



NatureScot
NàdarAlba

Scotland's Nature Agency
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

Accompanying reports
**Young people's views
on the proposal for a
new national park in
southwest Scotland**

Report number 4(a)

May 2025

A report on the proposal for a national park in southwest Scotland

Introduction

This is one of 21 reports that accompany NatureScot's Reporter advice on the Scottish Government's proposal for a new National Park in southwest Scotland. The advice was submitted on 5 May 2025. The paper outlines the bespoke engagement with young people.

Scottish Ministers have proposed that a new National Park is established in southwest Scotland and appointed NatureScot to seek the views of local people. During the consultation period, NatureScot staff gave a presentation to over 1500 young people in secondary schools and youth groups to raise awareness of the proposal and how they can have their say if they wish. We also facilitated activities and discussions with around 340 young people that were designed to support them to explore some of the consultation themes and begin to consider their own views.

In addition, we created a short online resource for use by those working with young people, to support them to run their own sessions about the proposals. Approximately 35 young people shared their thoughts via work they had done with their teacher or leader. A few young people also shared the results of surveys they had done with peers or their local community.

The presentation included what a National Park is and why Scottish Government is proposing one for the area. Activities and discussions focussed on their wishes for their area, opportunities and threats of a potential National Park, local places they consider meet the Scottish National Park aims and objectives, and what they would like a National Park to do for them and their area. Young people's responses are shared in more detail below but can be summarised under the following themes.

What is special about the area?

In general, young people considered the landscape, countryside, views and scenery special, as well as the ability to use the outdoors for leisure and recreation. Some mentioned the history, culture, and the past and present uses of the land, including farming.

What are the special needs of the area?

Overall, young people felt the area has a lack of things to do. Some felt there is a need for more diversity, while some expressed concerns about litter, the roads, tourists and the cost of living.

Young people's wishes for the area

Young people's top priorities for the future of their area related to the economy, followed by social, environmental then recreational wishes. The highest number of comments related to a future with less litter or pollution. Better jobs and/or wages were high on young people's list of what they feel their area needs, followed by preserve/increase animals and/or their habitats, more to do, more/greater variety of shops and places to eat, more/better public transport, and regeneration/improved planning and development.

Opportunities of a National Park

Most of the comments raised by young people identified economic opportunities, followed by recreational, environmental, and social opportunities. If a National Park was established in this region, young people were most keen to see local businesses benefit and more job opportunities. They were also keen to see local wildlife and biodiversity protected, more shops and businesses in town and more outdoor activities. Opportunities for social regeneration and more/better mountain biking and cycle routes were also highlighted.

Threats of a National Park

Most of the concerns raised by young people were social in nature, followed by economic, environmental and recreational worries. Young people were most concerned about the impact of a potential National Park on transport, highlighting that more visitors would mean more traffic congestion and damage to the roads. Concerns were also raised about increasing prices, tourism, antisocial behaviour and crime, social damage to communities, and increased littering. Concerns pertaining to a National Park Authority's planning powers, farming, environmental footprint of tourism, and access were also mentioned.

Potential Boundary/Area

Many young people said they do not venture far from home and only a minority shared things they enjoy doing in nature. The vast majority appeared to have little knowledge of the wider proposed area, but were able to suggest nearby places they thought met the aims and objectives of a National Park. The coast was frequently highlighted, with specific places all along the coastline mentioned. Forests, hills and lochs (general and specific) were noted but young people mostly experienced and appreciated places very close to

home or local paid attractions. There was recognition of the history and culture of the area too. Some young people named places they felt should or should not be part of a National Park for a variety of reasons, e.g. to protect the landscape (should) and don't want it to become a honeypot town (should not).

Powers and Functions

Some of the things young people wanted a potential National Park Authority to do for them and their area include:

- Look after and improve the environment and cultural heritage
- Protect the area from air, noise and light pollution
- Create and share more information on local history, landscape and nature
- Address litter problems and antisocial/irresponsible behaviour
- Create jobs for the area, including consideration of current and future jobs in the primary industries.
- Sustainable forestry including planting with more native trees, while keeping in mind the need for jobs.
- Consider impacts of renewables, again keeping in mind jobs.
- Support farmers, including with diversification, and promote local produce.
- Increase tourism to provide jobs and help regenerate towns to attract more businesses, including restaurants, take aways and entertainment venues.
- More and varied outdoor recreation opportunities and locations (with concerns for transport infrastructure)
- Rangers
- Affordable housing and improvements to transport and healthcare were also identified but it was acknowledged that these would not be a core role of any National Park Authority.

National Park staff and Board

Young people were aware of a wide range of potential roles in a National Park Authority and were very vehement that jobs should be filled by local people as far as possible. They recognised that this could provide opportunities for themselves and others wanting to stay in the area. They identified many roles relating to the environment (e.g. scientist, archaeologist), economy (e.g. officers to support the agriculture sector and businesses) and recreation and visitor management (e.g. rangers for path maintenance and litter reduction). Social roles identified included green heath officer and people to educate about the outdoors. The young people also highlighted the need for staff with finance skills, web and communication skills.

Conclusion

Young people had a range of views about the special qualities, issues and needs of their area. They were particularly aware and concerned about current challenges regarding the economy but also identified social, environmental and recreational wishes, needs and opportunities. There were diverse opinions as to whether a National Park would help address their concerns and meet their perceived needs or make things worse.

Young people had lots of thoughts about what a National Park Authority should do for the area, including protecting and enhancing nature, creating

and sharing information, creating jobs and helping to regenerate the area, and giving appropriate support for primary industries. They identified a breadth of skills and experience needed by any National Park Authority staff members and a number of young people expressed that they might like to work in one of these roles in the future.

The young people we met and heard from were mature in expressing their views, and respectful in listening to the views of others.

Our Role and Approach

Scottish Ministers have proposed that a new National Park is established in southwest Scotland, with the potential area extending to parts of Dumfries and Galloway, East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire. They appointed NatureScot to be the Reporter on the proposal and one of the requirements of this role is to seek the views of local people, including those that are harder to reach such as young people.

