

# **PROCESSES AND TIMESCALES FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ON THE ISSUE OF A NATIONAL PARK FOR JERSEY**

## **1. Background**

### **National Parks – A global perspective**

In the UK National Parks are areas of special quality and national significance in which people live and work. They belong to a worldwide network of National Parks, ranging from the smallest, Penang National Park, Malaysia covering 26 square kilometres, to the largest, Denmark's Greenland National Park at 972,000 square kilometres in size. There are currently no lands classified as National Park in the Channel Islands.

### **Public appetite for a National Park for Jersey**

In many respects, our systems for managing the land and its environmental resources have never been so sophisticated, nor so attuned to the principles of sustainable development. If that's the good news, it's equally true that the world does not stand still and pressures on Jersey's land-based resources and seas continue to expand and intensify.

A combination of economic, policy, technological and social changes are influencing the environment in Jersey, amplifying the need for solutions which accommodate multiple objectives. This prompts questions about how the landscape-scale protection and restoration of special areas can be coordinated with the social and economic sustainability of urban and rural communities. One tried and tested approach is the use of a National Park designation.

Responses to the Island Plan Review Green Paper showed strong support for a West Coast National Park. The Green Paper stated the following:

*National Park - An issue arising from the application and review of the current protection regime at St Ouen's Bay is whether a National Park should be declared, focusing on this area and also, potentially including other important areas along Jersey's west coast where, through their exposure to westerly winds, they are defined by a wild and distinctive character, quite different to the Island's other coasts. Such an area could potentially include Corbiere headland; Ouaisne heathland, dunes and wetland; and the commons of Portelet and Noirmont to the south; and Les Landes and Plemont to the north.*

It asked the following question:

*Do you agree with the idea of a St Ouen's Bay and West Coast National Park?*

The response attracted 196 comments where 78% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Additional comments suggested that the concept should not be limited to the west of the Island. The debate around a proposed National Park needs to be focussed on a range of detailed questions, subjects and issues (see appendix 1 for initial proposals).

## **2. Issues to be addressed by public consultation.**

### **Why is another planning designation needed?**

The St Ouen's Bay area is the closest Jersey has to a National Park. It was designated as a 'special place' in 1978 and positive land management initiatives have been implemented to enhance and maintain its character, however there is a perception that the area is still under threat from development and unsympathetic land use. The St Ouen's Bay Planning Framework was developed in 1999, which set out a number of aims and objectives for the area. The Island Plan Review contained proposals to strengthen and re-invigorate existing planning guidance.

Outside of the Jersey Island Plan (JIP), which identifies large tracts of land as; Zone of Outstanding Character; Green Zone; Countryside Zone; and St Ouen's Bay Planning Framework, Jersey only has one other type of recognition of the 'value' of land, which is the designation as a Site of Special Interest (SSI). SSIs are designated "for protection in recognition of the importance of their: special zoological, ecological, botanical or geological interest; or special architectural, archaeological, artistic, historical, scientific or traditional interest that attaches to a building or place", and have greater planning constraints than the character zones that they occur within. Some sites are designated for two, or even three of these reasons.

The reason for designation of a SSI must be specified, and it is therefore difficult to use this designation, under existing definitions, for complex 'cultural' landscapes. Consequently, where a proposed SSI site has one or all of the interests listed, each must be explained and justified independently. National Park designation could encompass any, or all, of the above reasons for recognising a site as a special place or area.

A National Park could still have SSIs within it, but the designation could extend to protect land 'over the boundary' of an SSI, and could promote connectivity and management consistency on fragmented and isolated sites, reduce 'edge effects', and buffer habitats. Designation could provide the opportunity to interpret SSIs and other issues of interest in a cohesive way, rather than in the isolated, site specific way that SSI designation is forced to adopt. For example, the cultural landscape of the Parishes with their archaeological and historic remains and buildings, their small field patterns, including strip fields, old farm buildings and their semi-natural areas with the enormous biodiversity it supports, could all be recognised as an integrated unit within a National Park designation.

The Planning and Building (Jersey) Law 2002 provides 'inter alia' the means to protect, enhance, conserve and to use wisely the natural beauties, the natural resources and biodiversity of the island. Article 3 of the law charges the Minister with preparing an Island Plan and revisions to that plan and the creation of a national park could be done under this element of the law.

