



**NatureScot**  
**NàdarAlba**

Scotland's Nature Agency  
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

# Overall report for NatureScot on the community consultation for the proposed National Park in Southwest Scotland

April 2025

Outside the Box

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# Introduction

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In September 2024 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. This work was to support the second stage of the Reporting process, involving a statutory formal public consultation in the area over a minimum 12-week period.

Between November 2024 and February 2025 Outside the Box facilitated and hosted 30 community drop-in events across Southwest Scotland and three online events. Individual reports for each event have been produced separately with all the comments collated from the activities. Six hub reports have also been produced with key data for the hub area along with key themes for the area.

This report outlines the

- Community consultation events
- Consultation activities
- Overall themes from the consultation
- Learning from the consultation process for OTB
- Atmosphere at the community events
- Feedback from people at the community events
- Overall conclusion

## About OTB

Outside the Box provides community development support to smaller groups and enterprises and helps develop opportunities for people to have a voice and influence the services they use and their communities. We began in 2004 and since then have supported over 500 projects across Scotland. Most of the work we do is in rural communities supporting people and communities to develop ideas and initiatives that make a difference. We work in communities at a very local level, at the same time feeding back what people are telling us, to help shape national strategy and policy.

Further information can be found at: [www.otbds.org](http://www.otbds.org)

# The Community Consultation Events

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Between November 2024 and February 2025 Outside the Box facilitated and hosted 30 community drop-in events across Southwest Scotland and three online events.

From the 30 community drop-in events 1158 people signed in and participated in the activities in person. For the online events there were 60 places available across the three events. The online events were fully booked. Across the three events 26 people participated via Zoom.

The purpose of the events was to share information about the proposed National Park and to find out what people thought about the proposals and their community.

The area was divided into 6 hub areas, and events were organised around key locations and settlements, held at different times in each hub area, including an evening, an afternoon and late morning session. Each event was scheduled for 2 hours. This approach was to allow people to choose which venue and time worked best for them, their lives and busy schedules. Holding events at one set time, and especially the evening, limits participation to people with standard 9 to 5 jobs, access to transport/private cars, and to those comfortable going out in the cold and dark. Some of the busiest and well attended sessions were held in the afternoon.

The venues booked were local community venues and spaces and local town halls. A community lunch space, garden centre and community garden were also used because they had been identified by residents as key community spaces. The venues were assessed for disabled access and general accessibility to ensure that the spaces were ones that residents used and were familiar with.

Booking the venues was difficult and time consuming. Many of the venues were already busy with existing local activities reducing the options in terms of times and venues available for the community drop in events. Also, many of the venues are managed by volunteers, who checked booking enquiries once or twice a week or needed to be tracked down via a series of mobile numbers which meant that confirming the timetable for each hub area and the whole consultation programme took additional time.

A map of the community drop-in sessions is set out in Appendix 1.

# Introduction

## Newton Stewart Hub

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

Date	Location	Time	Attendance
Wednesday 20 November	Newton Stewart McMillan Hall	1.30-3.30pm	43
Thursday 21 November	Wigtown County Buildings	11.30am-1.30pm	60
Thursday 21 November	Newton Stewart McMillan Hall	6.00-8.00pm	44
Friday 22 November	Whithorn New Town Hall	10.00am-12.00 noon	49
Friday 22 November	Portwilliam Maxwell Hall	2.00-4.00pm	34

In the Newton Stewart hub area, from people that signed in there were

- 203 local postcodes given
- 9 non-local postcodes given
- 18 no postcodes

## Dalmellington Hub

The events in the Dalmellington area were carried out over five days:

