

CABINET

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 17 th December 2024
Report Subject	Consultation for a proposed new National Park for North East Wales
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Economy, Environment and Climate
Report Author	Chief Officer for Planning, Environment and Economy
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Natural Resources Wales are leading work on the development of a new national park for Northeast Wales. This is currently the subject of live consultation exercise:

<https://ymgynggori.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/north-east-gogledd-ddwyrain/wales-national-park-proposal-public-consultation/consultation/subpage.2024-10-04.4971417404/>

The questionnaire requests stakeholder's views on the proposed National Park boundary. However, the consultation goes beyond that and asks more extensive questions in relation to the proposed park in principle.

The consultation exercise runs until 16th December 2024 and an extension of this has been agreed with NRW to allow Cabinet to submit comments on behalf of the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.	That Cabinet, on the basis of the currently available information, does not support the proposal to create a new National Park for North East Wales.
2.	That the final wording of the response attached at Appendix 2 is delegated to the Cabinet Member for Economy, Environment and Climate in conjunction with the Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy).

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE ON-GOING CONSULTATION EXERCISE FOR A NEW NATIONAL PARK FOR NEW EAST WALES
1.01	In its Programme for Government (2021-2026), Welsh Government set out its intention to designate a new National Park in Wales based on the existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or AONB (now known as a 'National Landscape'). If established, it would be the fourth National Park in Wales, and the first since 1957.
1.02	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 National Landscapes. Welsh Government has commissioned NRW to evaluate the case for the proposed new National Park.
1.03	NRW is independent and will make an evidence-based recommendation for the benefit of the people of Wales, accounting for all relevant legislation. They have prepared procedural guidance setting out the statutory process that must be followed. It is evidence led and allows for engagement with all stakeholders.
1.04	The assessment procedure will decide if the evidence demonstrates that the statutory criteria relating to natural beauty and opportunities for open-air recreation are met, and if the area is of sufficient national significance that National Park purposes should apply. The procedure will also allow for consultation and ensure opportunity to adjust the proposals such that benefits are maximised and potential disbenefits can be avoided.
1.05	On completion of the assessment procedure, If NRW considers that Designation is desirable for the people of Wales, (both current and future generations), then a Designation order will be submitted to Welsh Government. Welsh Government will consider this and decide to either confirm, refuse, or vary the Designation Order. If confirmed, a new National Park will be created.
1.06	The assessment will take place within the existing Senedd term (2021-2026).
1.07	<p>The study area (referred to as the Area of Search), based on the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley 'National Landscape' was identified and shared during a public engagement period in late 2023. Following this, and a period of evidence gathering, NRW are now consulting the public on the emerging proposal. The consultation exercise lasts for 12 weeks and concludes on 16th December 2024. Flintshire County Council have been consulted on the proposal as a key stakeholder and member of the AONB Joint Advisory Committee. It is therefore important that the Council responds, though there is nothing to prevent individual Members from responding independently.</p> <p>A further consultation with the County Council will take place in 2025.</p>

1.08	<p>Whilst the consultation seeks view on the proposed boundary for the National Park the questionnaire also includes more fundamental questions in relation in principle support for the concept of the Park. A copy of the questionnaire can be found at Appendix 1.</p>
1.09	<p>The proposed boundary of the National Park within Flintshire reflects the current outline of the AONB. Earlier iterations and suggested boundaries in relation to the National Park within Flintshire saw the existing AONB boundary extending to the north towards the coast, and eastwards to take in Hope Mountain and across to the outskirts of Caergwrle. Neither of these proposals have been taken forward into the boundary which is currently the subject of consultation.</p>
1.10	<p>The key questions which the consultation poses are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think that the area proposed should be a National Park? • Do you agree with where the proposed National Park boundary has been drawn? • Do you have any other comments about the Candidate Area boundary? <p>This is a small selection of the questions asked.</p>
1.11	<p>The Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the consultation and provided their views at the meeting on 12th November 2024. The Committee voted in favour of not supporting the proposed National Park based on the currently available information. The Committee had concerns in relation to:</p> <p>The potential future short and long term costs to the County Council of establishing and operating the National Park;</p> <p>The potential future costs to individuals living in and outside the proposed National Park;</p> <p>The National Park introducing another level of bureaucracy; The current National Landscape of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley already doing an effective job of protecting the landscape and natural environment of the area;</p> <p>The National Park placing more burden on the remaining areas of Flintshire outside the park to provide land for employment and housing; The constraint on growth within the proposed National Park and within its immediate vicinity;</p> <p>The potential to reduce the value of existing National Parks in Wales.</p>
1.12	<p>Given the simplicity of the questionnaire which accompanies the consultation it is suggested that the views of Cabinet are instead set out in a written response to NRW setting the Council's concerns. The detail of the content of that response will include the views of the Scrutiny Committee (should Cabinet agree with them) and Cabinet.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	At this stage it is difficult to predict what the resource implications would be of a new National Park should it be introduced. If it is created, it would be a separate local government body with its own governance and staffing structure. In most cases, National Parks also take on the planning function for their areas.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	The Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the consultation and provided their views at the meeting on 12 th November 2024. Their views are summarised above.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None identified at this stage.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 - Copy of the questionnaire
	Appendix 2 – Draft response to NRW

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Contact Officer: Andrew Farrow – Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy) Telephone: 01352 703201 E-mail: andrew.farrow@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Natural Resources Wales is the largest Welsh Government Sponsored Body, formed in April 2013, largely taking over the functions of the Countryside Council for Wales, Forestry Commission Wales and the Environment Agency in Wales.