
GSAB National Park Response 29th January 2025

Q1a To what extent do you support the idea of a new National Park being established in the south west of Scotland?

1. **Strongly support**
2. Tend to support
3. Tend to oppose
4. Strongly oppose
5. Undecided

Q1b Please tell us the main reason(s) for your opinion.

The Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere Partnership (GSABP) jointly submitted the bid for a Galloway National Park. Our goal is for the collaborative, participatory ethos of our UNESCO Biosphere to help shape a modern National Park (NP) that empowers diverse local stakeholders. We are absolute in our assertion that it is not an “either or” decision between the two designations but rather a unique opportunity to use the strengths of both to bring about new opportunities that will benefit the people, the environment and the economy of SW Scotland.

So our first choice is dual designation for SW Scotland with a fully integrated National Park and UNESCO Biosphere that shares staffing and working practices. The combination of the two designations would make a compelling offer for SW Scotland building on the international brand and identity of UNESCO and the greater public awareness of National Parks. There would be challenges in exploring how best to bring together the different governance models of both designations with one being recognised as a statutory body and the other a third sector organisation, but these are not insurmountable and there are examples from continental Europe of Biospheres and National Parks having shared approaches and closer to home of the relationship between the Lake District NP and the Lake District World Heritage designation.

Q2a Are there any alternatives to a National Park in Galloway that you would support? Please explain your answer.

If a National Park does not go ahead, the GSABP believes that the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere (GSAB) does offer a genuine, albeit with less powers alternative that should be given due consideration.

The overarching aims of the two designations are highly complementary, the key difference being their legal status and the powers/functions that this brings.

The Aims of a NP in Scotland are;

- to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area,
- to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area,

- to promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public, and
- to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities;

and the internationally specified core functions of UNESCO Biospheres are:

- Conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity
- Economic Development that is socio-culturally and environmentally sustainable
- Logistic Support underpinning development through research, monitoring, education and training.

Over the last 12+ year GSAB has been working with partners to develop and deliver a governance model, strategic plan and staff resource to implement these functions. The [2023-24 Annual Report](#) gives a flavour of activity delivered, much of which closely mirrors that expected from a National Park.

As highlighted by the reporter, the UNESCO Biosphere designation does not come with the long term funding, functions, powers or governance that a National Park has, but it could and does already deliver many of the softer powers or functions,. These include giving advice and assistance; being a focus for academic research; giving out grants (albeit lined to key projects); promotion of the area for tourism and leisure etc.

The Biosphere's governance model is highly progressive, focused on bottom up collaboration between the people who live and work within the Biosphere area, alongside public sector partners and eNGO's who have a strategic interest in and commitment to the region. It's a unique Partnership, with the balance of decision-making remaining at a local level, and the only such grouping that meets regularly in SW Scotland to discuss sustainability issues.

Whilst the Biosphere is already recognised through policies in the relevant LDP's and its significance and value to the region and Scotland is highlighted in NPF4, it doesn't have any of the legislative standing that a National Park has, nor is it a statutory consultee. It therefore relies on working with people to seek collaboration and comprise in the delivery of solutions that benefit the region.

However, the public sector partners that sit on the Biosphere Partnership Board do have these powers and functions. So, with an enhanced recognition of the international value that the UNESCO Biosphere designation brings to SW Scotland, aligned to a robust framework and legal minutes of agreement with public agencies, the Biosphere Partnership could directly influence delivery of such powers and functions through partnership with public sector agencies.

Long term funding support would need to be addressed but if there is sufficient commitment from local and national government to recognise the value and role of the Biosphere model as a modern inclusive approach to sustainable rural development, this should not be an issue.

Q2b What are the advantages of your preferred alternative(s) over a National Park?

Our suggestion is not a preferred alternative, rather it is a fallback position that we believe should be given fair and balanced consideration. The Biosphere is already well networked with a track record locally, nationally and internationally that has been developed over the last 12+ years. It is leading on the delivery of community-based responses to climate change, is a key partner in delivery of the Natural Capital Innovation Zone, has an existing structure, existing staffing and with a more secure

funding model, aligned to greater recognition of the international significance it brings to the region, could further develop to constitute an agile and cost-effective alternative with the potential to deliver some of the benefits associated with National Park designation.

Q3a If a National Park was to be designated, which of the three options presented in Map 4-1 and Table 4-1 would you support?