Date	Location	Time	Attendance
Monday 25 November	Bellsbank Education Centre	1.00-3.00pm	19
Tuesday 26 November	Carsphairn Lagwyne Hall	10.30am- 12.30pm	20
Tuesday 26 November	Dalry Town Hall	2.30-4.30pm	78
Wednesday 27 November	Straiton McCandlish Hall	12.00-2.00pm	22
Wednesday 11 December	Dalmellington Community Centre	6.00-8.00pm	25
Monday 27 January	Cumnock, Dumfries Arms Hotel	12.00 -2.00pm	1

In the Dalmellington hub area, from people that signed in there were

- 140 local postcodes given
- 25 non-local postcodes given

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## Kirkcudbright Hub

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

Date	Location	Time	Attendance
Monday 2 December	Kirkcudbright Community Centre	2.00-4.00pm	82
Tuesday 3 December	Gatehouse Community Centre	11.00am-1.00pm	78
Tuesday 3 December	Kirkcudbright Community Centre	5.00-7.00pm	60
Wednesday 4 December	Kippford Village Hall	10.00am-12.00 noon	45

In the Kirkcudbright hub area, from people that signed in there were

- 217 local postcodes given
- 23 non-local postcodes given
- 25 no postcodes

## Girvan Hub

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

Date	Location	Time	Attendance
Wednesday 8 January	Lendalfoot Hall	1.00-3.00pm	15
Wednesday 8 January	Girvan Wave Hub	6.00-8.00pm	38
Thursday 9 January	Girvan Community Garden	12.00-2.00pm	12
Thursday 9 January	Pinwherry Centre	4.00-6.00pm	41
Friday 10 January	Cairnryan Hall	11.00am-1.00pm	2

In the Girvan hub area, from people that signed in there were

- 90 local postcodes given
- 9 non-local postcodes given
- 9 no postcodes

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## Stranraer Hub

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

Date	Location	Time	Attendance
Monday 13 January	Leswalt Memorial Hall	1.00-3.00pm	6
Monday 13 January	Stranraer Millenium Centre	6.00-8.00pm	33
Tuesday 14 January	Portpatrick Village Hall	12.00-2.00pm	13
Tuesday 14 January	Sandhead Community Hall	4.00-6.00pm	44
Wednesday 15 January	Stranraer Millenium Centre	11.00am-1.00pm	30
Wednesday 15 January	Ballantrae Garden Centre	1.30-3.30pm	22

In the Stranraer hub area, from people that signed in there were

- 123 local postcodes given
- 6 non-local postcodes given
- 19 no postcodes

## Dumfries Hub

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

Date	Location	Time	Attendance
Tuesday 21 January	Dalbeattie Town Hall	6.00-8.00pm	78
Wednesday 22 January	Castle Douglas Town Hall	6.00-8.00pm	121
Thursday 23 January	Dumfries Baptist Centre	12.00-2.00pm	26
Thursday 23 January	Dumfries Baptist Centre	6.00-8.00pm	17

In the Dumfries hub area, from people that signed in there were

- 145 local postcodes given
- 57 non-local postcodes given
- 40 no postcodes

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An additional three online sessions, using Zoom and an interactive Canva board, were held on:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Saturday 30 November	Zoom	10.00-11.00am	6
Tuesday 10 December	Zoom	6.00-7.00pm	10
Tuesday 14 January	Zoom	10.00-11.00am	10

# The Consultation Activities

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Outside the Box and NatureScot co-designed the consultation activities. They were broadly divided into two key themes. These were sharing information and gaining people's views about the proposal such as proposed boundary, board size and powers, and also generally gaining views and feelings about the proposal overall.

Outside the Box hosted the events and facilitated activities, and NatureScot staff talked with people and answered technical questions.

