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Scotland's Nature Agency
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

An overview report by Outside the Box of the six consultation hubs

Report number 3(b)
Dumfries Hub

outsidethebox



Dumfries Hub

Introduction

NatureScot commissioned Outside the Box (OTB) to work with them to design a consultation process and materials to gain community views on the proposed National Park for Southwest Scotland.

Between November 2024 and February 2025 Outside the Box facilitated and hosted community drop-in events across Southwest Scotland. Individual reports collating all the comments from the activities have been produced separately.

This is a report of the Dumfries Hub. It uses the H diagram activity as a way to illustrate the key themes and views from the Hub.

The community drop-in events were scheduled for two hours with a range of different days and times and locations to allow people to choose the event that suited them. The events also had to fit in around existing local bookings in venues.

Dates and week

The events in the Dumfries area were carried out over three days:

Date	Location	Time
Tuesday 21 January	Dalbeattie Town Hall	6.00-8.00pm
Wednesday 22 January	Castle Douglas Town Hall	6.00-8.00pm
Thursday 23 January	Dumfries Baptist Centre	12.00-2.00pm
Thursday 23 January	Dumfries Baptist Centre	6.00-8.00pm

Attendance

In total 242 people signed into the events in this area. People were invited to sign into the events, give their connection to the area and postcode. Not everyone signed into the event, either because it was busy at the sign in desk or because they didn't wish to.

- Local resident - **160**
- Local resident & farmer - **6**
- Local resident & local business - **16**
- Farmer - **4**
- Local resident & works locally - **12**
- Local interest - **5**
- Business & landowner - **4**
- Works locally - **2**
- Councillor - **2**
- Farmer & business owner - **1**
- No category given - **33**

The postcodes given in this hub area were:

- DG8 - **6**
- DG7 - **27**
- DG6 - **47**
- DG5 - **53**
- DG2 - **16**
- DG1 - **30**
- DG3 - **3**
- KA9 - **1**
- No postcode given - **59**.

Consultation activities

At the community drop-in events there were a series of activities for people to participate in. People chose which activities they wanted to participate in. Some people completed all the activities and some just chose a few. OTB staff members facilitated some of the activities. NatureScot staff were also in attendance to answer questions from the community.

The aim of the activities was to share information about the proposal and to gain people’s views and ideas about the proposal and the area.

H diagram

One of the key activities was the H diagram where people were given the opportunity to indicate how they felt about the proposal. They did this via placing a red sticky dot. There tended to be two approaches to this activity. Some people arrived at the event knowing how they felt and wanted to immediately put their dot down. And others spent time looking at the other activities before deciding where to place their dot.

Table 1 - collates the H diagrams from each event in this hub.

Scale	0 (Negative)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (Positive)
Indication of feeling about proposed National Park	93	5	1	1	1	9	4	5	8	12	14

99 people indicated they were ‘very negative’ towards the proposal and 34 people indicated they were ‘very positive’.

The H diagram activity also gave people the opportunity to say what they liked about the proposal, things they didn’t like and any changes they would like to see.

What do you like?

General

Comments focused on it being a good idea and a well-designed National Park would bring great benefits to remote areas.

Tourism

Comments focused on the benefits of increased tourism bringing prosperity into the area. People said it was a good proposal, balancing responsible tourism and grant money while protecting the beautiful countryside of Galloway. People also said it had the potential to extend the tourist season, turning seasonal jobs into permanent jobs and allowing investment in local businesses and in hospitality businesses.

Housing

People wanted to see more affordable homes in the area and especially for young people.

Nature

Comments focused on increasing access to the countryside for more people, as well as offering greater protections and funding for natural environments and increasing biodiversity. People also said it was an opportunity for farmers to make habitat corridors to improve and restore biodiversity.

Investment and planning

Comments focused on the opportunities for growth and economic benefit to the area that will result in improvements to the infrastructure, services and jobs. Concerns were expressed that without this option Galloway would continue to decline.

Future and young people

Comments focused on the opportunities for regeneration that would help young people stay in the area and return to work, live and prosper.

What do you not like?

General

Comments were concerned about a lack of information and a clear proposal that identified the benefits and vision for the area, people, farming and the protected environment. People also said Galloway is beautiful because of the people who have lived here, not because of incomers. Concerns were also raised about the financial cost of establishing and running a Park and that investment was needed to support improvements to the infrastructure first. People would also like to vote on the proposal.

Tourism

Comments were concerned about increased pollution, rubbish, litter and toilet waste and the impact on nature and wildlife and the local population. They were also concerned about tourism and hospitality roles tending to be low paid and seasonal.

Housing

Comments focused on concerns that house prices rise in National Park areas, and this excludes local people and younger people. People said they wanted to see more affordable homes, and fewer holiday lets and second homes.

Nature

Comments focused on the potential damage to the environment by increased visitors, increased cost of living and inconvenience for local residents. Concern that house prices will increase, making it harder for young people, and the need for permanent well-paid jobs and not seasonal low-paid hospitality roles.

Roads and infrastructure

Comments focused on the priority for improvements to roads and infrastructure, especially the A75 and train services to the region. There were concerns about:

- lack of public toilets
- increased numbers of campervans and motorhomes
- increased numbers of people visiting the area will create more accidents and need more emergency response
- current medical provision and health care services that are already stretched supporting an ageing population
- parking issues and charges.

Bureaucracy

Comments focused on concerns about creating and paying for an additional layer of bureaucracy. That it would create too many restrictions on working people, drive young people away, create overcrowded areas and ruin the natural landscape.

Employment

Comments focused on the need for investment in industry, technical services, trades and health and support for new and existing business to grow and employ more local people. There were concerns that a National Park would bring low-paid and seasonal work which do not allow people to buy houses and live well. People also said young people leave for better paid jobs elsewhere, and innovation and financial investment is needed to support and keep skills here. Importing skills and professionals from elsewhere doesn't help young people.

What changes would you like to see?

Comments focused on how people would like more information about the proposal, what it means for the area and the financial implications. Comments included the composition of the board which should be controlled by local people, and that a National Park should aim to improve infrastructure, retain young people, improve and enhance the natural environment, and bring the people of Dumfries and Galloway together.

Overall

There was a strong emphasis at this hub on environmental conservation, the need for new affordable housing, employment opportunities for young people and an improved infrastructure to meet current and future demands. Comments in favour of the National Park proposals noted that it could support year-round rather than just seasonal employment and increase the number of new businesses. Increased countryside access was seen as a positive benefit and a Park could offer greater environmental protection with funding for targeted initiatives. A National Park could bring economic regeneration leading to investment in infrastructure, but without it, the area will continue to decline.

Comments not in favour of a National Park echoed those raised other hubs; that it will not only fail to deliver the positive changes people want to see but will negatively impact the local community and environment for the foreseeable future.

Concerns about the impact of a National Park on the infrastructure raised the issue that an ageing population is already stretching local health services, and more visitors to the area will push it to breaking point. In addition to improving roads, the need for better rail services was raised at this hub. People expressed concern that National Park tourism would bring low-paying seasonal jobs, second homes and holiday lets, pushing up house prices and driving out young people. They stressed the need for investment in innovation, training and skills for young people. Concerns were raised not only about the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, but also of the inconvenience this will bring to residents.

People want more information on what a National Park would mean for the area, they want to retain control of the future of where they live and be involved in decision making.

NatureScot
Great Glen House
Leachkin Road
Inverness, IV3 8NW

www.nature.scot

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