Option 1 - 'Hills and coast'

Option 2 - 'Hills and extended coast'

Option 3 - 'Hills, coast and countryside'

Other - see Q6

None

Q3b Please give your reasons.

Scottish Governments own Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) carried out by independent consultants clearly shows that Option 3 provides the greatest benefits for Biodiversity and Geodiversity; Climate Change; Environmental Quality (encompassing air, soil and water resources); Material Assets; Cultural Heritage; Landscape; and Population & Human Health.

The Trustees of the GSABP are supportive of having the largest possible area of the Biosphere included in any future NP and agree that this is how the greatest benefits will be realised. Indeed, the SEA show that an even larger area that encompasses all of the Biosphere + additional areas would also provide more benefits than either of the smaller options 1 or 2.

The Option 3 larger area would provide a greater opportunity to support delivery on both the four aims of a NP and the core functions of a Biosphere through development of landscape scale approaches that look for sustainable solutions to the climate and biodiversity crises that will also support our local communities and businesses. The extension of the northern boundary into South and East Ayrshire would bring more opportunity for delivery of socio-economic benefits to some of the most deprived and marginalised communities in Scotland, with them well placed to be gateways to a NP.

Q3c Do you have comments on the extent of the area in your preferred option? Would you add or remove particular areas, features or settlements to make the option smaller or larger? And if so, why?

If future management of a NP is to be based on an ecosystem services approach, then we do believe that, as with the Biosphere currently, river catchments should be key (though not necessarily determining) units in defining a boundary. Similarly, the marine environment should be given due consideration or, failing that, appropriate attention should be given to ways in which the marine area of the UNESCO Biosphere can support delivery of NP aims and objectives.

Q4 Is there another option for the area of the proposed National Park which should be considered? If so, what do you suggest and why?

Whilst one extreme option could be to take in all of the UNESCO Biosphere as a NP, the GSABP recognises that noting the different criteria for designation and scale of area involved, this is unlikely to happen and that having two different but complementary boundaries offers an opportunity unlike any other Scottish NP to share good practice developed within the NP area across the wider UNESCO Biosphere area and visa versa.

Q5a Looking at the description of the options presented in Table 4-1, do you think they meet the legislative conditions for designation?

a) the area is of outstanding national importance because of its natural heritage or its combination of natural and cultural heritage

Yes/Partially/No

Yes

Why?

The range of international and national designations for biodiversity, geodiversity, landscape, built heritage and culture more than adequately demonstrate the outstanding national importance of SW Scotland.

b) that the area has a distinctive character and coherent identity

Yes/Partially/No

Yes

Why?

The area forms a coherent biogeographic unit influenced by underlying geology, topography and river drainage systems, with a rugged mountainous core, an extensive periphery of forest, woodland, arable land and pasture, and a varied coastline. It's an area often overlooked from much of the rest of Scotland. This has led to a distinct cultural and historic tradition of independence with much of the early influences from the sea to the west. Historically, agriculture has provided the evolution of a distinct character for settlement patterns and landscape, much of which remains. This is particularly so in the lowland areas where dairy farming dominates and along the coastal strip where arable enterprises are more common. On the uplands and higher ground the rearing of sheep and beef calves is the main farming enterprise with an increasing emphasis on forestry and wind energy as the main land use alternatives.

c) that designating the area a National Park would meet special needs of the area and would be the best means of ensuring that the aims of the National Park are achieved in a co-ordinated way.

Yes/Partially/No

Yes

Why?

The region is currently and prospectively subject to the most intense pressure for large-scale land use change (afforestation, agricultural intensification, renewable energy development) anywhere in rural Scotland. This process desperately requires steering in a direction that maintains and if possible enhances its remarkable and under-appreciated qualities. The economy very badly needs a boost and local communities want more say in the way that the area evolves. A NP and particularly a NP Plan that becomes a statutory document is the only available means through which to ensure that multiple public sector partners can agree a binding shared agenda which, in cooperation with private land owners, businesses and communities, can address these challenges and bring people together to help shape the region's future.

Q5b Do you have any additional comments on Table 4-1 which might be relevant to the consideration of the geographic area?

It should be noted that Option 1 contains more than just the Core of the UNESCO Biosphere, it extends out through much of the Buffer and into the Transition Area. Options 2 & 3 further extend out into the wider Transition Area.