The activities and information mirrored the information available online via the NatureScot website and the consultation document sent to every household. The activities included:

**A welcome desk** – where people were welcomed, invited to sign in, the event and activities were explained, and refreshments offered

**Boundary options** – maps with 3 options were outlined, and people indicated their preference and left comments via post-it notes

**Frequently Asked Questions** – 5 questions were answered, and people were encouraged to add additional questions and comments

**Powers of the proposed Park** – options around planning controls and forestry

**Proposed board** – options on size and roles, and asking for skills for board members

**Pros and Cons** – outlining the key pros and cons of the proposed Park

**SWOT analysis** – a facilitated activity where people were encouraged to offer their opinions on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the proposal

**H-diagram** – a facilitated activity where people indicated, via a red dot, how they felt about the proposal and offered comments on what they liked, did not like and the changes they wanted to see

**Flourishing tree** – where people were encouraged to share their hopes and dreams for the area if a National Park didn't go ahead

**Priorities** – pictures of 14 potential areas where a National Park could be involved. People used sticky dots to give their 3 priorities for the Park.

For each activity people were encouraged and supported to give their views via post-it notes which they wrote on. All activities were voluntary, and people chose which activities they wanted to complete. Some people completed all of them and other people completed no activities or just a few.

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The numbers and percentages used within the report are a guide based upon the data collected across 30 often very busy and challenging community events.

All the comments on post-it notes, from all the activities at each event, were photographed at the venue. After the consultation event the comments were collated and recorded onto an individual event report and submitted to NatureScot in February. Six hub reports highlighting the key themes in each area have been produced and submitted to NatureScot with this report.

After each event Outside the Box and NatureScot reflected on what would and could work better. This included the layout of activities to increase circulation space, and the reduction of activities when the venue was smaller, and the way to explain activities and support people to give their views safely. More information is contained in the learning section.

# Overall Themes from the Consultation

This section gives information on the overall themes from the consultation.

