

# North East Wales National Park Designation Project

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

**Updated on 11 September 2023**

**This document will be added to as the project progresses and further questions are asked.**

### **Where has the proposal to designate a new National Park come from?**

In its Programme for Government (2021-2026), Welsh Government has set out its intention to designate a new National Park in North East Wales based on the existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). As a result, a landscape designation evaluation process must now be undertaken to assess the case for the designation.

### **What is Natural Resources Wales's (NRW) role?**

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is the Welsh Government's statutory adviser on landscape and natural beauty and the designating authority for any new National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).

NRW has been commissioned by Welsh Government to evaluate the case for a new National Park in North East Wales against the statutory criteria for designation as a National Park. NRW is not responsible for making the final decision, this lies with Welsh Government.

### **What would change if the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB changed its status?**

Currently, the statutory purpose of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the

area. Changing the status of this area into a National Park would mean that its purpose is to conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and; promoting the understanding and enjoyment of it's special qualities by the public.

The governance arrangements for National Parks and AONBs are also different. Currently delivering on the purpose and duty of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB are part of the work of the local authorities. The current AONB covers more than one local authority area which means coordinated governance arrangements have been established. If the Welsh Government confirms the designation of a new National Park, they will then be required to establish a new National Park Authority.

## What is the process for evaluating the case for a new National Park in North East Wales?

For a National Park to be designated, an area is assessed in detail and must pass certain tests set out in legislation. These include assessments of natural beauty and opportunities for open-air recreation. A statutory and public consultation will also be held and an analysis of various options to ensure the Park meets requirements and provides a benefit to the citizens of Wales.

**There are three main parts to examining the case for a new National Park.**

**Stage 1 Pre-commencement:** NRW's Board agreed on the 22 September 2021 to begin the pre-commencement stage involving the production of procedural guidance on the designation process, confirmation of necessary resource and the establishment of a project team and the carrying out of informal dialogue with relevant local authorities. This is now complete.

**Stage 2 Evidence gathering and engagement:** This involves:

- **Scoping an area of search and establishing the evidence base:** This includes defining a maximum geographical extent for a potential National Park based upon a series of studies. These studies will look at the unique qualities of the area, the factors that influence pressures for and against a new National Park, and how best to organise the authority.
- **Assessment of land for designation:** The area is divided into 'Evaluation Areas' and assessed against technical natural beauty and open-air recreation criteria. This is informed by data and evidence, verification in the field and engagement with the local communities and other key stakeholders. The desirability to designate is then considered and 'Candidate Areas' for designation identified.
- **Detailed boundary setting:** Areas that have been shown to meet the natural beauty and open-air recreation criteria and NRW considers a National Park is desirable to designate, are included within a draft designation boundary. Areas that don't fully or only partially meet the designation criteria, may be excluded at this stage. The

proposed boundary will be mapped, and accompanied by a detailed explanation and justification for the boundary.

**Stage 3 Statutory designation process:** A statutory and public consultation period to gather feedback on the proposed boundary will be held. All the consultation responses and any amendments to the boundary will be considered before presenting a recommendation to Welsh Government. If there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the statutory criteria relating to natural beauty and opportunities for open-air recreation are met, and that the area is of such national significance that National Park purposes should apply, a Designation Order will be submitted to Welsh Government. Ministers will then consider this and decide whether to confirm, refuse or vary the Designation Order. If confirmed, Welsh Government will establish a new National Park in North East Wales.

*Further technical information detailing the process is included in the Statutory Landscape Designation Procedural Guidance document, which is available on request, see project information page for further details.*

## What is natural beauty?

Natural beauty is a widely used term to refer to landscapes of high quality and scenic value and is used across a range of UK legislation. Natural beauty can be seen as a subjective characteristic of a landscape and ultimately like other statutory designations, it involves some aspect of value judgment. To make these judgments in a transparent and consistent way, we will be following specific guidance which sets out how evidence will be collated and evaluated, and the criteria we will use. The main factors relating to natural beauty include landscape quality, scenic quality, relative wildness, relative tranquillity, natural heritage features, cultural heritage.

The practical application of natural beauty criteria is identical for National Parks and AONBs. The only technical difference in order to be designated as a National Park is that an area must also meet the recreation criteria. The statutory purposes of National Parks include wildlife and cultural heritage in addition to natural beauty.

*Further information is included in the Statutory Landscape Designation Procedural Guidance document, which is available on request, see project information page for further details.*

## What is the planned timescale?

The case for a new National Park will be considered within the existing Senedd term (2021-2026). NRW will present the final recommendation to Welsh Government at the end of 2025 for their consideration.

## Can I have a say in the proposal to designate a new National Park in North East Wales?

Yes. NRW will be running an engagement period from Monday 9 October until 23:59 on Monday 27 November 2023. During this time, we will be holding a series of online and in-person engagement events. These will be an early opportunity to learn more about the project, ask questions of the team and share feedback on an early map of the area being assessed.

People from local communities and other key stakeholders are welcome to share their views on the initial Area of Search map. Please note, the map being shared at this point will not be the proposed boundary, it is subject to further changes as the assessment procedure continues. A proposed boundary will be prepared in 2024 ahead of a consultation.

People will **only need to attend one event**, be that online or in-person as the information shared will be the same for each event.

People are encouraged to drop by at the in-person events, there is no need to book a place. If you are interested in taking part in one of the online events, please email the project team with your name, which event you are interested in (the date) and whether your preferred language is English or Welsh. We will do our best to ensure a place for you at your chosen event.

See website for more details of the dates, times and locations of these engagement events <https://ymgyngori.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/north-east-gogledd-ddwyrain/north-east-wales-national-park-designation-project>

For more information, to express an interest in the online engagement events, or to contact a member of the team, please email: [designated.landscapes.programme@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk](mailto:designated.landscapes.programme@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk)