PROPOSED NATIONAL PARK IN GALLOWAY

Consultation Response by Cree Valley Community Council

Cree Valley Community Council, CVCC, have studied the formal proposal to establish a national park in Galloway. We are responding to the current consultation on a GNP by stating our general position on the proposal rather than by completing either the online or paper survey. We do not consider that the consultation papers and the online response forms give us the opportunity to properly express our views

We emphasise that, if it is decided to proceed with the GNP proposal, Nature Scot will have to take into account local circumstances and the views of local communities.

We further emphasise that." Every relevant local authority and community council must be engaged and consulted in line with the requirements in Section 3(5) of the 2000 Act.B". We have not been consulted.

WHO ARE CVCC

CVCC is the community council for the market town of Newton Stewart and the surrounding area. Newton Stewart lies at the heart of Galloway and is central to both Galloway and the area chosen as a potential new National Park. The CVCC area covers 500km2, around 15% of the total land area that is being considered in this consultation. Our population, at just over 4200 is around 10% of the total population in question. It should be noted that, despite being listed behind Gatehouse and New Galloway in this consultation, Newton Stewart with a population of 3800 is almost twice the size of the two of them put together. It is bigger than Kirkcudbright, on a par with Castle Douglas and smaller than Dalbeattie. Only Stranraer can claim to be much bigger than Newton Stewart.

The map shows Newton Stewart is situated in the centre of Galloway with roads radiating out from it in all directions. Realistically, there is

no alternative to Newton Stewart being chosen as the main hub for a Galloway National Park wherever its boundaries are. In consequence CVCC believe that their input will be critical to the successful delivery of any National Park. We request that Nature Scot involve us in the conversation however they decide to proceed.

DO WE SUPPORT A NATIONAL PARK?

We tend to support the idea of a National Park. We fully support exploring the idea further but without any firm details of what the GNP would turn out to be we cannot give it our full support. A minority of the people we represent strongly support the idea, a larger minority strongly oppose the idea, and the vast majority believe that since something needs to be done to get more young people and vitality back into our community, we can't simply refuse the chance to become the main town in a National Park without first of all giving serious consideration to the idea. Ultimately, we would like to think that we would support the proposed GNP, provided the following issues are properly addressed as the proposal evolves.

THE ISSUES

Funding - The funding must be adequate to deliver meaningful change. It has to be borne in mind that the Galloway National Park will be unique in that it is being set up to create a vibrant tourist economy rather than to control an existing vibrant tourist economy. Galloway has no existing excess tourism wealth available to be tapped into. The set-up costs and administrative costs of a GNP are bound to be several million pounds annually. In our opinion, it would take an annual budget of at least £25 million to kick start the investment required to deliver any meaningful improvement in local tourism facilities. Without adequate investment the quality tourist experiences that are essential in attracting high spending tourists will not materialise. The National Park label may simply attract even more non spending camper van tourers, Tesco tenters, and static

caravan weekenders. If only £10 million is available annually it would be more expedient to sidestep the bureaucratic cost of establishing a National Park and instead use the limited resources available to fix our decaying High Streets, repair our hill walking routes, invest in tourist businesses and make improvements to the visitor facilities in the Galloway Forest Park.

Farmers concerns- The majority of farmers are strongly opposed to the GNP. Their opposition is founded on their lived experience of ever-increasing regulation. It is often said that 100 years ago a farmers role involved him giving twenty people instructions as to what needed to be done. Come ten years ago, economic pressures dictated that he was left to run the farm on his own, his only assistance being from twenty different government agency staff who came up the farm road each week to give him instructions as to what he needed to do. Recently, the visits from government staff have been getting fewer because of enforcement agencies replacing people with IT systems. Today's Galloway farmer has to spend a lot of his time harvesting data from the farm to satisfy a seemingly insatiable official appetite for records and information. He naturally sees the GNP as yet another bureaucratic monster that will end up sucking up even more of his life for little apparent purpose.
There is already sufficient environmental legislation in place governing farming practices, and more than sufficient mandatory record keeping. With the exception of large-scale developments and land use changes the GNP has no need to get involved in regulating agriculture at all. This needs to be in the GNP legislation from the outset
To get farmers onside, the GNP will have to acknowledge that the farmers who look after the drystane dykes, green fields, cows, sheep and crops are essential to the Galloway that is considered worthy of being a National Park.
Funding will always be needed to maintain and enhance the attraction of the Galloway countryside. Whilst the GNP probably cannot promise to deliver this funding. The principle that; it exists to do all that it can to help farmers and landowners maintain and improve the aesthetic qualities of the Galloway landscape should be a central tenet of it