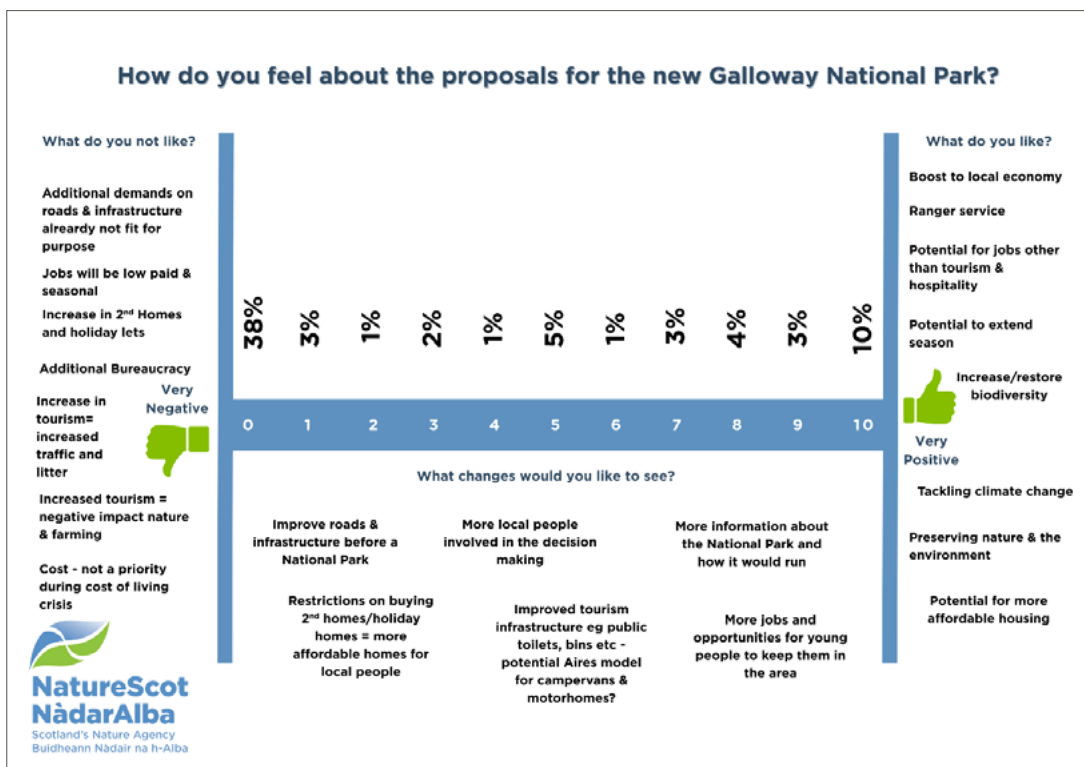
## H-Diagram

This was one of the key activities for the consultation, where people gave an indication of how they were feeling about the proposal via a red sticky dot and people also recorded their views on what they liked and didn't like about the proposal, and what they would change.

The activity was created to give people an opportunity to register their feelings about the proposal. When people arrived at the events already knowing what they wanted to say or with a strong view about the proposal they were directed to this activity first. Some people just completed this activity, but most then went on to consider the other activities. Another approach by participants was to explore all the activities first and then to complete this activity after they had considered the information or when there was a quiet moment when they would be unobserved by other people at the event. Some people did not complete this activity at all.

The activity was facilitated by Outside the Box staff who gave a red sticky dot to individuals to place on the diagram. It was stressed to participants that this activity was not a vote but a way for people to give an indication of their view on the proposal. Most of the time the red dots were held by OTB staff but during very busy times this was not always possible, and then it was noticed that people placed more than one dot on the diagram.

The diagram below sets out the activity and condenses the key responses. The individual event reports and six hub reports offer more detailed information.



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The H diagram above also shows that over the whole of the 30 in-person events 71% of the people who signed into the event participated in the H diagram activity by placing a red dot, and on average 29% of people attending did not participate in this activity.

Appendix 2 contains a table setting out the detailed information for each local event, showing the numbers of people who signed in, those that gave a preference via a red dot and the numbers and percentage of people who did not participate in the activity.

From this table there are a set of events where non-participation in the activity was greater than 30% of the people who signed in. At these sessions the breakdown of people in favour and against the proposals is as follows.

A strong indication against the proposals was found in 11 locations and these were:

- Dalry,
- Carsphain,
- Girvan Hub,
- Portpatrick,
- Stranraer 2,
- Ballantrae,
- Castle Douglas,
- Dalbeattie,
- Kirkcudbright 2;
- Kippford,
- Gatehouse of Fleet.

There were two locations which were strongly in favour of the proposals and these were

- Bellsbank,
- Newton Stewart.

This table shows that there appears to be a relationship between a higher level of non-participation in the activity and a strong indication against the proposal. This fits with one purpose of the activity as an opportunity for people to share easily their views on the proposed National Park, but also that in these locations people also chose not to participate in this activity because they did not want to share their views about the proposal with their neighbours and local community.

## **Boundary for the proposed Park**

Three options were given for the Park boundary. These were presented via maps with drawn outlines. People were asked to give an indication on which option they preferred, and comments were also collected. Maps were also available for people to draw their own boundaries, details of these are set out in the individual event hub reports.

The options were:

- Option 1 - Hills and coast
- Option 2 - Hills and extended coast
- Option 3 - Hills, coast and countryside

The diagram below shows the indications people gave for each option.

<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Option 2</b>	<b>Option 3</b>
<b>5%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>None of the above - I'd prefer another option</b>	<b>None of the above - I don't know at this stage</b>	<b>None of the above - I don't want a National Park</b>
<b>2%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>29%</b>

Option 3, the larger options with hills, coast and countryside was the most popular option. However, 29% of people who gave responses also said they didn't want a National Park. This figure was collected across all the consultation events. In the events before January there was a 'don't know' option. For the events after December an additional response box was added to include 'No, I don't want a National Park.' The change was made to reflect what participants were saying and to make it easier for participants. It made no material change to the consultation.

## **Powers**

People were asked to consider the range of options available for Town and Country Planning, Forestry and wind farm development, and access and visitor management to the countryside.