### **What Special qualities should be promoted?**

Potential benefits of a National Park classification would be dependant on identifying the 'special qualities' that society is interested in within the boundaries of a National Park and whether funding and effective mechanisms for protection, enhancement and interpretation of these qualities could be delivered.

A National Park for Jersey that had a similar focus to protected areas in other parts of the world, i.e. maintenance of high biodiversity and unique, distinctive and tranquil landscape character (already identified to some degree through SSI's, Biodiversity Action Plans and Island Plan) integrated with the provision of opportunities for enhanced access, interpretation and enjoyment would focus the debate into key areas;

### **What is the Scale?**

National Park boundaries are critical elements of any designation and undoubtedly one of the most contentious issues, illustrated by discussions around the Cairngorms, New Forest and proposed South Downs National Parks. Early and pro-active consultation with people and organisations with land directly affected by proposed boundaries is essential. The key challenge is to decide if it is possible to provide spatial boundaries that do enough to embrace key members of 'the community' that shape environmental and land management outcomes in a given area.

### **What would a National Park Authority do? Would we really need one?**

The establishment, by central government, of an authority to manage, administer and carry out the function of a National Park on behalf of the government is common in other areas. Key issues around this area include how people are elected to the authority, the degree and scope of delegated power, funding, accountability, auditing processes and governance.

### **What objectives are required to take into account the need to promote enhanced sustainable development *and* land use strategies within protected areas?**

Designation could be used to enhance the measures government can take towards achieving sustainable development, through de-intensifying development and land use, promoting innovation and the provision of a long-term consistent strategy and/or management planning process. The lack of protection against small cumulative negative changes has been previously highlighted within the Ouen's Bay area, which has in part, led to a conclusion that special areas on Jersey are still facing significant threats.

### **What weight for socio-economic considerations?**

UK National Parks have two purposes; conserving and enhancing natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage and promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the park. These considerations take primacy over a duty to support socio-economic development. Consideration will need to be given to the degree of weight that socio-economic development issues are afforded, in relation to environmental considerations and broader rural development strategies such as the Rural Economy Strategy.

### **Are there other benefits?**

#### **➤ Provision of increased opportunities to fulfil obligations under Multilateral Environmental Agreements**

The States have responsibilities under various Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) as a consequence of the ratification of such agreements by the UK government on behalf of Jersey. In broad terms all such agreements, have the common aim of promoting the conservation of species and habitats, by providing statutory protection for species and habitats, establishing nature reserves, raising public awareness, monitoring and reporting change, through planning and development policies, in measures to reduce pollution and

to have regard to the conservation of wild flora and fauna. It could be argued that the establishment of a National Park for Jersey would contribute to the fulfilment of the aims of many of the MEAs by which Jersey is bound e.g. potential enhancement of RAMSAR sites.

➤ **Increased public involvement and pride of place**

Designation of a National Park would provide an island-wide opportunity to increase public involvement and interest in the protection of the island's biodiversity and landscape and promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public. With this comes the issue and challenge of how to effectively open up areas to more people, without causing a negative impact on those special qualities that are being promoted.

➤ **The need for ecological linkages**

Sites of Special Interest have been designated to protect the ecologically important areas of the island, and more designations are proposed. However mobile species like squirrels or toads need suitable habitat connections so that they can be mobile within their ranges or to migrate as a response to climate change. Provision of a National Park could be used to provide a biodiversity refuge and allow for the provision of coherent ecological linkages, as well as providing protected buffer areas and 'borrowed landscapes' around SSIs.

➤ **Provide better integrated management**

Water, wildlife, landscape and the impacts of climate change know no artificial boundaries, yet it is increasingly clear that society needs to manage them in an integrated way if we are to achieve the sustainable exploitation of the environment. The establishment of a National Park, with an associated National Park Management Plan, would provide the framework for the provision of positive integrated management to safeguard the special qualities of the area for the long term. In particular, it could encourage a planning approach which would consider the cumulative impacts of development on the landscape and biodiversity within the park boundary and the need to undertake visual impact assessments in sensitive situations, as well as considering the individual merits of a development proposal as at present. It might also encourage the drive to introduce greater consistency in the application of design standards and guidance.

The designation would provide an opportunity to bring together a number of policy, strategy and guidance documents in a coherent way, such as the Countryside Character Appraisal; Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, Sustainability Strategy for Jersey, the Codes of Good Agricultural Practice, the Cultural Strategy, planning, transport and energy policies, and could help in coordinating and prioritising work relating to the Countryside Renewal Scheme, Rural Initiative Scheme and water quality targets.