During the consultation period, which ran from 7 November 2024 until 14 February 2025, we engaged with young people to raise awareness of the proposal, the consultation process and how they can have their say via presentations at school assemblies and at youth group meetings. In addition, we worked with some young people in class and group settings to explore some of the consultation themes and begin to consider their own views on the proposals. Educators, group leaders and local authority education departments were very supportive of our work with young people, with Dumfries and Galloway's Executive Director of Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing highlighting to secondary school leaders the importance of informing and engaging young people in the consultation process and encouraging them to invite us to speak to their pupils.

We also created [a resource for use by those working with young people](#), which was designed to help young people to: discover what a National Park is; explore how they feel about their area and what they want to see in the future; critically analyse different views and information; and understand how they can contribute to the consultation process.

The proposed new National Park is a chance for young people to engage first hand with a real-world learning opportunity and explore issues around this proposal. Engaging with this consultation is relevant to the Curriculum for Excellence, e.g.

Delivery of the four capacities, in particular:

- Successful learners - openness to new thinking, able to make reasoned evaluations, able to link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations.
- Confident individuals - develop and communicate their own beliefs.
- Responsible citizens - a commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life.
- Effective contributors - communicate in different ways and in different settings, apply critical thinking in new contexts.

Curriculum themes:

- Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is about exploring local and global issues. It is about children, young people and communities taking action for a better future.
- Political literacy enables children and young people to critically examine sources to inform their views and express them confidently.

The [Information Hub - A proposal for a National Park in Galloway](#) aimed to help everyone interested in the proposal to learn more and share views. We invited those sharing views to answer demographic questions and, from this, know that young people were the age group least engaged with the hub, with 16 - 24-year-olds making up only 1.7% of contributors and 25 - 34-year-olds only 6.9%. This reiterated to us that we needed a bespoke approach in order to reach young people and ensure they had the opportunity to take part.

This report outlines the views of young people, expressed during our visits to schools and youth groups. It also references the work teachers, leaders and young people have done independently and shared with us, including via our resources.

Further Education

Prior to the consultation period, we emailed further and higher education establishments and contacts. This was to raise awareness of the proposal and indicate how we could, if they wished, engage further with them on the proposal and issues it raised. There were no responses we could follow-up.

School Visits

Before the consultation period began, we emailed all schools in Dumfries and Galloway to raise awareness of the proposal, share our resources for those working with young people, and invite secondary schools within the proposed area to work with us. In South Ayrshire, these emails were sent to Girvan Academy and most of its feeder primary schools, as advised by a South Ayrshire Council Quality Improvement Manager. In East Ayrshire, emails were sent to Doon Academy and some primary schools, as advised by a local authority contact. We also emailed further and higher education establishments and contacts but got no responses.

NatureScot staff visited 6 secondary schools during the consultation phase where we spoke to over 40% of secondary pupils within the proposed area via presentations and engaged more closely with over 8% through class activities.

Table 1 – List of secondary schools engaged with

Secondary School within proposed boundary	Local Authority	School roll (from 2024 spreadsheet)	Assembly/presentation (from school)	Class activities
Castle Douglas High School	D&G	538	535	92
Dalbeattie High School	D&G	332	332	48
Dalry Secondary School	D&G	13	9	9
Douglas Ewart High School	D&G	592	330	82
Kirkcudbright Academy	D&G	432	0	0
Stranraer Academy	D&G	1007	0	0
Doon Academy	EAC	249	249	40
Girvan Academy	SAC	526	42	42
Totals		3689	1497	313
% of secondary pupils (approx.)			40.6%	8.5%

The assembly/presentation number for Douglas Ewart High School were unknown, therefore 2024 spreadsheet S3-S6 figures were used. The class activities number includes double counting where pupils study 2 or more of History, Environmental Science, Travel & Tourism or Modern Studies.

Visits began with an assembly, which was a presentation based on the one available on the [Information Hub – A proposal for a National Park in Galloway](#). The purpose of the assembly was to raise awareness of the proposal for a new National Park, the consultation process and how young people can have their say if they wish. The final slide of this presentation included a QR code that linked to the summary survey. Pupils were encouraged to take their time to consider the proposal and only complete the survey if they wish, ideally closer to the consultation deadline, when they had had a chance to discuss the issues with trusted adults. Schools decided which pupils should attend assemblies: all schools included all pupils except Douglas Ewart, where assemblies involved S3 – S6 pupils. We are aware of a few pupils that did not attend assemblies at the request of their parents. Approximately 1500 pupils attended assembly presentations.

Schools also invited us to speak with specific classes, chosen by them. The purpose of the class session was to support young people to explore some

of the consultation themes and begin to consider their own views on the proposals. Apart from Dalry Secondary School (which only takes S1 – S3 pupils), all pupils involved in class activities were S3 or above. We facilitated 17 class sessions for a total of 313 pupils, usually one period long (about 50 minutes). The session at Dalry was shorter and involved fewer activities due to the younger pupils involved.

Table 2 – number of students engaged with split by study topic

Subject	Number of pupils
Geography	159
History	37
Travel & Tourism	29
Environmental Science	21
Modern Studies	16
Mixed Groups (Social Subjects, Eco Committee, other committees, Dalry pupils)	51
Total	313

Class Activities: Pupils' Views

Warm up questions

As we worked with more groups, we began to place greater emphasis on introductory questions to get the young people thinking and encourage them to share their views freely in the main activities. We asked for hands up if they had heard of the proposal for a new national park before our visit. A higher proportion of young people who were studying Geography had heard of the proposal than in any other group, with more than half of the class having heard of it and, in a couple of cases, almost the full class.

When asked if they thought they had visited any of Scotland's existing National Parks, the vast majority had not, with the Lake District being the National Park most visited (at least one school organises schools trips/Duke of Edinburgh expeditions there). Some young people had used the Lake District National Park and some Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park as case studies for class work.

Pupils were then asked the following 3 questions:

1. Scottish Government think this area is special enough to be considered as a National Park. What do you think is special about your area?

As is to be expected, responses were as diverse as the young people, for example "it's home", "the people", "it's friendly", "nothing", "not really special but the hills are kinda nice". Landscape, countryside, views and scenery were commonly mentioned along with forests, hills/mountains, beaches and some

specific places, e.g. The Merrick, Cairnsmore, 7stanes/Kirroughtree. Ability to take part in leisure activities like walking and biking was considered special. Farming was frequently mentioned in some areas. Cultural mentions included the Book Town, the history, coal mines and granite.

2. One of the criteria for an area becoming a National Park is that it would be the best means of meeting the special needs of the area. What do you think are the special needs of your area? Another way to think about that is what worries or annoys you about living here?