The diagram below shows the overall responses to the planning powers. Comments from these questions are contained in the individual event reports.

## Town and Country Planning – What should happen with planning powers?

A) The existing planning authorities should retain their existing responsibilities for development planning and management, with the Park Authority being a key partner and statutory consultee.	B) The Park Authority should be responsible for the development plan for its area.	C) The Park authority have power to call in cases which it deemed to be of significance for achieving the aims of its Park Plan for development management.	D) If you don't agree with any of these options, do you have another suggestion?
17%	4%	8%	15%

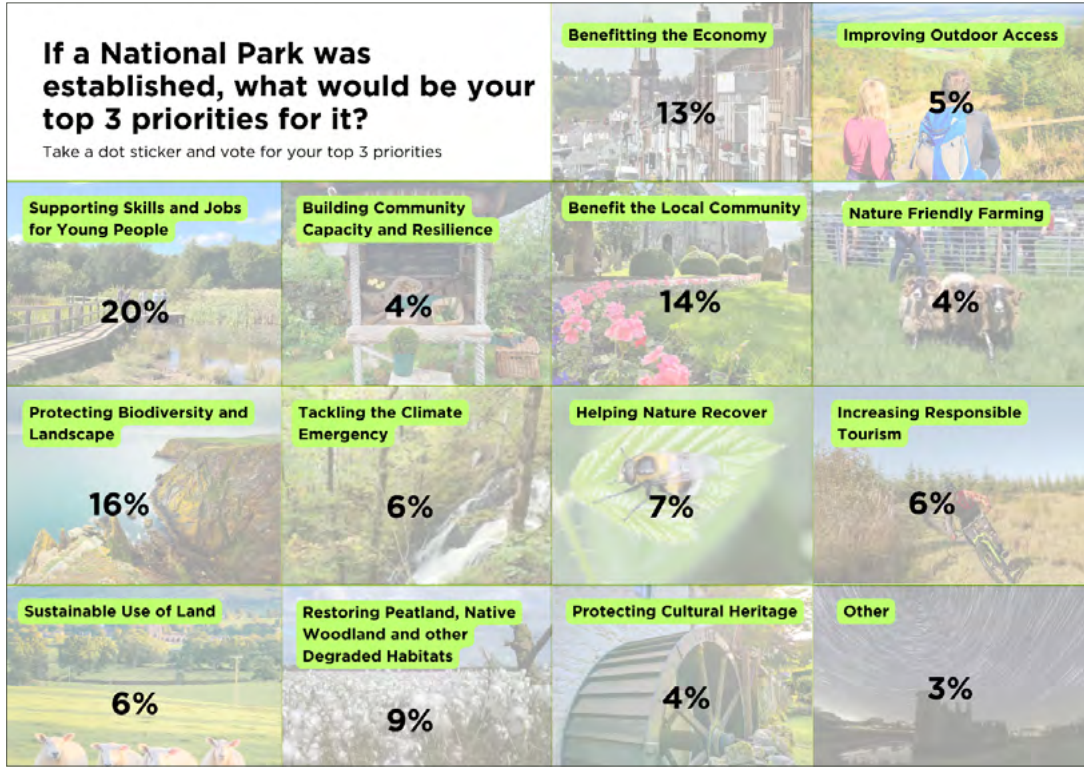
## Forestry and wind farm development – How should the Park Authority be involved in these?

The diagram below shows the responses to the forestry and wind development. Comments from these questions are contained in the individual event reports.

A) The Park Authority should be a statutory consultee on forestry and wind farm proposals within the proposed area.	B) The National Park Authority and Forestry and Land Scotland should jointly produce a management plan for the Galloway Forest Park, detailing the long-term vision for nature and recreation in the area alongside the ambitions for timber production contained in individual forest management plans.	D) If you don't agree with either suggestion, do you have another suggestion?
8%	16%	9%

## Priorities for a future National Park

The diagram below shows the priorities participants at consultation events from January 2025 onwards gave to 14 potential areas where a National Park could be involved.



