a series of information sessions rather than developing ideas and opportunities that people might want to see within the bid. This was definitely a result of the timescales at play and for the next stages of the process - with whichever bid (or bids) move forward - the focus should be much more on what shape they want their national park to look like.

Engagement work is also something that requires a level of experience of understanding and listening to the concerns, questions, opportunities and ideas of the general public. The nominating groups themselves, while some did have this skill and experience, generally didn't have a level of experience in public engagement and this came across in what was in some cases very tense and pressurised environments.

Moving forward any future engagement sessions should provide a lot clearer answers - which should be part and parcel of the next stage due to the nature of its outputs - and be attended by facilitators, local community groups/stakeholders and also people who have lived experience of national parks within Scotland.

Further to this, engagement sessions should be advertised well in advance with local involvement and advertisement. Opportunities to engage both physically and digitally are important.

OVERALL ANALYSIS**Analysis of the Process**

The process to establish a new national park(s) is determined by working back from how long the statutory process is required to be and the fact that the national park(s) need to be established within this parliamentary term. As a result, the process of nominating your area has been a very quick and speedy process which would have definitely benefited from being extended. Unfortunately, as this has not been possible, there are some groups which have been affected by this timescale.

However, all of the areas which have been part of the process have clearly highlighted that it has been an extremely beneficial use of their time as, while they might not be progressing with their nomination, they have learned a considerable amount about their local community, area and the challenges it faces. As such, there are benefits that have been experienced by all groups.

## OVERALL ANALYSIS

### **Analysis and Lessons Learned for the Next Stages**

Throughout the engagement work across the whole of Scotland, and all the different nominating groups, common themes / questions / requests began to develop. These included:

- People were keen to understand what a national park would do for them and their local community - both positive and negative effects - and what certainty there would be that what was being proposed would actually be what eventually happens. Generally people wanted a lot more information, both about the national policy level and also what specific changes would be made at a local level (people often cited that the two existing national parks operated differently and so there wasn't clarity as to whether the new one would follow one of these existing models or adopt a wholly new approach).
- People wanted to know why the process was so quick and expressed concern that they were not being given enough time or information to respond effectively.
- People wanted further clarity on what the governance model would be for the new national park and how local people, in particular, would be represented on the board of the new national park.
- While there were exceptions, the majority of people who worked within agriculture or land management were generally the people with the most amount of concerns about the creation of a national park within their area.

Overall the process to establish a new national park through community nominations is to be considered extremely positive and the process has, as such, been successful in ensuring that those who identified that their community did not want to take forward the bid have removed themselves from the process.

There are, as highlighted throughout the engagement phase of this initial process, still considerable questions to answer when a bid moves forward, however, it is very clear that the community want to be involved in that process and have their say as to the governance, shape, and other elements of what will be a new national park(s).