Again, there were a wide range of answers including “A lot” and “Nothing”. Lack of things to do was most commonly mentioned: “Not many activities for young people”, “It’s a little too quiet” followed by comments around demographics: “not very diverse”, “not very tolerant culture and people”, “lack of young people”, “Heaven’s waiting room”. Other common issues included litter, “some towns are a bit dead”, “how far away everything is”, tourists, e.g. “how many people come over for the Book Festival”, cost of living, and the roads.

3. We were interested to learn a little about young people’s relationship with the outdoors. We simply asked: How do you use the outdoors?

In general, young people did not appear to venture far from home or school: “I don’t really go outside”, “I don’t know”. Walking was most mentioned, including “walk about the town with friends” and “walking to and from school”. Sports were fairly common, especially football, golf and rugby. Other, less common, recreational uses of the outdoors included fishing, sailing, wild swimming and going to the beach. Farming was the most frequently mentioned non-leisure use of the outdoors. A minority of pupils mentioned feelings or emotions; “calming, cold”, “fresh air” and “enjoying the scenery” and one said they liked to sit in a tree to gain inspiration for their writing.

The main part of the class session involved up to 4 group activities, depending on the time available, group size and pupil ability. Not all pupils took part in all activities.

Main Activities

Activity 1: How would young people like to see Galloway flourish? (facilitated by NatureScot staff)

We asked pupils what they would like Galloway/their area to be like when they are 30, or to think about what it would be like if they could wave a magic wand. A range of comments were made and later collated under the following categories. Comments per category are given in brackets along with some examples.

SOCIAL CATEGORY (133)

- More/better public transport (33); “More bus routes, especially more rural areas”; “Train rail back open”
- Better roads (28); “No more potholes”
- Better education/more funding for education (13); “Better university and college courses”
- Better/cheaper housing (13); “More affordable housing”
- Greater sense of community/participation (11); “Give young people a voice to see what things they want in their town”; “More accepting of others”
- Less crime (10); “More police”; “People are safe”
- Accessible healthcare (9); “More local access”
- More public facilities/services (9); “More public toilets”; “Lights in dark places”
- Tourists respectful of locals (7); “Tourists to be very kind to the locals”

ECONOMY (180)

- Better jobs and/or wages (44); “Greater variety of jobs”; “More jobs opened up so people stay in the area”
- More/greater variety of shops and places to eat (41)
- Regeneration/improved planning and development (32); “If they [shops] are shut down do something with the buildings”; “Bigger budget on cleaning up towns”
- Mixed views on tourism (25); “Control of tourist numbers”; “More tourist attractions”; “Bring money to the area”
- Support for farming (17); “Farmers have full control of their land”
- Cost of living pressures eased (10); “Cheaper food”; “Stop poverty”
- Mixed views on forestry (5); “More forestry to bring income”; “Less bad trees”
- Business (2); “Reopen local production”; “Better support for businesses”
- Other (4)

ENVIRONMENT (118)

- Less litter/Pollution (52)
- Preserve/increase animals and/or their habitats (43); “Preservation of natural wildlife”; “Once new trees are planted let them grow”
- Well thought out renewable energy (16); “Put solar panels on roofs instead of fields”; “Put wind power in more appropriate places”
- Protecting and celebrating heritage and culture (5); “Museums, history (because not a lot of people know about it and they should)”
- People learn about and respect nature (2); “More opportunities for schools and the public to engage with the environment”

RECREATION (117)

- More to do (42); “More clubs/activities for teenagers”
- More sports/sports facilities (27)
- A variety of views on land use conflict resolution (12); “Make the landscape accessible and promote the hidden spots so more people visit them”; “Dirt bike tracks to keep people out of the fields/hills.”; “Keep nice footpaths to ourselves so people don’t wreck the natural beauty of nature”
- Ability to be in nature (16); “Nice place to walk with family”; “Lots of places to ride horses”
- Attractions (10)
- Better/more places to hang out (6)
- Other (4)

Pupils’ top priorities for the future of their area related to the economy (180 comments), followed by social (133), environmental (118) then recreational (117) priorities. The highest number of comments (52) related to a future with less litter or pollution. Better jobs and/or wages (44) were high on the pupils’ list of what they feel their area needs to flourish, followed by preserve/increase animals and/or their habitats (43), more to do (42), more/greater variety of shops and places to eat (41), more/better public transport (33), and regeneration/improved planning and development (32). A wide range of other comments were also made.

Activity 2: Where do young people feel are the best places for nature and landscapes? (facilitated by class teacher)

Class teachers facilitated this session, as we expected them to have some local knowledge, e.g. of colloquial place names. We sent them the following information in advance:

If a National Park was to be created in your area, it would need to be decided which places should be included and which should not.

1. Find and circle where you are on the map.
2. Bearing in mind the special needs of the area (the things that worry or annoy you about living here), your hopes and aspirations (Activity 1), and what you know about National parks (the Aims and Criteria introduced at Assembly), think about places you know that could be included.
3. Mark each place on the map with a pen, write its name, draw a happy face and, if you want, briefly say why you think it should be included.
4. If pupils need prompting, reframe to ask where they would take a visitor from another country that was visiting their area – prioritise natural and cultural attractions (as per the Aims and Criteria).
5. If there are any areas you think should not be included (bearing in mind everything in 2 above), if there was a new National Park in this area, mark it with a pen, write its name, draw a sad face and, if you want, say why you think it should not be included.

Unsurprisingly, young people had most knowledge and passion about places closest to their home and school, so their thoughts are generally reflective of the schools' locations and catchment areas rather than the relative merits of other places in the proposed area. As noted regarding our warm up questions, many young people did not appear to venture far from home and school very often, including (perhaps especially) into nature.

As this activity was not facilitated by NatureScot staff, we do not know the context of the comments on the maps. In many cases, comments did not include a happy or sad face, so some assumptions have been made as to whether these are positive or negative comments. Some just included place names or names of attractions, and we have presumed these are places that a visitor should visit (positive).

Young people identified lots of places of interest for beauty and/or leisure along most of the coast, including Ailsa Craig, Mull of Galloway and beaches/views at Ayr, Girvan, Luce Bay, Ringadoo Sands, Sandhead, all around the Machars, Mossyard, Baldoon Sands, along the coast near Gatehouse of Fleet and Kirkcudbright, Rockcliffe, Kippford and Southernness.