The priorities indicated above are also reflected throughout the consultation comments with people interested in supporting skills and jobs for young people, benefits to the local community and to the local economy.

# Learning from the Consultation for OTB

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After each event and hub area the sessions were reviewed and changes made as needed. The changes included:

Spacing and layout for the consultation activities to allow ease of completion for participants, the free movement of people within the venue and to reduce the likelihood of intimidation for participants.

Checking numbers and space available in venues before allowing new participants to enter the space.

Consultation video – at the first two hubs a video of the consultation process was used. But it added to the noise in the rooms, making it hard for people to hear easily, hold conversations and added to the general noise in the rooms. After the second hub area the consultation video was only used when two rooms in the community space were available to use.

New materials – after feedback at the first two hubs additional information boards were produced with the pros and cons of a National Park, and NatureScot provided notes on the case for a National Park and a note on the advantages and disadvantages of a National Park for people to read and take home.

Boundary options – after reviewing the responses, from January onwards the boundary boards with the three map options included a ‘no’ option. It was not a material change to the consultation, but a change that reflected how people were already responding to the boundary boards.

Priorities Board – from January onwards an additional priorities board was added with pictures of 14 potential areas that a National Park could be involved in. People used sticky dots to give their 3 priorities for the Park.

The learning from the overall consultation resulted in the following areas of learning:

Timing of the consultation – winter is a difficult time for conducting an extensive consultation exercise in remote rural areas for staff and participants, due to long dark nights, lack of open facilities and poor weather including ice, snow, freezing fog and a red weather warning for wind. No events were cancelled.

Offering a range of times of day for the community drop-in events. This was a good approach because it allowed people to choose when they wanted to attend the sessions. This meant they could include the sessions as part of an existing trip and within busy schedules, reducing travel time and costs. Traditional evening meetings and sessions held at one time only often exclude people working shift patterns, parents of young children, people with caring responsibilities, people using public transport especially in rural areas, and people who don't like going out after dark.

Planning for the consultation – 8 weeks between being appointed to carry out the consultation and beginning the consultation is too short. There were

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also some bureaucratic delays with obtaining information, formalising and approving proposed activities.

Booking community venues in small remote communities takes time and research to locate an available venue and the relevant person to take and confirm the booking.

Preparing the consultation materials – agreeing the wording, design, activities and time for printing and delivery takes time.

Information boards – could have been simpler with less technical information, using plain English would have been more accessible for most participants.

Consultation activities – having a range of options for people to participate was fundamental to the consultation aim but there could have been one less activity.

Publicity and promotion – more time in the planning stage to promote the sessions and having details about all of the sessions ready at the beginning would have been helpful for residents to plan which location worked best for them.

Publicity and promotion – more time would have allowed for the publicity to reach more people and communities.

Publicity and promotion – more time would have allowed for greater understanding that the events were drop-in sessions and not presentation style/town hall debates.

Producing summaries and feedback from the consultation after each hub area – would have provided information to residents and communities and supported the consultation process but would have needed more time and resources.

## Atmosphere at the Community Events

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The aim of the community drop-in events was that they were a safe enjoyable space and experience where people could easily share their views, participate in activities and get answers to their questions.

However, during at least five events, participants, Outside the Box and NatureScot staff experienced aggressive and intimidating behaviour by other people at the events.

At four events the venue was at capacity for the numbers of people who arrived and then stayed watching what was happening and what comments were being left. The lack of space and noise of many people talking added to the unpleasant atmosphere.

At other events no campaign banners were installed outside the venue during the drop-in event, no campaign leaflets were handed out to people outside the venue before they came in (and inside at least two venues as well) and members of the no campaign wore clothing, fleeces and buffs, featuring no campaign logos.

At the end of every event people supporting the no campaign took photos of the completed feedback boards and in particular the completed H diagram board.

