

# Potential Pros and Cons of a New National Park

Following the public engagement period (2023) and public consultation (2024), we have developed a detailed understanding of the complex issues surrounding the potential designation of a new National Park in Wales.

NRW have commissioned independent assessments and engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to examine both the benefits and implications of designation. Feedback has been gathered through thousands of responses and hundreds of in-person conversations, revealing a wide spectrum of views, often shaped by varying assumptions, access to information, and personal priorities.

Before outlining the potential pros and cons, it is essential to clarify three key assumptions that have consistently influenced opinions:

## 1. The Current Situation

## 2. What a National Park Is (and Isn't)

## 3. What Are We Trying to Achieve?

### 1. The Current Situation

Many people, both supportive and opposed, recognise the challenges facing the area. Some assume the status quo will remain unchanged if nothing is done. However, it is clear from the assessment process that the area is already experiencing significant pressures.

In 2024, we commissioned Land Use Consultants to identify key “Forces for Change.” The resulting report grouped these as follows:

- Climate Change
- Built Development and Infrastructure
- Land Management and the Natural Environment
- People, Communities, and Cultural Heritage

- Recreation, Tourism, and Access

These are not static, many are worsening. For instance, climate change is intensifying and will increasingly impact biodiversity, flood risk, and agriculture in future. Local communities have also raised concerns over traffic congestion, erosion of cultural heritage, and a perceived lack of control over change. Although some fear a National Park may increase these pressures, few suggest credible alternatives.

While designation may introduce the risk of new pressures (e.g., more visitors), it also offers enhanced planning powers, funding, and statutory responsibilities to manage them. Without reform, current systems, already stretched, may prove increasingly inadequate or untenable as these intensify in the future.

## 2. What a National Park Is (and Isn't)

There is confusion around what a new National Park would actually do. Based on the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, the two statutory purposes are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the area.
- To promote opportunities for the public to understand and enjoy its special qualities, provided this does not conflict with the first purpose (the Sandford Principle).

These core purposes are now being interpreted in the context of modern challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change, sustainable development, and post-Brexit agricultural reform.

National Parks are increasingly seen not just as protected landscapes but as delivery mechanisms for public goods, especially aligned with recent Welsh legislation such as

- Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)
- Environment (Wales) Act (2016)
- Agriculture (Wales) Act (2023)
- Environment (Wales) Bill (2025)

These frameworks position National Parks as central to delivering Wales' goals around sustainability, net zero, and nature recovery in future.

## 3. What Are We Trying to Achieve?

In discussions with residents, farmers, developers, environmentalists, and councillors, one consistent pattern emerges: despite surface-level disagreements, most people broadly want the same things, thriving communities, healthy landscapes, and a sustainable future.

The designation of a National Park should be seen as a means to an end, not an end in itself. It offers a structure to integrate environmental, social, cultural, and economic goals in a coherent way, which has not happened in the area to date.

Having understood these assumptions, and having undertaken extensive analysis the following is what NRW now believe are the potential pros and cons of a new National Park:

## Potential Pros of a New National Park

### 1. Enhanced Protection of Landscapes

Provides legal safeguards for natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, protecting them from inappropriate development.

### 2. Boost Climate and Nature Recovery

A National Park can support long-term climate adaptation and ecosystem restoration efforts, backed by existing, and emerging policies, funding, and strategic planning. The `30x30 framework for Wales` sets out Welsh Government priorities for Wales and includes an enhanced nature recovery role for Designated Landscapes.

### 3. Agricultural Opportunities

Post-Brexit funding reforms promote “public money for public goods.” Designation aligns farmers in the area with new schemes and grant opportunities (e.g., Local Farming, Sustainable Farming Scheme, Peatland Restoration Fund etc). Recent boundary changes better reflect upland farming and suitability for such opportunities.

### 4. Secure Long-Term Funding

National Parks receive direct, recurring funding from Welsh Government and are better positioned to secure match funding and large-scale grants. This creates a consistent and strategic investment pipeline. It is significantly more than the available funding for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscape) and supplements rather than replaces other regional funding such as the local authority allocation. Potential Pros of a New National Park

### 5. Planning Powers

Statutory planning functions enable National Parks to better manage land use. Local authorities will work with the Park to ensure decisions are transparent, balanced, and aligned with community and environmental needs.

### 6. Economic Growth & Tourism Benefits

Sustainable tourism can drive local business, boost job creation, and support services, Our assessment suggests designation could add in the region of £26m in revenue to the local economy. (Please see the Economic Impact Review for further details).

## **7. Access and Health Benefits**

Improved countryside access supports physical and mental well-being, and investment can ensure this is done sustainably. (Please see the Health Impact Assessment for full details).

## **8. Enhanced Cultural Heritage Protection**

Designation would support conservation of Welsh language, traditions, and historic landscapes, buildings and archaeology through dedicated planning and community initiatives. (Please see the Welsh Language Impact Assessment for further details).

## **9. Opportunity for More Community Engagement & Good Regional Governance**

National Parks are required to involve local stakeholders, creating platforms for inclusive, place-based decision-making and local representation.

## **10. A Long-Term Legacy for Future Generations**

The cumulative effect of funding, planning, and conservation over decades ensures ongoing benefits that will accumulate over time so that they particularly benefit young people and future generations facing climate and biodiversity crises.

# **Potential Cons of a New National Park**

## **1. Tourism Pressures**

There are existing localised strains on infrastructure and existing infrastructure that is not designed to take large numbers of visitors. A management plan will need to proactively address parking, congestion, and protecting sensitive ecosystems as an immediate priority.

## **2. Housing Affordability**

There is concern that property prices could increase. While analysis of the evidence suggests limited impact in this area, a new Park would need to actively manage housing policy with local councils through such levers as local planning policies and Article 4 to limit holiday homes if necessary, alongside wider measures such as council tax premiums and supporting opportunities to enhance availability of non-residential tourist accommodation. (Please see the Economic Impact Report for further details).

## **3. Planning Restrictions**

For most residents already within the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) there will be no substantive change in the planning framework. However for those currently outside the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, national planning policy relating to major development will apply together with changes to permitted development right. Some view this as a benefit (preventing inappropriate development), but to others it may feel like a constraint and make the process of gaining planning permission more onerous. However comparative analysis of local planning authority approval rates demonstrate National Parks across Wales have similar or slightly better approval rates than other Local Planning Authorities, which indicates that it is more a matter of making applications appropriate rather than stopping development altogether, but the process will still seem more rigorous to those beyond the existing National Landscape.

#### **4. Perceived Loss of Local Control**

Some communities fear decisions which are perceived as being made by outsiders with no local input. Despite extensive engagement in 2023 and 2024, concerns remain in some areas. If established a new National Park Authority would need to make appropriate efforts to encourage local participation as it provides a mechanism to boost the influence of local people. Potential Cons of a New National Park

#### **5. Access Conflicts**

Issues related to trespass and irresponsible visitor behaviour is already an issue irrespective of designation, and is not unique to the area. Balancing the need to preserve and maintain the existing public access with conservation and farming will require appropriate and sensitive management by a National Park Authority. It is likely that strong actions to promote and enforce more responsible visitor behaviour will be appropriate.

#### **6. Transition**

It will take time to establish the National Park Authority and deliver visible results. Change will not happen overnight even after establishment. Unrealistic short-term expectations could lead to frustration or disappointment from some sections of the community and this should be minimised and managed with clear communication.

#### **7. Administrative Complexity**

New governance structures will need to be carefully designed and implemented to minimise the risk of overlap and provide for clear roles and collaboration between organisations.