ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL **COUNCIL**

DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH **22 FEBRUARY 2024**

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CALL FOR NEW NATIONAL PARK NOMINATIONS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The Scottish Government has announced its intention to designate a new National Park(s) during 2026. Early stages of the process for selecting new National Park(s) involved development of the assessment criteria and informal expressions of interest and this occurred during 2023.

1.2 During the spring of 2023, Policy Leads ELT were appraised of the process. Following that a Briefing Report was considered by PPSL on the 24th May 2023 (May 2023 PPSL Brief) which explained the forthcoming process and the likely issues which might need to be considered if a National Park was to be proposed by a local community group (see Appendix 2). The report outlined that, if a local group made formal proposals for a National Park within Argyll and Bute, the Council would need to consider if it wished to support that proposal or not. The report highlighted that it would be useful to raise awareness of the Scottish Government process by publicising the opportunity for communities to develop and pursue their own proposals. This was carried out by issuing a press release at the time.

1.3 The formal nomination process was opened by the Scottish Government on October 12th 2023 and runs until the 29th February 2024. Until January 2024, no Councillor nor community group had provided details of any proposed National Park within Argyll and Bute. Officers were aware of interest in the Loch Awe area and requested details for consideration. On the 20th January 2024, officers received details of a proposal for a National Park around Loch Awe. A website to support this has been created www.lochawenationalpark.scot. At this late stage it is not possible for the Council to take a considered view of the implications of the proposal and whether the Council wishes to support it or not. Notwithstanding this, the Council will be consulted by Scottish Government as part of the assessment process and will get opportunity to express its views at that stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Council:

i. notes the information in the Report; and
ii. notes that should a National Park within Argyll and Bute be proposed as part of the nominations process, the Council will get opportunity to express its views on such a proposal as part of the assessment process.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1. The Scottish Government wishes to establish at least one new National Park by 2026. This paper provides an update of the process to date, notes that to date no Councillor or Community Group has proposed a National Park within Argyll and Bute, and outlines the forthcoming assessment process for any potential National Park nominations, and that the Council will be consulted as part of that process.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that Council:

i. notes the information in the Report; and
ii. notes that should a National Park within Argyll and Bute be proposed as part of the nominations process, the Council will get opportunity to express its views on such a proposal as part of the assessment process.

4.0 DETAIL

Context

4.1 The Scottish Government has announced its intention to designate a new National Park(s) during 2026. A new overarching purpose for Parks of *"leading nature recovery and a just transition to net zero"* has also been proposed. The 2000 Act allows for the possible designation of land-based National Parks and coastal and marine National Parks.

4.2 The first two National Parks designated in Scotland were Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park in 2002 and the Cairngorms National Park in 2003. The aims of these parks are to:

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

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

It is important to note that the aims for the original parks are wider than just the natural environment, also covering cultural heritage and sustainable economic development.

4.3 The Scottish Government may introduce differences between the approach to existing and new National Parks. For example, it has already stated that new National Parks will be treated differently to the existing Parks in respect of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) policy for onshore wind. To ensure any new National Park addresses the climate emergency and supports progressive development, the Scottish Government propose to develop new bespoke planning policy on onshore wind to be applied in new National Parks.

Process

4.4 Early stages of the process for selecting new National Park(s) involved development of the assessment criteria and informal expressions of interest and this occurred during 2023. There is a commitment to an open, transparent and bottom-up nomination process for selecting new National Park areas and it is proposed that the nominations will be assessed through a non-statutory evaluation framework. The stages and timing of the process are set out in Appendix 1.

4.5 During the spring of 2023, Policy Leads ELT were appraised of the process. Following that a Briefing Report was considered by PPSL on the 24th May 2023 (May 2023 PPSL Brief) which explained the forthcoming process and the likely issues which might need to be considered if a National Park was to be proposed by a local community group (see Appendix 2). The report outlined that, if a local group made formal proposals for a National Park within Argyll and Bute, the Council would need to consider if it wished to support that proposal or not. The report highlighted that it would be useful to raise awareness of the Scottish Government process by publicising the opportunity for communities to develop and pursue their own proposals. This was carried out by issuing a press release at the time.

4.6 The formal nomination process was opened by the Scottish Government on October 12th 2023 and runs until the 29th February 2024. Information on how to nominate a location and the subsequent appraisal process has been made available on the Scottish Government website.

Known interest within Argyll and Bute

4.7 It is noted that no councillor, has approached Development Policy regarding a potential area for nomination within Argyll and Bute following on from the PPSL paper raising awareness of the issue and further publicity. Therefore no early consideration has been given to potential areas.

4.8 Until January 2024, no Councillor nor Community group proposed a National Park within Argyll and Bute. Officers were aware of interest in the Loch Awe area, and had requested details of any proposal. On the 20th January 2024 Council officers received details of a community group's proposal for a National Park around Loch Awe. A website to support this has been created www.lochawenationalpark.scot. It is assumed that a formal submission to Scottish Government will be made by the group. At this late stage and before the end of the nominations period on 29th February 2024, it is not possible for the Council to take a considered view of the implications of the proposal and whether the Council wishes to support it or not. Notwithstanding this, the Council will be consulted by Scottish Government as part of the assessment process and will get opportunity to express its views at that stage.

4.9 Officers are aware of groups outside Argyll and Bute that have expressed interest and these include: Galloway, Scottish Borders, Tay Forest, Lochaber, Eilean a' Cheo (Skye and Raasay), Affric to Alladale, Glen Affric, The Lammermuirs and Largo Bay. Officers are not aware if formal nominations to Scottish Government have been made by any of these groups to date.

Next Stage of Nominations Process

4.10 An appraisal framework (website) will be used to help assess nominations and to inform the decision of Scottish Ministers on which area(s) will be progressed to designation. The broad selection criteria that will be used to help assess nominations for new National Parks are:

- outstanding national importance
- size, character and coherence
- meeting the special needs of the area
- strategic contribution
- visitor management and tourism
- local support

4.11 Another factor that will be considered is the compatibility of the proposed area with the application of regulatory frameworks surrounding existing and planned projects and activities for the area. This will help assess the impact of National Park designation on existing and proposed projects in that area, as the regulatory framework may change following designation which could then lead to issues with the delivery of projects.

4.12 The nomination and appraisal process timeline is set out in Appendix 1. Any proposal received with Scottish Government by the 29th February, will be sent to every local authority that has an area or part of an area within which the proposal relates. This will be undertaken as part of an investigation in to each proposal carried out by a DPEA Reporter. Local authorities that have a new proposed National Park in their area require to be consulted as part of the investigation as well as local communities. A recommendation will be provided by the Reporter to Scottish Ministers regarding the area which it is proposed should be designated as a National Park, the desirability of designating the area in question as a

National Park, the functions which it is proposed the National Park authority for the Park should exercise (including planning), the likely annual costs and capital expenses of the authority in exercising its functions and any other relevant matters. The reporter's report will then be published and laid before Parliament upon completion. Scottish Ministers may decide to make a "designation order" following the process. This will include sending a copy of the draft designation order to every local authority within the proposed area, laying the proposed draft order before parliament, publicising the draft order and holding a further phase of consultation on the draft order.

4.13 It is worth noting that any proposal that receives insufficient local support will not be taken forward.

4.14 If following the closure of the nominations period a community group has nominated an area of Argyll and Bute as a proposed National Park, then the Council will be notified as part of the formal assessment process. Officers will report to Council at that stage with an assessment of the proposal so that the Council can consider if it wishes to support the proposal or not, and any other views it wishes to express.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 The Scottish Government process for creating a new National Park is underway, and the nominations period is currently live until 29th February. If after the closure of the nominations period, any proposal for a National Park has been made within Argyll and Bute, the Council will be notified of such. At that stage, officers will report to Council with an assessment of the proposal so that Council can express its views on the matter.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Policy – None as a result of this paper, which raises awareness of the National Park nomination process. However, the designation of a new National Park in the Argyll and Bute Council Area would have policy implications.