Finding carrots to encourage farmers to do the right thing rather than finding sticks to threaten them with if they cannot provide the data to prove they aren't doing the wrong thing is the only way forward if the local farming community are to be persuaded to support the GNP

Afforestation- The growth in the area of conifer plantations in Galloway has been rampant recently. Over generous Woodland creation grants have encouraged outside investors to buy up farmland, clear out farming families, and cover the former fields with a dense sterile blanket of commercial woodland. This has led to a significant decline in the biodiversity and beauty of much of Galloway. New coniferous woodland creation needs to be stopped before it completely smothers all rural life in Galloway

Wind Farms - Rumour has it that there is a growing pile of planning applications for new wind farms in Galloway waiting to be submitted should the GNP proposal be abandoned. CVCC will not support a GNP that allows for any further expansion of the existing wind farm area in Galloway. There is ample scope to repower and redesign the established local wind farms; halting any further expansion of wind farms will not jeopardise Scotland's ability to meet its carbon reduction targets There is no need to destroy any more of the Galloway landscape in order to save the planet.

Urban decline- The decline of our main shopping streets and the dereliction of what were once thriving town centre hotels and high street banks is rapidly eroding the appeal that our seemingly time warped market towns hold for visitors. We need to find a way to find the money to stem the accelerating dilapidation and abandonment of large buildings in our main towns. The primary aim of the GNP must be to enable our towns to thrive. Good hotels and restaurants will attract visitors to a town. Derelict hotels will repel them. The GNP must be given sufficient funding to be able to offer generous grants to anyone who is prepared to restore any dilapidated building on any main street in Galloway. Otherwise, the GNP is destined to fail because Galloway will not have the high standard of facilities that are essential to attract affluent visitors to the area.

Path networks- The GNP should have the responsibility of ensuring that footpaths in Galloway are properly maintained. There is no need to create any new path networks. There are already hundreds of miles of recognised paths in Galloway. The issue is that many of the popular ones need repaired and upgraded. There is little point in designating new footpaths unless there is strong evidence that they are required. The Southern Upland Way is by far the most interesting long-distance walk in Britain. Long sections of it need repaired. At present the Merrick circular walk is more like a tough Mudder challenge than a pleasant hill walk. A long section of the Criffel footpath is a peaty mudslide. There is little point in allocating money to establishing new path networks. We don't seem to be able to look after the ones we already have

Static Caravans- Galloway has dozens of holiday parks which added together host several thousand static caravans. These sites are generally well maintained and attractive when viewed from up close. However, they are often a blight on the Galloway landscape when viewed from further away. The Fleet estuary looks like a collection of shanty towns when viewed from Wigtown. Bright, light-coloured caravans should be banned. Camouflage colours should be insisted upon.

Motorhomes- Motorhome owners see Galloway as a very convenient and cost-free place to overnight in. An overheard conversation in the Harbour Inn in Garlieston between veteran and novice motorhome couples sums up the current situation. "You can park in town centres for free, there are no height restriction bars stopping us from getting into car parks, and you can overnight anywhere by the side of the road. Compared to the rest of the country, we have free run of the place here." Meanwhile outside the Harbour Inn two motorhomes were parked up for the night right beside the council NO OVERNIGHT CAMPING sign. The growth of social media has led to an explosion on motorhome freeloading in Galloway. Beauty spots need protected, and our roads and public facilities need funded. A GNP needs to force motorhomes into designated sites where their owners must pay.