The Forest Park, "forests" (especially Kirroughtree), "hills" (especially the Merrick and Criffel), "lochs" (especially Loch Ken), Cairnsmore, and Otter Pools were commonly mentioned as well as "nice walks" in and around several of the settlements. Outdoor attractions such as Red Deer Range, Wild Goat Park and Farm Parks were also often mentioned.

Cultural references included "castles", Book Festival, Threave farmers markets, Big Water of Fleet Viaduct, Caerlaverock and "history".

As well frequent mentions of nice landscape/scenery and the availability of attractions/leisure activities (e.g. mountain biking), reasons given for inclusion in a new National Park in the area include “[The Machars] protect the original landscape”, “[Newton Stewart] needs jobs”, [Castle Douglas] businesses will flourish with increased tourism profit” and “Increased protection for Galloway Forests”.

A few comments highlighted places pupils valued that they did not want any new National Park to change, e.g. “Don’t want [Kirkcudbright] to become a honeypot town”, “They should go to Loch Doon out of the way”, “Stay away from Osprey’s nest”. A few also felt specific places were not suited to being part of a National Park for other reasons, e.g. “[Mull of Galloway] too far away from anything relevant”, “[The Machars] cultural assets not ‘in danger’”, “[Wigtown] already has a book festival”, [Castle Douglas] not much natural beauty” and “[Castle Douglas] massive dairy/ agricultural economy is currently in the area, restoration wouldn’t progress”.

Activity 3: What do young people feel are the Opportunities and threats of a National Park in their area? (facilitated by NatureScot staff)

Pupils were asked to keep in mind the activities and discussions they'd taken part in during the session so far and what they had learned about the Aims and Criteria for National Parks in Scotland during the assembly and share their thoughts on the opportunities and threats a National Park in their area might bring. The number of comments recorded per category are in brackets and examples of pupils' comments are included verbatim in quotes.

Opportunities

SOCIAL (34)

- Community/Social regeneration (14); "Castle Douglas becoming the food town again."; "More people could add life to towns"
- Roads (9); "Need bigger and better roads."; "Would increase demand for road improvement that would benefit locals and tourists"
- Public Transport (3); "More frequent bus times"; "More trains and trams"
- Tourism/Benefits to area (2); "It will put us on the map - less of an obstacle on the way to Glasgow and more of an actual destination."; "More people learning about the local culture and history of Galloway."
- Housing (2); "Better housing"
- Other (2); "Need more bin workers"; "More care homes"
- Healthcare (1)
- Education (1); "Not a lot of schools"

ECONOMY (110)

- Benefits to businesses (41); "More disposable income being spent in the area and helping the economy and local businesses."; "Stop small businesses from shutting down"
- Jobs (40); "More job opportunities and career options"; Environmental jobs, rangers, outside jobs, in tourism etc.
- More businesses (16); More shops, restaurants, cafes etc.
- Funding opportunities (7); "More money from the government"; "Funding for education, fixing up schools, more colleges"
- Farming (4); "Promote farmers markets."; "Young farmer opportunities"
- Other (2); "Bring down prices"; "More people coming could rent houses"

ENVIRONMENT (42)

- Wildlife and Biodiversity (17); “Endangered animals kept safe.”; “It would encourage conservation of local wildlife and trees”
- Landscapes (12); “Preserve native woodland.”; “Healthier environment and ecosystems”; “Could create more opportunities for trails linking forests together”; “Protected coastlines”
- Sustainability (7); “Lowered emissions”; “More clean and sustainable”
- Environmental Awareness (3); “Be more aware of how to behave in nature and not disturb wildlife.”; “Signs for fire safety”
- Less litter (2); “Can help reduce litter on beaches”
- Other (1); “More park rangers”

RECREATION (58)

- Outdoor activities general (16); “Activities on Carlingwark loch, paddleboarding, fishing, water sports, archery”
- Mountain biking/cycle routes (13); “more/better mountain biking trails”; “Better cycle routes”
- Sport activities (8); “More sports pitches, sports centres, clubs”
- Paths for walking (8); “More walking paths”; “Walking groups for old people”
- Activities for Young people (6); “More opportunities for young people”; “More parks for children”
- Other (3); Farm tours, outdoor hunting, zoos, Arran boat rides
- Space (2); “Caravan parks and camping sites”; “Give spaces for people to camp”
- Better access and signage (2); “Farmers are encouraged to provide clear signs and better access along strategic paths to indicate the right way to access property [and avoid conflict]”

Most of the comments raised by pupils identified economic opportunities (110), followed by recreational (58), environmental (42), and social opportunities (34). If a National Park was established in this region, pupils were most keen to see local businesses benefit (41) and more job opportunities (40). Pupils were also keen to see local wildlife and biodiversity protected (17), more shops and businesses in town (16) and more outdoor activities (16). Opportunities for social regeneration (14) and more/better mountain biking and cycle routes (13) were also highlighted.

Threats

SOCIAL (104)

- Transport (34); “Roads will get wrecked from the amount of traffic - road wear, potholes.”; “Will cause traffic congestions”
- Tourism (24); “Tourist overcrowding”; “More noise and disturbing the peace”
- Antisocial behaviour/Crime (19); “More vandalism, crime and conflicts between tourists and locals”
- Community/social damage (15); “Increased tourists means less sense of community as there will be more short-term residents.”; “Local people might leave or be driven out by tourists”
- Pressure on healthcare and other services (9); “Cause too much congestion on the roads meaning emergency services can’t pass through.”; “Higher demand for/waste of resources like police time and healthcare”
- Housing (3); “People buying second houses to make Airbnb’s.”; “Will be harder to buy more than one house”

ECONOMY (72)

- Prices (30); “Prices will go up - fuel, electricity, water, food.”; “Driving young people out with house pricing.”
- Planning (14); “Harder to get planning permission.”; “National Park should have no say in the planning application process.”
- Farming (13); “it’ll get in the way of agricultural development - stop farmers from using certain chemicals.”; “Could kill small traditional farms.”; “Farmers in the national park can’t kill animals; will lose profit due to foxes killing animals”
- Jobs and Businesses (8); “Seasonal jobs only”; “Big businesses can put small businesses out of business.”
- Resources (7); “Big costs to set up the national park.”; “Tourists buying out the shops - nothing left for the locals”