6.2 Financial – None as a result of this paper. The designation of a National Park would have financial implications. At this stage these cannot be estimated.

6.3 Legal – None as a result of this paper. The designation of a new National Park in the Argyll and Bute Council area would have legal implications.

6.4 HR - None

6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: The Scottish Government are seeking nominations for a new National Park from within local communities and it is for local groups and organisations, which could include a Local Authority, to submit a nomination for their area. National Parks can bring significant benefits and opportunities to an area, but it is for those nominating locations to explore whether these may outweigh any potential disadvantages.

6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics – Should be considered as part of the nominations process.

6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – Should be considered as part of the nominations process.

6.5.3 Islands - Should be considered, where relevant, as part of the nominations process.

6.6 Climate Change – The important role of National Parks may play in tackling the climate and biodiversity crisis is noted.

6.7 Risk –The full implications of a the selection of a new National Park within the Argyll and Bute Council area are currently uncertain and would require detailed discussions between the Council and Scottish Government should such an area be selected.

6.8 Customer Service – The Council should support data requests, as appropriate, in relation to the Scottish Government National Park nominations process.

6.9 Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – None.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 National Park Designation Timetable

Appendix 2: Summary of main points relating to National Park designation raised during the Proposed Local Development Plan 2 Main Issues Report consultation 2017

Appendix 1 National Park Designation Timetable

New National Park(s) Indicative timeline	
Milestone	**Timescale (indicative)**
Public Consultation – (The Future of National parks in Scotland)	Late Spring 2022 – completed
Public Consultation – Approach and Criteria of National Parks in Scotland	Autumn 2022 – Winter 2022/3 – completed
Development of Evaluation Framework and any legislative changes required (including public consultation)	Winter 2022 – Summer 2023
Nominations and Assessment of proposals for New National Park(s)	October 2023 – February 2024
Deadline for nominations	29th February 2024
Appraisal of nominations	Spring 2024
Decision and announcement by Scottish Ministers of area(s) to be progressed as 'National Park proposal(s)	Summer 2024
Reporter investigation	Summer 2024 Onwards
Designation process – Subject to Parliamentary approval	Following investigation

Appendix 2 Summary of main points relating to National Park designation raised during the Proposed Local Development Plan 2 Main Issues Report consultation 2017

- **Control and governance**
  - Island circumstances
  - Scale and nature of management required
  - Planning powers – different models
- **Other designations**
  - Regional Parks
  - Marine Protected Areas or other nature designations
  - Role of other agencies e.g. Argyll and the Isles Strategic Tourism Partnership
- **Need for further information to make an informed decision.**
  - Explore the potential/aspirations with key stakeholders and communities.
  - Understanding of the special qualities and needs of the area
  - Impacts on repopulation and tourism
  - Outcomes in current National Parks
- **Economy**
  - Potential for economic growth, including tourism
  - Potential impacts on existing economic activities; in particular distilleries, fishing, energy, farming, forestry, aquaculture and manufacturing industries
  - Fit with growth agenda e.g. Tobermory - Oban - Dalmally growth corridor
- **Renewables**
  - Impact on renewable industries
- **Environmental issues have been raised:-**
  - Environmental protections are already in place/additional safeguards
  - Argyll and Bute has internationally important marine and land environments
  - Impact of increased tourism on natural assets
- **Social**
  - Population impacts
  - Job impacts – growth some areas, restrictions others
  - Potential impact on affordable housing
  - Benefits of environmental management for local communities
  - Need for strong local backing
- **Finance**
  - Additional costs
  - Additional funding
  - Additional pressures on infrastructure