The Forestry Commission- Recently relaunched as Forest and Land Scotland, FLS, the Forestry Commission has owned over 1000 km2 of the GNP consultation area for over 70 years. It used to provide a lot of jobs locally and facilitate outdoor leisure access. Recently, with the exception of the 7 Stanes mountain bike trail network, it has abandoned its role in catering for and encouraging recreational use of its large estate. It has gradually become an absentee landlord. Its role is now to profit from its plantations without any regard for the communities which host them. Outside contractors are brought in to plant and harvest the trees. Rumour has it, that locally it no longer employs anyone with a chainsaw licence. It has installed pay and display machines at its most popular car parks. Every Friday a van comes down from Edinburgh to empty the cash from these machines and take it back to head office. The GNP will have to tackle this exploitation of Galloway. FLS has cleared people from the land like an 18th Century Highland laird. It is publicly owned, its behaviour is inexcusable and requires to be addressed by any GNP.

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere- The consultation reads as if Biosphere status will be of overwhelming importance to any GNP. Biosphere status is nothing more than a recognition that Galloway and the south of Ayrshire contain many ecologically important areas. These areas were all in existence before Biosphere status was granted. All the SSSIs in Galloway were protected by law before the Biosphere status came along. Whilst having Biosphere status will complement National Park status, it cannot be the main driver in its design. The GSAB has so far produced an evocative film and facilitated several research projects and habitat restoration works. However, after 12 years of existence the GSAB has a turnover of only £800,000. There are many private businesses in the consultation area that have a much higher turnover. It is a mistake to give Biosphere status undue precedence considering that it exists to protect relict natural areas rather than enhance the human experience within areas of outstanding natural beauty

THE BOUNDARY OF THE NATIONAL PARK

The consultation document is wrong in stating that what was once the Kingdom of Galloway included parts of Kyle and Carrick. It didn't. The Hereditary Sheriffs of Galloway, written by Sir Andrew Agnew, and published in 1893, is a comprehensive account of the Agnew family's 600 year involvement with Galloway. It should be studied before this consultation process is taken any further. Kyle and Carrick may have occasionally been under the control of the same families as Galloway. That does not mean that they ever formed part of it.

Native Galwegians know full well that Girvan and Dalmellington are not part of Galloway. The Geology and the Topography of the South West of Scotland are what dictated this. Galloway is Galloway. Girvan and Dalmellington are in Ayrshire.
The local authority boundary is a natural and ancient boundary, it should be the National Park Boundary. Galloway people know little of Girvan and Dalmellington. That, two representatives from these two communities will sit on the board of the GNP and be given an outsized influence on what is decided for Gatehouse, Garlieston, the Glenkens, and Glentrool is not something that CVCC can support.

None of the three areas presented in the consultation as options for the GNP area meet the statutory criteria as stated. No part of Dumfrieshire or South Ayrshire should be included. To be cohesive the GNP should be Wigtownshire and Kircudbrightshire with the exception of the area to the east of Crocketford and the north of New Abbey. This area, although historically in Galloway, is close to Dumfries and nowadays is more part of it than it is of Galloway.

We emphasise that Biosphere status is nothing more than a net thrown out to catch areas of internationally important habitat. It doesn't respect economic, administrative or natural boundaries. It cannot be used as a template for a Galloway National Park.

THE MAKE COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD

The board should include a majority of native Galwegians. A national park cannot thrive without local involvement and support. Indigenous peoples need to be at the heart of all discussions. Outside

actors may have different agendas to the local population. The makeup of the GNP board has to respect that local people should be in control.

THE NAME OF THE NATIONAL PARK.

It cannot be the kingdom of Galloway. Galloway may have been a kingdom that had its own laws until the 15th Century, but no one ever refers to the Kingdom of Galloway. The Kingdom of Fife is the only part of Scotland that goes by the name of Kingdom.
It cannot be Galloway, for the simple reason that when Galloway is mentioned by a Galwegian to a non-Galwegian in any conversation anywhere in the world. The listener invariably thinks that Galloway is Galway and begins to chat about how much they love Ireland.

The name chosen should be Robert the Bruce National Park. Galloway is the cradle of Scottish independence. People throughout the world know of Braveheart and Robert the Bruce. It is a distinctive name and will attract people. The creation myth of any nation is vital to its sense of self. Glentrool in the heart of Galloway is where the idea of Scotland was born. The name, Robert the Bruce National Park, would acknowledge this.

We would love to have a gleaming new National Park headquarters building in the middle of Newton Stewart. We would like to be proud of it as well. The issues we have raised above, particularly funding, must be addressed at the inception of the National Park.

We can be contacted at:- cvccsec@btinternet.com

Thank you

Cree Valley Community Council