ENVIRONMENT (56)

- Litter (15); “More tourists means more rubbish and litter”
- Tourism footprint (13); “Hotspots may become worn down meaning they can’t be enjoyed by future generations;” “destroying landmarks and old ruins.”; “Shore and bank degradation on rivers and lochs due to speed boats and jet skis”; “Footpath erosion”
- Changes to landscape (8); “Forests destroyed to put housing on them.”; “Habitats destroyed by wind farms.”
- Pollution (7); “More carbon from cars”; “Increased pollution”
- Hunting (6); “Threats to people’s ability to fish and game keep.”; “Can’t kill wildlife like foxes”
- Fire (4); “Forest fires from more wild barbeque sites”
- Impact on wildlife and livestock (3); “Disturb animals’ habitats”; “Livestock could choke on litter”

RECREATION (13)

- Access (11); “People could snoop about farmers land putting themselves at risk.”; “Farmers fields ruined by tourists walking or camping on them”; “Dogs could attack animals or worry livestock”
- Golf (2); “Golf courses under threat”

Most of the concerns raised by pupils were social (104) in nature, followed by economic (72), environmental (56), and recreational threats (13). Pupils were most concerned about the impact of a potential National Park on transport (34), highlighting that more visitors would mean more traffic congestion and damage to the roads. Concerns were also raised about increasing prices (30), tourism (24), antisocial behaviour and crime (19), social damage to communities (15), and increased littering (15). Other concerns pertaining to a National Park Authority’s planning powers (14), farming (13), environmental footprint of tourism (13), and access (11) were also highlighted.

Activity 4: What do young people think a National Park Authority should do for them and their area? (facilitated by NatureScot staff)

The aim of this activity was to encourage discussion about what young people wanted to see happen in their area, using the aims of a Scottish National Park as a prompt to structure their thoughts and facilitate discussion. They discussed what they felt needed to happen in their area to meet these aims and, where time allowed, what skills and jobs might be needed to do that. Where they identified a problem, we talked about different ways this had been looked at in other places: in Scotland; in National Parks; and more widely. This was used as a base for how they think it could be addressed in their area.

Aim 1 - To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area (45 comments)

Aim 1 prompted a lot of ideas and discussion (45 comments recorded in total); it seemed to fit the pupils' idea of what a National Park should do. Although mentions of looking after the environment were the most frequent (16) the cultural heritage comments (14) were more place and event specific. The environmental focus was on habitat improvement and caring for wildlife, with one mention of species reintroduction. The different schools' awareness of issues varied, most likely linked to their location, for example Doon Academy pupils focussed on Loch Doon, the ospreys and antisocial issues around wild camping in that area. They mention light pollution on a par with air and noise, which would be reflective of their location in the Dark Skies Park. Douglas Ewart pupils had a greater awareness of the coast and the history of the port villages. There was enthusiasm for more information about what is there, historically and environmentally (7 comments).

Concerns about litter and ideas about how to combat that and other antisocial behaviour were discussed at length. There were 15 mentions of issues and suggestions as to how to combat this, ranging from laws, fines and CCTV to litter picks, bins and posters to encourage responsible behaviours.

Aim 2 - To promote the sustainable use of the natural resources of the area (40 comments)

The concerns and issues brought out here were heavily localised and focussed on the main primary industries in the area, and young people recognised a need for more jobs in the area in general. Forestry, specifically sustainable forestry, was mentioned 9 times, with main concerns for the environment and jobs. Renewables, solar in particular, had been in the local news due to new applications which may have prompted the 5 mentions, all positive, about encouraging more jobs in that sector. The pupils were mostly positive about the development of more primary industry in the area for jobs but recognised that it might have negatives; they focussed on this duality with forestry especially, mentioning the need to restock with more natural woodlands. Despite many pupils identifying themselves as being from a farming background, farming was not as high in the pupils' interests as forestry (only 5 comments), but all emphasised the need for support for farmers and diversification. Improving tourism for more jobs in the area also featured as well as improving high streets and towns to make them more attractive for businesses and visitors. There was also a mention about supporting the fishing industry and an observation that making the economy thrive would mean that the council would be able to concentrate on improving healthcare and education.

Aim 3 - To promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the area by the public (51 comments)

Developing more and varied outdoor recreation was an area that all pupils had strong views about, and the 51 comments illustrated this. Although few identified outdoor activities as their hobbies or interests in the starter activity, within the conversations in this activity they started to talk about things they did with their families or groups, ranging from horse riding, fishing and mountain biking to enjoying the beach and dog walks. They were keen for more destinations for activities to be promoted and developed but concerns about accessibility and transport were raised (4 comments). Rangers to encourage activities were mentioned twice in this discussion, once as a positive and once as a negative with a dislike of being policed voiced. Pupils identified that activities for younger children were lacking in the area (4 comments), mentioning activity centres for school trips and farm parks as areas they had enjoyed and felt would be an asset for families. Carlingwark Loch, Loch Doon, Ladies and Queen Mary's pools (near Newton Stewart) were identified as places which were enjoyed for activities, but the pupils voiced concerns about how they were treated. Developments such as the new Bikes and Rocks venue/Rocks and Wheels initiative and events like the Hardrock Challenge (mountain bike event) were mentioned as ways to get to more young people interested in activities and attract visitors. Sports facilities such as football pitches, athletics tracks, and dirt bike areas were mentioned as places that they wanted to use.

Aim 4 - To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities (36 comments)

There were 36 comments relating to this aim, with pupils most concerned about transport. There were 15 comments expressing concerns with the quality of transport infrastructure, roads and car parks and 8 comments about public transport not being reliable or adequate for them to access town or the countryside, including for recreation. There was also a mention of the extra cost of fuel in the villages. There were 6 comments about a desire to see food accessibility and improved hospitality including fast food and entertainment for young people. The discussion around accessible food was related to pupils complaining they could not get food in their home villages and travel to activities limited access. Improved job prospects within the area were also highlighted as a priority for sustainable economic and social development of the area (5 comments with the associated discussion), other points were reducing littering in town (mentioned twice in this discussion and recurring in the discussions around Aims 1 and 2), preventing flooding and one mention about affordable housing.

What knowledge, skills and experiences do young people think National Park Authority staff should have?