The river catchments and associated lochs do not get much mention, yet they have played an integral part in shaping the region both physically, culturally and economically. They have been used to help delineate the Biosphere area, and create that essential source to sea overview at which many land use decisions are being considered.

It's worth noting that the quality and interest of the settlements (from clachans and villages to market towns) makes a much more significant contribution to the quality of the environment than in the existing Scottish National Parks (and makes the area in that respect more akin to some of the NPs south of the border). This is relevant both to the choice of area for designation and to its future management, including potentially the powers required.

Noting the key questions at the end of table 4.1 about additional communities to include and noting that the GSABP are strongly in favour of Option 3 then we would anticipate all the areas listed as being included. The inclusion of Loch Ryan is an interesting possibility, which should be considered in the context of the wider question as to whether a NP should take in the marine environment or whether through working with the GSAB this can be adequately covered, see below.

Q6a Do these principles provide a reasonable basis for drawing up a detailed National Park boundary for the area?

The marine environment needs to be considered if a full ecosystem services approach is to be taken. If a marine component is included it needs to be clear how this works alongside the national marine plan (and is considered in National Marine Plan 2) and the existing Marine Protected Area network to ensure connectivity and coherence. However, it is recognised that this could be challenging and perhaps reinforces the need for careful thought particularly around the relationship between any National Park and the UNESCO Biosphere that now extends 12 nautical miles into the marine environment. Thoughtfully and imaginatively handled, this could mitigate any problems associated with the demarcation. More generally it is desirable that the Park Authority has the capacity to influence activity beyond the statutory boundary within which its legal powers apply. Again, this represents a strong argument for the closest possible working relationship with the Biosphere, within the boundaries of which most of this hinterland is likely to lie and which in practice already has operating experience and collaborative working relationships there. This would form a unique basis for cross boundary collaborations and sharing of best practice.

Q6b Do you have any suggestions for changes to these principles which would be specifically required for drawing up a boundary for a National Park in this part of Scotland?

See 6a above.

Q7 Are there any further existing functions and powers from recent legislation that would be beneficial for this Park Authority to be able to draw on and why?

It would be useful for a NP to have a clearly demarcated role in supporting the RLUP and to be encouraged to expand the South of Scotland RLUF developments into Ayrshire.

The NP should be a consultee able to advise on the content of the whole farm plans that will be required as a condition of future agricultural support payments. This would help to encourage and embed a more consistent approach to nature friendly farming, ensuring compatibility with delivery of the NP Plan and creating opportunity to link activity between neighbouring land owners.

The NP should also be a consultee for Scottish Forestry in determining future forestry proposals in the area, helping ensure a balanced approach is taken in considering social, economic, environmental and cumulative impacts.

Estate Land Management Plans are proposed for ownership transfers of over 1000 ha under the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill 2024. Whilst changes of ownership on this scale are not a common occurrence within the proposed area, GSABP would like to see the NP being recognised as a consultee in the development of such plans.

Within the NP area the NP Authority should be given a clear role in working with communities in the development and implementation of Place Plans.

Q8a Do you agree with the need for a bespoke approach suggested for the planning function for a National Park authority in Galloway?

Yes/Maybe/No/Don't know

Yes

Q8b Looking at the possible options in Box 5-2, how do you think this should work in practice?

Whilst not necessarily objecting to the proposals in Box 5-2 we think that there could be an even more bespoke option for a NP in Galloway

Q8c What alternatives should be considered and why?

Following various discussions with planners and others an alternative approach is suggested which would need to be supported by a robust legal framework but could offer a more collaborative option.

A NP does not need to have full planning powers, but it does need to have a positive working relationship with the local authority planning departments. This partnership approach is key and would require regular meetings between NP officers and local planners to discuss alignment of approach with applications, policy etc. An example of how this has worked in the past is development of the Galloway Dark Sky policy that all three planning authorities jointly developed and signed up to. That convening power to bring planners together to address such issues is key.

Whilst we recognise that the Cairngorms hold the power to “call in planning applications” in high regard it's been suggested by others that it should be treated with caution as it could be detrimental to that relationship with local planners and seen less as collaboration and more as a hierarchical approach challenging local authority planning policies. It's suggested that if policies are developed jointly between the NP and local planners, and with recognition of the NP as a Statutory Consultee that the need for “call in” powers could be reduced.

