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Scotland's Nature Agency
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An overview report by Outside the Box of the six consultation hubs

Report number 3(b)
Newton Stewart Hub

outsidethebox



Newton Stewart 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 Newton Stewart 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 Newton Stewart area were carried out over three days:

Date	Location	Time
Wednesday 20 November	Newton Stewart McMillan Hall	1.30–3.30pm
Thursday 21 November	Wigtown County Buildings	11.30am–1.30pm
Thursday 21 November	Newton Stewart McMillan Hall	6.00–8.00pm
Friday 22 November	Whithorn New Town Hall	10.00am–12.00 noon
Friday 22 November	Portwilliam Maxwell Hall	2.00–4.00pm

Attendance

In total 230 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 - **183**
- Local resident & farmer - **6**
- School children - **7**
- Local resident & local business - **6**
- Farmer - **14**
- Local resident & works locally - **1**
- Local interest - **1**
- No category given - **12**

The postcodes given in this hub area were:

- DG8 - **203**
- DG9 - **3**
- DG7 - **3**
- DG6 - **3**
- No postcode given - **18.**

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	89	4	1	4	1	12	0	4	12	9	44

94 people indicated they were ‘very negative’ towards the proposal and 65 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 how a National Park would increase the potential for the area and its aspirations.

Employment

Comments focused on increased job opportunities, particularly for young people.

Tourism

Comments focused on encouraging people to visit the area and the need for responsible tourism to regenerate the area. People liked the opportunities and possibilities for tourism and hospitality businesses such as guided walks, bird watching, cycling etc. There was concern about the detrimental effects of over-tourism.

Housing

Comments focused on the ability to provide more affordable housing in the region.

Nature

Comments emphasised the importance of greater protections for nature, and increasing biodiversity, the opportunity to celebrate and protect wild places, landscapes and the environment from inappropriate development.

Investment and planning

Comments focused on the National Park being an opportunity to bring in investments for the area. There was concern that the area needs investment to improve the infrastructure, economic regeneration and encourage people to visit and live in the region. The need to secure long-term investment for the area to make the area sustainable and stop the declining population, services and facilities.

Future and young people

Comments focused on the proposed National Park offering more opportunities for young people – improving their futures. And on connecting young people with nature, with more opportunities to experience and care for it.

What do you not like?

General

Comments focused on three key concerns about:

- how a National Park will benefit people living here or the area itself
- how vague the details are at this stage and not being able to vote on the proposal or have a referendum on it
- the cost of establishing and running a National Park at a time when governments and local governments have very little money and are cutting budgets.

Tourism

Comments were about existing levels of tourism and the impact it already has especially with the wide use of motorhomes and campervans, lack of local spending by tourists, increase in wildfires and litter.

People also said tourism will increase regardless of the outcome of the National Park and the area needs investment to improve infrastructure and ways to help manage additional visitors.

Nature

People said that the region already supports an amazing amount of wildlife, and the area should be left as it is and not spoilt by the impact of increased visitor numbers.

Roads and infrastructure

Comments were focused on current inadequate road infrastructure, especially the A75 between Stranraer and Dumfries. There was concern that increased visitors to the area will result in increased congestion.

The impact on other services due to visitor numbers was also mentioned, especially the impact on health services, policing and refuse and litter collection. Comments were also made about road repairs and accidents on unsuitable roads.

Bureaucracy

Comments focused on the proposed National Park being an extra layer of bureaucracy that needs paying for, and which would have a negative impact on local businesses.

What changes would you like to see?

These included comments asking for more details about the proposed Park, and how it would work with and build the Biosphere approach into the National Park. The other comments were about improvements needed in the area, such as:

- better transport infrastructure and A75 improved
- more affordable housing
- more public toilets - cleaned and maintained
- more jobs and opportunities for young people.

Overall

There was a strong emphasis 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 at 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.

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