Pupils had many ideas on the types of jobs and functions that a National Park should have in this area and were very vehement that these jobs should be locally recruited if possible and recognised that this could provide opportunities for themselves and other young people wanting to stay in the area. In many cases the pupils did not know the name of the job but understood and described the function they wanted to see. In these cases, a job title was suggested, sometimes a couple, and the best one agreed with the pupils.

SOCIAL (13)

- Developing career development opportunities, especially for young people (6); e.g. more outdoor apprenticeships and training for traditional skills such as building structures and walls.; “All the jobs are dead-end”
- Educate the community about the outdoors (4); e.g. Education Officers, lecturers, teachers and professors
- Green Health Officers, health facilities (3); “Social workers [?] to talk to people”

ECONOMY (14)

- Support and understanding for farming (5); “Know about the farming here compared to other places”; “Rangers to encourage farming upkeep”
- Support business people (3); e.g. help businesses set up equipment hire
- Jobs (2); e.g. people who stay and work in the area
- Encourage better shops, accommodation and restaurants (2)
- Forestry (1)
- Science based careers for graduates (1)

ENVIRONMENT (28)

- Habitat management (13); e.g. Scientists and people with an understanding of how the environment works and how to benefit it for managing natural sites and preserving forests and coastal landscapes.
- Wildlife management skills (6); e.g. Animal specialists to take care of wildlife and protect special species better (e.g. red squirrels), gamekeeper and vets.
- Built environment (4); e.g. Builders, stone masons, architects, landscape architects
- Reducing litter (3)
- Historians and archaeologists (2)

RECREATION (14)

- Rangers for path and access maintenance (7); e.g. Land management
 - footpaths, fix walls, build fences; “Checking fences and making sure people’s dogs are under control”
- Improve availability of outdoor activities through instructors and centres (4)
- Write history guides (1)
- Encourage people to go outside more (1)
- “Make Ailsa Craig more accessible to the public because it is so famous but so difficult to get to” (1)

GOVERNANCE/CORPORATE (19)

- Finance (6); e.g. finding funding, accountants
- Communication, design, web and marketing skills (4); e.g. graphic designers to promote activities and make information boards and signposts, social media skills
- Geographers/Mapping skills (2)
- “Willing to change and evolve”, Different Opinions (2)
- Political skills (2)
- People who understand the area (1)
- Good management (1)
- Research (1)

Pupils recognised and valued a range of roles and skills needed in a potential National Park Authority, particularly those relating to the built and natural environment (28 comments) and the governance and running of the organisation (19). Habitat and wildlife management roles were identified by 13 and 6 pupils respectively, along with related training and career development opportunities such as apprenticeships (6) and science-based careers for graduates (1) also mentioned. Support for the farming community was mentioned 5 times. Roles relating to responsible access and visitor management (7) were mentioned, with recognition that this might include educating the community about the outdoors (4). Many roles and skills relating to the running of a National Park Authority were also identified, most often regarding the effective management of finances, and good communications skills. Individuals also reflected that a willingness to change and evolve was needed, as well as political skills and a good understanding of the area.

Youth Group Visits

Before the consultation period began, we emailed local and national youth organisations, such as Scouts, Children’s Parliament, Scottish Youth Parliament, and local authority youth panels to raise awareness of the proposal, share our resources and invite them to work with us. This had limited uptake. Anecdotally, through our established networks, we know that the youth sector was aware of the proposal and the opportunity to work with us and that some shared this through their own networks, e.g. newsletters. We were told that some had used our resources with their groups and others had decided to avoid the topic completely due to the strength of feeling in the local area.

We met with 25 young people who were part of the South of Scotland Enterprise Youth Advisory Forum (SOSE YAF: aged 16 - 26) or East Ayrshire Council Children and Young People Cabinet (EAC CYPC: Primary 6 - 25 years). As with school visits, sessions began with a presentation based on the one available on the [Information Hub – A proposal for a National Park in Galloway](#) to raise awareness of the proposal, the consultation process and how young people can have their say if they wish. Sessions included the same warm up questions as the schools and some of their responses are below:

1. Scottish Government think this area is special enough to be considered as a National Park. What do you think is special about your area?

Comments were similar in range and content to those from school pupils but also included “the countryside is more accessible”, “Forgotten Scotland”, “cost of living is lower”, “really strong and bonded community”.

2. One of the criteria for an area becoming a National Park is that it would be the best means of meeting the special needs of the area. What do you think are the special needs of your area? Another way to think about that is what worries or annoys you about living here?

Groups’ views on the special needs of the area were, again, similar to school pupils’ views, including “dying towns”, small town mindset”, “not very welcoming” but also included “no jobs”, “outdated”, “needs run deep”, “make it more known”.

3. How do you use the outdoors?

Youth group responses that differed to school pupil responses included “calming walks, inspiration”, “when I am stressed, I go and find somewhere peaceful to sit”, “walks for self-regulation” and “for photography folio”.

The groups then focussed on the opportunities and threats of a national park in their area and the young people identified the following:

Opportunities

SOCIAL (12)

- More events (4); “Cultural events, seasonal events, weddings
- Benefits for locals (3); “Community upheld”; “Help people to think more positively about their area”; “Incentive to come back for young adults”
- More social opportunities (3); “Meet new people, In-person meetings and clubs”
- Visibility (1); “Put us on the map”
- Protect historical buildings and memorials (1)

ECONOMY (17)

- Businesses (8); “More independent, self-owned, local family businesses”; “Encourage new activity-based businesses”; “More money for small businesses”; “Better signage to deal with accessibility issues and infrastructure improvement”
- More funding opportunities (4); “Funding non-profits”; “Opportunity for people in the area to access funding that wouldn’t otherwise be available”
- Job opportunities (3); “Gardening, Park rangers, joinery, apprenticeships, tree surgeons”; “Jobs within this sector/relating to nature”; “Environmental jobs”
- Being strategic (2); “Collaboration between industries, companies and organisations”; “Promoting the use of existing facilities/attractions”

ENVIRONMENT (17)

- Environmental protection (9); “Protect endangered species and wildlife”; “Rewilding”; “More natural materials used”; “Bio-controls”; “Biodiversity projects”; “Nature recovery”
- Environmental Education (6); “How to source agricultural crops”; “Bring awareness to environmental dangers (fire safety, access)”; “More signs – awareness raising”; “Educate youth on hazards”
- “Protection of the Dark Sky Park” (1)
- Opportunities for wildlife (1)

RECREATION (13)

- Walks and Tours (5); “Educational walks”; “Guided walks”; “Bus tours”; “School trips to local nature reserves”; “Historical site tours”
- Fishing activities (2); “Angling competitions”; “Fishing clubs”
- Activities (2); “Outdoor swimming”; “Go ape – tree top climbing”
- Campsites (1)
- More tourist attractions (1)
- Sports opportunities (1)
- DofE- camping, community events” (1)

Groups identified equal numbers of opportunities relating to the economy and environment (17 each), followed by recreational (13) and social opportunities (12). If a National Park was established in this region, young people were most keen to see protection for the environment (9) and opportunities for businesses (8). Other opportunities identified included environmental education (6), walks and tours (5), more events (4) and funding opportunities (4).