A NP need not get involved in most of the development planning if there are clear policies identified and agreed in the National Park Plan, that are supported by legally binding minutes between the partners. Future iterations of the Local Development Plans would need their policies agreed in partnership with the NP ensuring alignment with the National Park Plan, and negating the need for a separate NP LDP.

The NP will want to influence strategic spatial planning and as such would require a Regional Spatial Strategy drawn from the NP Plan, focussed on the NP area, and covering transport, infrastructure, land use, nature networks, climate mitigation/adaptation, tourism, recreation etc and agreed and bound by a legal minute.

To achieve these objectives and to enable informed comment as a statutory consultee the NP would need to employ a small planning team. The skills of such a team should be steered towards the special purposes of a NP e.g. Biodiversity, Archaeology, Landscape, Place Planning etc. These are areas of expertise that local authority partners often now struggle to retain due to budget cuts. The skills of these officers would be available to input to local authority planning decisions within the NP area, strengthening the partnership and consistency of approach across the NP area.

These planning officers would represent the NP, and subject to capacity, could also offer a service of site visits, advising applicants on how best to ensure their submission will comply with the NP Plan and therefore will be most likely to succeed.

This would provide a partnership approach to planning within a NP that builds on the collaborative ethos at the heart of the UNESCO Biosphere.

Q9a Do you agree that the National Park should in principle become an access authority for its area?

Yes/Maybe/No/Don't Know

Yes

Q9b If not, what other options could be considered and why?

Access is a challenge for the existing Local Authority partners following year on year budget cuts, reduced staffing and increase in issues due to extreme weather events and/or changing land use. If tourism and recreation is to be a key remit for a NP then it's essential that management of that access network is consistent across the whole of the NP area by having one access authority.

Q9c Do you agree with the suggested approach to core path planning?

Yes/Maybe/No/Don't know

Yes

This is essential – the original core path plans had limited strategic consideration to the creation of key link routes between communities and/or across local authority boundaries. A tripartite review creates an exciting opportunity to explore how core paths can support and help feed into an active travel agenda that would be good for health, well-being and support businesses and the wider local economy across the region. A well-designed and well managed access network also provides a more positive experience for both user and land manager by having clearly signed route and well managed infrastructure reducing the risks for conflict.

Q9d If not, what other options could be considered and why?

The status quo has not worked for cross-border access. Capacity of the three local authorities to deliver core path priorities is not consistent. Other local authority priorities would inevitably lead to more pronounced differences in how access is planned and delivered depending on the individual areas. It's essential that a NP has one approach that is consistent across the board.

Q9e What are the strengths and weakness of these options for access and other fora?

A NP wide Local Access Forum is key to achieving the strategic joined up approach that is required to create a core path network that is both dynamic and ambitious in its implementation. Having one access forum both takes a burden of local authority partners and also ensures consistency of approach across the entire area in decisions making and maintenance.

Q9f Are there any other options you would want to see considered?

No

Q10a Do you think that the new National Park should establish its own ranger service?

Yes/Maybe/No/Don't know

Yes

Q10b What are the strengths and weakness of this approach?

The NP will need its own ranger service. This should embrace all the existing public sector ranger services within the area to ensure consistency of messaging and activity. Past experience from a time when there were substantially more rangers in the region would suggest that additional positions will need to be created.

There are a number of third sector employed rangers within the proposed area e.g. Loch Ken and Loch Doon – the NP should explore funding support to retain their services and training to ensure consistency of NP messaging.

The strengths are clearly about having an enhanced public face for the NP, to engage with members of the public, promoting NP messaging and to support education with visitors. The weaknesses are that the more 3rd party ranger services that are supported the more challenging it can be to ensure a shared vision and consistent approach to ranger activity within the proposed NP area.

Q10c Are there any other options which should be considered and why?

n/a

Q11a Do you agree with these possible arrangements?

Yes/In part/No/Don't know

Yes

Q11b If not, what alternative approaches should be considered and why?

The NP, as proposed in 8c, must be a Statutory Consultee with not just the legal locus to comment on forest management plans, SF funding decisions or proposals being assessed by the ECU but also with the resources required to employ a team of suitably skilled NP officers covering specialist areas such as biodiversity, archaeology, landscape planning etc who can ensure that contributions to such decision makings are meaningful and well considered.

Proactively working with these NP Officers gives opportunity for this to be an exemplar of a modern NP that actively works with key land use industries to develop best practice approaches that show how food, fibre and energy can be produced in a modern landscape whilst still delivering the multiple benefits that society demands.