Outside the Box staff observed that people who were undecided or were positive towards the proposed Park were less likely to complete activities and write comments, and when they did complete activities would wait until a quiet time to do so.

# Feedback from People at the Community Events

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At the events, informal feedback was gathered at the welcome desk from people as they left the events.

Feedback tended to fit into four areas. People said:

- it was useful and informative, and they felt they had a chance to have their say, leave comments and talk with NatureScot staff.
- the information was too vague, and the proposal was unclear making it hard to comment.
- the information boards were too wordy with too much to read and take in.
- they didn't like the dots and post-it notes approach because they felt they were being treated like children.

Most people said the events were useful. Outside the Box observation of people at the events was that many arrived looking tense and uncertain and left looking more relaxed after they had completed activities and had conversations with NatureScot and Outside the Box staff.

People also said they liked meeting and seeing their neighbours and friends and spending time chatting about the issues in an informal setting. At most of the events there was a friendly relaxed atmosphere and people stayed for an hour or so chatting with neighbours and friends.

## Overall Conclusion

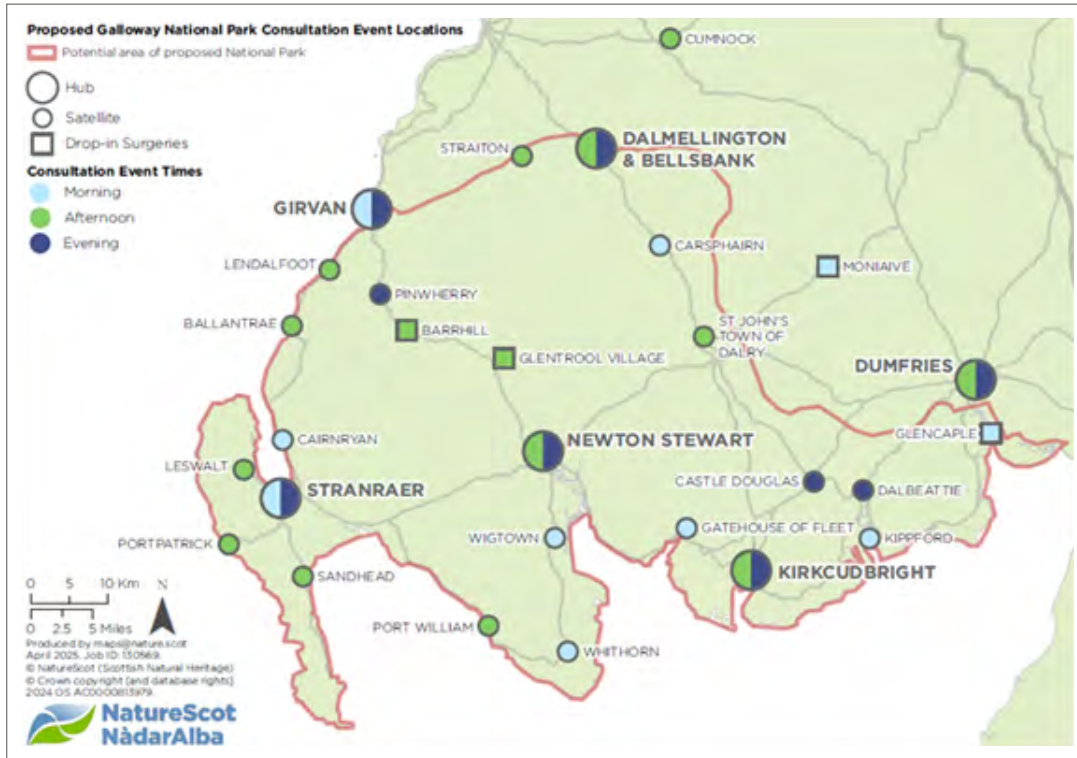
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The community consultation reached over 1000 people and held 30 events across the area for the proposed National Park. The events were well attended and well facilitated with the majority good natured and friendly. At least five events were hostile and aggressive for participants and the facilitators.