Threats

SOCIAL (13)

- Infrastructure (3); “Public transport – may not support tourism to the park”; “Traffic”; “Infrastructure [buildings, hotels, roads] not up to par”
- Impact on community (2); “Increase in visitors changing community atmosphere”
- (Regarding tourists changing community atmosphere) * - “could be helpful/beneficial to appreciate others’ views.”
- Low social interest (2); “Lack of interest and involvement [from public]”
- Health (2); “Lack of water safety”; “Pollution”
- Antisocial behaviour (2); “Vandalism”; “Campsites concerns”
- Too many tourists (1)
- “Gentrification” (1)

ECONOMY (13)

- Impact on local businesses (3); “Off season may harm businesses”; “Local business competition and loss”; “Independent business uniqueness loss”
- Housing (3); “Airbnb and second homes meaning less houses for locals + less social housing?”; “House prices”
- Funding (3); “Low priority in terms of funding”; “Funding promises? What will be cut to have a national park?” (Regarding funding for park); “Not necessarily cutting anything we already have” *
- Lack of quality employment (2); “Temporary contracts”; “Unstable jobs”
- Restrictions (1); “More restrictions for forestry/agriculture? – Our main industries?”
- “Staffing issues – not enough staff anyway, tourism increases more problems” (1)

ENVIRONMENT (6)

- Impact on wildlife (3); “Fish loss”; “Wildfires”; “Habitat disruption”
- Impact of Irresponsible behaviour (1); “Littering, Dog poo”;
- “Not enough people doing preservation work” (1)
- “Increase in tourism and light pollution – busier dark skies areas” (1)

RECREATION (5)

- Conflict (2); “Conflict of land”; “Farmers vs Tourists
- Safe access (2); “Lack of safety”; “Possible injuries – leads to bad reputation”
- “Not enough funding for activities” (because of seasonal factors) (1)

Young people identified equal numbers of economic and social concerns (13 each), followed by environmental (6) and recreational (5). They were most concerned about impact on infrastructure (3), business (3), e.g. “independent business uniqueness loss”, housing (3), wildlife (3) and funding (3). Other concerns included impact on community (2), antisocial behaviour (2) and land use conflict (2).

What do young people think a National Park Authority should do for them and their area and who should be represented on the Board?

A couple of the older young people in these groups had some understanding of the structure and governance of organisations, so they were more able to consider how a potential National Park might operate than the school pupils. Some sub-groups considered Powers and some Governance but, due to time constraints, age and ability, it was not feasible to explore both with all young people.

One group considered potential Access powers for a National Park and identified the following issues: Raiders Road (seasonal pressure); area not accessible to people with visual impairments (transport, information, paths); seasonal rangers needed (with training); Otter Pools (camping pressures, fires); footpath erosion and maintenance of signs; and protection of Dark Skies Park.

There was an agreement that any National Park Authority should put supporting jobs and the economy of the area as a priority. Apprenticeships and educational opportunities were also important (mentioned 6 times). Promotion of locally produced goods, especially relating to agriculture, was highlighted and so was development of renewable energy. There was no negative feedback on renewable energy in the area (mentioned 4 times) which appears to contradict the views in the wider community. More opportunities and facilities for holidaying visitors, especially accommodation and recreation, were mentioned 8 times, including hiking and angling. As an aside, swimming pools, or lack of them, were mentioned 3 times, including how hard it is to access swimming lessons in several areas. Cultural assets, like the Doon Valley Railway and community groups, were mentioned as requiring their own support if a National Park was created. Inclusion was mentioned 3 times and emphasis placed on ensuring that benefits are felt by everyone who lives in the area.

One group considered Governance and emphasised that youth representation was vital on the Board. They suggested a Youth Forum or Panel is established and that it would be important but challenging (with it being such a large area and not quick to travel around) to ensure that the whole area was represented.

Young people raised thoughtful questions, including the relationship with existing designations (Biosphere, Forest Park, Dark Skies Park), whether there would actually be an increase in tourism, and where the money would come from, and asked for examples of how Scotland's existing National Parks carry out Scotland's National Park Aims.

Youth Groups: Other responses

We promoted our resource for use by adults working with young people ([Information Hub – A proposal for a National Park in Galloway](#)) via email directly to schools and groups in the area, as well as to relevant national organisations. The resource was created to help young people to discover what a National Park is, explore how they feel about their area and what they want to see in the future, critically analyse different views and information, and understand how they can contribute to the consultation process. There were 322 unique visitors to this page, and we know of schools and groups within and out with the proposed area that used the resource. The views and discussions of approximately 35 young people from Dumfries and Galloway Youth Council or Annan Academy were shared directly with us and this is summarised below.

How young people feel about their area

Some of the things young people said they love about their area included the lifestyle, the people, nature and outdoors. They like that it is safe, the small businesses, the traditions, and the variety of events – and really value the youth workers. One felt that the area’s rurality is “a double-edged sword” and another “not much going for D&G to be honest”. Their concerns included lack of jobs/lack of diversity of jobs, lack of things to do, and few education opportunities after leaving school.

What young people worry about for their area, and their hopes for the future of their area

For the future of their area, young people most worried about rural deprivation/poverty/cost of living, including “having to live in bigger towns/cities just to make a living” and “small businesses out of work”. Availability of jobs was also a common worry, while other worries included antisocial behaviour, nature, global warming, becoming “too modern” and “worried Dumfries will turn into a massive cul-de-sac”. As well as hopes that these worries are addressed, some things young people hoped for included a future with improved health care, less discrimination/more understanding of young people and people with additional needs, and better public transport.