It's essential regardless of a NP or otherwise, that FLS revert to having one Galloway Forest Plan rather than the current multiple land management plans which fail to give a coherent vision for the wide range of purposes for which the forest park was originally set up including timber production, tourism, recreation provision and conservation.

Q12a Do you support these proposals for the potential size and composition of a National Park Board in the Galloway area?

Yes/Maybe/No/Don't know

Maybe

Q12b What do you think would be the advantages or disadvantages of these suggested arrangements?

In the early days of a new NP it would be better to have a larger Board that offers more opportunity for a diverse range of local representation than a smaller board where the decision making is in the hands of a few. However, balanced against that is the cost of having paid Board members and so the size of the Board should be reviewed after the first term of office for Board membership.

The GSABP think it is important that strong local representation with significant local discretion holds a majority sway in decision making for a NP. It is important that all NP Board members whether publicly elected, nominated by local government or appointed by Scottish government, have a clear understanding of the interactions between the multiple often conflicting challenges faced in SW Scotland and are willing and able to look beyond their individual areas of interest to work in the best interests of the whole of the NP. The local imperative must be given clear understanding and consideration in the decision-making process.

We recognise the reasoning behind Ministerial appointments and the added value they can bring to the decision-making process but it essential those appointees bring with them a demonstrable understanding and enthusiasm for both the region and their area of expertise.

If D&G Council is going to have the largest number of appointees, we'd like to see encouragement for some of those appointees to be drawn from not just locally elected members, but also including local people living and working within the NP area who have demonstrable professional expertise in key issues associated with delivery of the National Park Plan.

Q12c What alternative options could be considered and why?

Any National Park is going to significantly overlap with the geography of the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere. The GSAB Partnership Board Trustees are currently made up of public, private, eNGO and community representation drawn from local people living and working within the Biosphere. Membership of the Board is voluntary, open to all, and publicly advertised. The Partnership Board is supported by officers in attendance from some of the public agencies such as NatureScot, Scottish Forestry etc that help ensure the Trustees take account of regional and national policies. Clear consideration needs to be given to the relationship between the two designations taking account of duplication of representation, as well as experiences elsewhere in the Europe and the UK where options range from shared governance to permanent sub committees.

Q13a Should Scottish Minister appointments to the Board include expertise on nature, farming and forestry?

Yes/Maybe/No/Don't know

No

SG appointments need to be made after local representatives (both elected and appointed) have been identified, so that Ministers can ensure that the Board is balanced across all sectoral interests. Depending on the individuals selected locally, this may involve other areas of expertise outside of those listed. SG representation needs to bring a national context to local discussions but also needs to have a clear understanding and experience of the issues being faced in SW Scotland.

Staff expertise in these areas should also be brought into Board as required to help inform decision making.

Q13b What other areas of expertise would the Board require, and why?

Business – supporting local businesses to use their association or proximity to the NP to develop new sustainable economic opportunities and employment that will encourage young people to either stay or relocate to the area.

Sustainable tourism – to ensure that the NP is promoted and managed in a way that ensures future tourism is done in partnership with local communities, minimising impacts on local people and the natural environment and ensuring that the visitor experience is positive for all socially, economically and environmentally.

Community empowerment and housing – some of the most deprived communities in Scotland are located within the proposed NP area. There needs to be a major focus on supporting those communities to grow and develop, taking a proactive stance on new employment opportunities, low energy social housing and community ownership of assets.

A key issue for many rural areas is the outward migration of young people. The NP should be seeking a young person who is active in youth engagement to be a representative on the NP Board, they could be drawn from the D&G/Ayrshire Youth Councils or Youth Parliament. It's important the appointment is representing a cross section of young people in the NP area.

Education is fundamental to NP and so relevant knowledge expertise should be considered for the Board

With Recreation a key focus for any future NP, knowledge and expertise in the sustainable delivery of such areas of activity will be essential.

Q14 Do you have suggestions for the topics that National Park sub-committees and advisory groups should be created for?

Expansion and delivery of the Regional Land Use Framework across the whole of the proposed NP area will be critical.

Support of the Natural Capital Innovation Zone and landscape scale nature restoration

New local energy efficient affordable housing, aligned with a firm position on second home ownership, will be critical if we are to ensure that a NP remains a living breathing place for local people.