The people attending the consultation events like living in the area and in Southwest Scotland and this included families that had lived there for generations and people who had chosen to live there.

- Everyone agrees the area needs improved infrastructure and services – especially roads and health services, economic regeneration, business investment, better employment opportunities for young people, affordable housing and environmental conservation.
- Comments in favour of a National Park embrace it as a way to bring what is needed to the area, and the concerns are that without it, the area will continue to decline.
- Comments not in favour of a National Park say that it will not only fail to deliver the positive changes people want to see but will negatively impact the local community, economy and environment for current and future generations.
- People want more information on how a National Park would run in reality and what it would mean for the area in terms of the issues noted above (infrastructure, employment, etc.).
- They want to be kept informed and for local people and communities to be involved in decision-making so that decisions are made with them, not for them.

## Appendix 1 – map of consultation locations



## Appendix 2 - Individual Analysis Reports for H diagram

Venue	Numbers	Numbers not contributing to the exercise	% not contributing	0 Very Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Very Positive
Cumnock	1	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Straiton	22	4	18.1	5	1	-	-	-	1	1	4	-	2	4
Bellsbank	19	6	31.6	-	1	-	-	-	2	1	2	1	2	4
Dalry	78	28	35.9	25	4	2	2	3	3	2	1	2	2	4
Carsphairn	20	8	40	8	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	-	-
Dalmellington	25	6	24	4	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	3	3	5
Girvan Hub	38	13	34.2	9	3	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	2	2
Cairnryan	2	2	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Girvan CG	12	3	25	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	4
Lendalfoot	15	2	13.3	5	-	2	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	2
Pitwherry	41	8	19.5	19	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	10
Stranraer (1)	30	6	20	7	1	1	1	1	2	-	-	3	3	5
Sandhead	44	10	22.7	21	2	2	-	1	4	-	-	1	1	2
Portpatrick	13	4	30.8	5	1	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Stranraer (2)	33	11	33.3	10	3	-	2	2	1	-	1	2	-	1
Leswalt	6	1	16.7	-	-	-	1	-	3	1	-	-	-	-

Venue	Numbers	Numbers not contributing to the exercise	% not contributing	0 Very Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Very Positive
Ballantrae	22	7	31.8	2	2	2	2	1	2	-	2	2	-	-
Dumfries (1)	17	3	17.5	8	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	1	2	-
Castle Douglas	121	45	37.2	48	3	-	-	1	1	2	3	2	9	7
Dalbeattie	78	28	35.9	32	1	-	1	-	6	1	3	3	-	3
Dumfries (2)	16	0	0	5	1	1	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	4
Kirkcudbright (1)	60	14	23.3	39	1	-	-	1	2	-	1	1	1	-
Kirkcudbright (2)	82	30	36.6	38	1	-	2	1	1	1	3	-	-	5
Kipford	45	15	33.3	23	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	1	-	3
Gatehouse of Fleet.	78	28	35.9	38	2	-	1	-	2	2	-	3	-	2
Wigtown	60	12	20	17	3	-	1	-	3	-	1	2	3	18
Whithorn	49	6	12.2	23	-	-	-	-	3	-	2	4	2	9
Port William	34	5	14.7	22	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	3
Newton Stewart (1)	44	11	24.4	18	-	1	1	-	3	-	-	3	1	4
Newton Stewart (2)	43	13	30.2	9	-	-	3	-	2	-	1	2	3	10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1148</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>% of total attendees</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>38.5</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>1.13</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.21</b>	<b>4.62</b>	<b>1.39</b>	<b>3.13</b>	<b>3.75</b>	<b>3.22</b>	<b>9.67</b>
<b>OTB final report</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>

Total 1-4: **521**

Total 6-10: **243**

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