Views on a potential new National Park in their area

Like our own work with young people, concerns these groups raised about a potential new National Park in the area included the area’s poor infrastructure, especially roads and public transport, restrictions on agriculture and forestry, lack of diversity of jobs created, influx of visitors, impact on nature, and price rises. Positives raised included that it would attract more people to the area to keep it alive, create jobs, protect wildlife, help tackle climate change, attract investment and “positive tourism could benefit businesses”.

What a National Park Authority should prioritise in their area

One group shared what they think are the important issues a National Park Authority should address in their area, which included house prices, jobs with liveable wages, help for small businesses, listening to the people who live here, keeping costs down, protecting wildlife and making sure the roads will cope.

Surveys by Young People

Several young people created and carried out their own surveys and some shared their results with us. We do not know the full context of these surveys, e.g. how questions were framed or how respondents were selected, so this should be taken into consideration when reading this section of the report.

One group of young people reported that their respondents, who were members of their local community, were equally concerned (from a choice of 4) about increased traffic and increased house prices but were not worried about restrictions on planning or increased litter. They shared that the most common reasons for supporting a National Park (from a choice of 4) were to protect the environment and create jobs. On the local economy, 50% of respondents thought that a National Park would have a very positive or somewhat positive impact and around 36% thought it would have a somewhat negative impact (14% thought it would have no impact). Approximately 64% of their respondents felt that a National Park would have a very positive or somewhat positive impact on the environment, while 14% felt it would have a somewhat negative impact (none felt it would have a very negative impact and the rest no impact). Of this group, just over 70% were for a National Park, the rest against.

Another group of young people found via their survey of the local community that reasons for supporting a national park were, from a choice of 4 and in order of preference, to increase jobs, to increase tourism, and to increase protection of the natural environment and increase government funding for economic development equally. Key reasons for opposing a national park were (again, in order and from a choice of 4), increased traffic on the roads, potential rise in the cost of housing, restrictions on planning, and increased litter and antisocial behaviour. 55% of this groups' respondents felt that a National Park would impact the local economy very positively or somewhat positively, with 35% feeling it would have a somewhat negative or very negative impact (the rest felt it would have no impact). Approximately 47% respondents felt a National Park would have a very positive or somewhat positive impact on the environment and 42% felt it would have a very negative or somewhat negative impact (the rest felt it would have no impact).

One young person carried out a survey of people under 26 who live, work, or study in Dumfries and Galloway & Ayrshire. It was promoted via Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram and supported by the No Galloway National Park campaign. They reported that, of the 238 young people that responded, 91% had heard of the proposal. When asked to what extent they agree with the statement "I feel I know lots about what a National Park in Galloway would look like" 49% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, 43% agreed or strongly agreed (10% selected don't know). On the statement "I think a National Park in Galloway will make my future better", 60% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 22% agreed or strongly agreed (18% didn't know) and on "I would like Galloway to become a National Park" 60% said no, 21% yes and 19% don't know.

Consultation Survey Responses: People in full time education

Consultation survey responses from people in full time education (presumed to be predominantly young people) are considered in the main report. We are aware of a number of young people completing the summary consultation survey, including some from school/s we visited.

Evaluation

During class and group sessions, we constantly assessed young peoples' understanding of the tasks and tweaked our approach accordingly (e.g. rephrasing questions or giving examples). We sought and acted upon feedback from teachers and leaders for future groups. Due to the very short time available in in most cases (only 45 minutes with some classes), we did not routinely ask young people for feedback. One teacher asked their class to note down what they enjoyed and a few of the answers include: "The group activities", "I enjoyed hearing everyone's views", "I enjoyed people listening to my opinions". Several young people asked us questions to help them understand the proposal further and we answered these on the [Information Hub - A proposal for a National Park in Galloway](#)

Adults associated with both Youth Panels said that they and their young people had found our session useful and engaging but one group's leaders felt we had missed an opportunity to get young people to answer the survey questions. They highlighted, in particular, that it would have been a good chance to hear young people's suggestions on a name for the potential National Park, which we agree from previous experiences would have been likely to elicit some creative and useful suggestions. Although we spent longer with youth groups than we did with school groups, some panel members were very young, some had only just heard of the proposal immediately prior to our visit, and many had never visited a National Park so we spent time introducing the proposal and getting the groups thinking about potential pros and cons and priority tasks for a National Park Authority. We encouraged (particularly the older) group members to complete the summary consultation survey if they wished and felt able, with the support of group leaders if appropriate and time allowed.

We met with a good percentage of secondary school aged young people in the proposed area but did not engage with as many young people aged 18+ as we had hoped. This was partly due to the relatively tight timescale we had to find relevant groups and build relationships with them, as well as the fact that some groups consciously avoided the topic of the proposed National Park and others decided such a controversial issue should be discussed with leaders only. During the consultation we were conscious of this, so we created an Instagram advert targeted at 18 - 35-year-olds, which we ran for the last few weeks of the consultation. Total reach was estimated at 8k with 45k impressions. It had a 1.38% click-through rate (0.5% to 1% is considered 'good') with 590 clicks.

Conclusion

Through our work as Reporter, we aimed to raise awareness amongst young people of the proposal for a National Park in Galloway and how they can have their say. While we reached over 40% of secondary school pupils in the proposed area, we were much less successful in raising awareness amongst young people over 18 years old. Through class and group sessions, we aimed to support some young people to explore the themes of the consultation and did so with around 8.5% of secondary school pupils in the proposed area. The thoughtful contributions from young people shared throughout this report show that, although numbers of over 18s were again low, young people considered the proposal and consultation themes in some depth.

The young people we engaged with recognise the unique characteristics of the area and what that means for the economy, environment and social and recreational issues and opportunities. They hold wide ranging views as to whether a National Park would bring benefits or cause problems. If there was a National Park in this area, local young people have many ideas as to what it could and should do for their area, and clear views on the skills and expertise needed by any National Park Authority staff.

We are grateful for all the support from educators, group leaders and senior leaders in helping to bring this consultation to life for young people of the proposed area and beyond. We recognise the significant challenges some of them faced in bringing such a locally controversial issue into the classroom. The young people we met and heard from were engaged and courteous, mature in expressing their views, and respectful in listening to the views of others.

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