As noted in 12c the relationship between a NP Board and the GSAB Partnership Board needs to be clearly thought out ensuring that dual designation embraces and delivers on the key remits of both designations either as an integrated board or through the adoption of suitable sub committees.

A young people advisory committee should be considered either link into Youth Councils or as a standalone group representing the needs and interests of young people I the region.

Q15 What steps could be taken to ensure a new National Park operated in ways which are inclusive of ethnic minorities and other protected characteristics?

To create the best avenues for engagement, the NP should have an outreach function with a focus on connecting diverse communities and groups in the region, both within the park boundary and out-with. A strong ethos of the NP as very much 'our park' will be crucial, using diverse representation throughout and from the outset. A meaningful engagement programme that supports all reaches of our communities to connect with the NP in their own way should be included. Diverse representation at all levels of the NP, including at board and/or subgroups, at delivery level, and among the NP staff and/or volunteers, will help to ensure that this park really does become a new type of NP that is for everyone.

The NP could seek to explore or develop its own programmes of blue and green health to engage groups working to support mental health & well-being, recovery and rehabilitation, amongst others. The NP could also engage a forest school/bushcraft programme that aligns with the regional school

system, supporting young people who find classroom learning difficult, have additional support needs or physical health challenges.

The NP should quickly look to develop physical accessibility in the area that will enable not just wheelchair users or those with mobility challenges to access the park but those with very young children in buggies. This will include not just accessible nature paths but accessible villages and towns, and accessible public toilets and parking options.

Another consideration will be improving public transport services to increase their coverage of the area, which will support not only those who choose this option for sustainability, but also those who depend on this option financially.

Q16 Views are sought on the timing of the direct elections in respect to the selection of other elements of National Park Board.

As explained in response to Q13a, GSABP think that it is essential that locally elected members are appointed first, followed by the locally authority nominated members and SG appointees coming at the end of the process. This provides an opportunity to ensure that the NP Board is balanced and representative of all sectoral interests enabling it to be in the best position for production of an ambitious NP Plan that we deliver for everyone.

Q17a What options for using the existing public sector staff and resources to undertake the work of the National Park Authority should be considered and why?

Noting the best value requirement for staffing of any future NP and as detailed in response to question 8c, to enable informed comment as a statutory consultee and to ensure successful delivery of the NP Plan the NP would need to employ a small planning team. The skills of such a team should be steered towards the special purposes of a NP e.g. Biodiversity, Archaeology, Landscape, Place Planning etc. These are areas of expertise that local authority partners often now struggle to retain due to budget cuts. The skills of these officers could be available to support local authority planning decisions within the NP area, strengthening the partnership and consistency of approach across the NP area and offering best value for money.

There maybe be some public sector staff resource that could be used to support delivery of a NP, but noting the significant reduction in staff resources by most public sector agencies over the last 10 years it should be principally a mandate that ensures public sector staff work in an open and transparent partnership with the NP authority.

Whilst not public sector staff, the Biosphere staff team should not be ignored. They already cover many areas of activity pertinent to delivery of a national park in the region and whilst the GSAB staff are not public sector to date they have been largely resourced through public sector funding agreements. Rather than duplicating such positions it would offer better value for the public purse to integrate the staffing of the two organisations, noting the potential for differences in geographic coverage of the two designations.

Q17b Are there any benefits or drawbacks to these options which need to be considered?

Having an in-house team of NP officers covering the special purposes as outlined above would offer a ready opportunity for partnership working with other public sector agencies in the region in areas that are often difficult for them to resource these days.

The geographic areas for a dual designated NP/Biosphere are likely to be similar but different and shared staffing offers an exciting ready-made opportunity to share best practice developed across the greatest area of SW Scotland and beyond.

Careful thought would need to be given to identity to ensure the relevance of both designations was retained without one being seen to 'trump' the other.

The major benefit would be for a new NP being directly aligned to an organisation that already shares many of the same objectives and that has won local, national and international acclaim for the networking and activity it has delivered over the last 12+ years. With that comes a skilled, knowledgeable staff resource that are respected and well networked across the region.

Q18a What level of staffing do you think is appropriate for the area, powers and functions and governance arrangements being considered?

It's very difficult to comment at this stage without understanding the full range of powers and functions that a NP will be given. However, experience from within the Biosphere covering a slightly larger area than option 3 is that at a peak of 17 staff employed during summer 2024 the team were still spread extremely thinly. If the NP is to really deliver and be noted for the positive impact it makes it is likely to require a significantly bigger staff resource that enables it to engage with the wide range of different user groups, across a large geography to tackle the issues faced in rural SW Scotland. With the additional powers and functions of a NP, key areas of expertise will also need to be recruited, which experience shows is not always easy in SW Scotland.

Q18b What other areas of work would require further staffing and why?

GSABP are supporting a fully integrated NP/Biosphere, so the staffing allocated needs to be sufficient to cover the full combined geographical coverage and respective remits of the two designations.

Of particular relevance, the Biosphere has excelled in recent years in its activity on community climate action, community engagement as well as educational resources/activities both inside and outside of the formal school environment. This is an area which should be embraced by any future NP.

The Biosphere work on Natural Capital should also be noted, not least as the proposed NP will be within the South of Scotland Natural Capital Innovation Zone.

Q19a Do you agree that – if designated – the National Park should be called the 'Kingdom of Galloway National Park'?

No, not at all.

Q19b If not, what alternatives would you suggest?

A range of suggestion from GSAB Trustees with no unanimous answer including Galloway and Carrick, Merrick or Galloway and Southern Ayrshire National Park have been suggested as alternatives.

Q20 Do you have any other comments you wish to make here which are relevant to the proposal?

The legislation states that a National Park must have a NP Board, NP Plan and a NP CEO. It does not specify any wider requirement for staffing to support delivery of the NP Plan. If we want to deliver

an ambitious and innovative NP Plan that is rooted in the region then consideration should be given as to how the wide range of existing organisations already delivering positive activity, could be aligned to that of the NP, there is an opportunity for wider consideration to be given to the options available for delivery of the NP Plan.

One option could be through working with existing strategic partners who have demonstrable areas of expertise for delivery of key elements of the Plan. It would introduce an additional level of complexity, and could create issues over a sense of identity for both the NP and partner organisation but it would result in a smaller NP service being required, would reduce the risk of competing against existing organisations for experienced staff and project funding, it would support third sector bodies in the region whose core funding is often tenuous, and would create a unique NP service that reflects the needs and demands of the region whilst embracing the community wealth building objectives of Scottish Government.

A NP for SW Scotland is a one in a generation opportunity, the GSABP believe it is incumbent on all of us to work together to design a NP model that will work for the majority of people living and working in the region.

Q21 Is there further evidence and information you want to provide on the potential positive or negative environmental, social and economic impacts of the proposed National Park?

The [GSAB State of the Biosphere 2012-2022](#) summarise the key environmental, economic and societal changes that have taken place in the UNESCO Biosphere during that decade. With the Biosphere overlapping significantly with the proposed NP area it's findings are very relevant to the NP discussion. It highlights the decline in traditional employment particularly mining and agricultural, and how a high proportion of remaining employment in the region is in the land-based sector, energy and tourism. It discusses how primary production industries have led to comparatively few well paid jobs in the region, and how professional jobs are often difficult to fill. The pressures of land use change in the region are discussed along with negative impacts on biodiversity due in part to climate but also aligned to changes in agricultural and forestry practices. The need for a more strategic spatial assessment of land use change is highlighted as a priority.

The report concludes by highlighting the key future priorities identified by local stakeholders. These included;

- Supporting communities and businesses in **tackling the climate emergency** by acting to mitigate, adapt and increase resilience of habitats, communities and businesses to climate change.
- Tackling the **biodiversity crisis** by acting to halt and reverse negative impacts on the natural environment.
- Promoting **sustainable development** within planetary boundaries
- Advice for **businesses on sustainability** and how they can get involved in schemes to help tackle the climate and biodiversity crises
- Becoming a recognised brand, that puts the **region on the map**
- Expanding on **educational** and wider-reaching initiatives, fostering both children's and adults' relationship with nature and the historical and cultural heritage of the Biosphere's landscape
- Communities, businesses and strategic partners all mentioned the need to further support **sustainable tourism** in the region and collaboration.

- A key priority for stakeholders over the next 10 years is to establish better mechanisms to **secure funding**, e.g. by running pilot projects and presenting the case for continued investment in the Biosphere from the Scottish Government equal to that of a national park.

All of these challenges and future priorities whilst identified for the UNESCO Biosphere are equally applicable to the proposals for a new National Park.