➤ **Strengthening the link between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems**

The extent to which any proposed National Park boundary included the marine environment would need consideration. In theory, the boundary could be drawn at the limit of Jersey's marine influence at the twelve mile exclusion zone. Regardless, the inclusion of some kind of marine protected zone within the boundary of the National Park could provide support and supplement the development of a Coastal Zone Management Strategy and reinforce the environmental, economic and social links between land and sea.

### **3. Public engagement**

The States are committed to provide people with the opportunity to influence policy development and government decision making through engaging the community with the work of government. It is also widely acknowledged that an effective system of sustainable land management needs to engage the public, whether that is justified in terms of democratic rights or because bringing the public into decision making can generate new knowledge and better solutions.

#### **Process design, timescales and public engagement activities**

Proposed timescales and activities for the preliminary public engagement process are as follows;

<b>Timetable</b>	<b>Detail of engagement activity</b>
Early February	Employ consultant/facilitator and develop key questions.
Mid February	Launch self-selecting on-line questionnaire.
End of February	Identify key stakeholders.
Early March	Hold 2x one-day stakeholder scoping workshops.  1. Targeted workshop for identified urban stakeholders likely to not be directly affected by the boundary of a National Park. Venue: The Airport.  2. Target identified rural stakeholders likely to be directly affected by the boundary of a National Park. Venue: St Ouen's Parish Hall.
Mid March	Process outputs and feed into draft Island Plan.
End of May	Publish Draft Island Plan.

The combination of an on-line questionnaire and key stakeholder workshops combines the benefits of both a self-selecting approach (potential for broad, democratic and inclusive outputs) and targeted approaches (more focussed and detailed outputs).

### **4. Conclusions**

1. There is a need to respond to the high levels of public support of a National Park for Jersey.
2. Lands classified as National Park could realistically deliver environmental, public, social and political benefits.
3. Current legislation is in place to allow for the creation of a National Park for Jersey.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Considerations for a National Park for Jersey**

#### **Why**

- Objectives of a National Park designation
- Why do we want a park?
- What will be protected?
  - Landscape / Habitats / Species / life styles / Cultural / Social / Geological / hydrology
- Improve / Compliment / not change – current planning restrictions
- Increase / decrease activity e.g. recreation?

#### **Where**

- Boundaries
- Any exclusions (airport / Quarry / Housing etc)?
- Land and Sea / Sea shore?
- How far east and south?

#### **What**

- Funding / resources
- What requirements are needed
  - Legislation
    - New
    - Existing
- How will it affect –
  - SSI's
  - Development
  - Site use – commercial and recreational
- Restoration required
  - Habitats
  - Buildings (historic)
  - Archaeology

#### **How**

- How will protection be conferred? Legislation / 'agreement' / Planning conditions or restrictions/
- How will park be managed?
- What management is required?
  - Physical
  - Administration
- Contact organisation for;
  - Park visitors / Residents / Tourism Business' / Farming / Quarrying / Racing & Motor sports

#### **Proposed outcome**

- Management Structure
- Steering Committee
- PR – who and what?
- Improvement vs. maintenance

#### **Who**

- Responsible Department
- Management Staff
  - Physical management
  - Administration
- Law Drafting / Legislation
- Enforcement

### **Infrastructure**

- Required
  - Visitor centre
- Existing
  - Kempt Tower
  - Frances Le Sueur Centre

### **Improvements required**

- Car Parking and visitor access and management
- Footpath infrastructure
- Cycling infrastructure

### **Other requirements**

- Interpretation
- 'Policing'
- Code of conduct / Park Countryside Code
- Maps / leaflets / information

### **Consultation**

### **Key partners**

- Jersey Environment Forum; Environment Think Tank
- SOJ
- Parishes (St Ouen, St Peter, St Brelade, Others?)
- Fire
- Police
- NTJ
- SJ
- New National Park 'Friends / association'
- Jersey Farmer's Union/Jersey Landowners Association/RJA&HS

### **Other partners**

- Friends of Les Mielles
- Businesses e.g.
  - Golf courses,
  - Simon sand & Gravel
  - Restaurant's/café's/tourist facilities
  - Recreational providers (e.g. surf school, sand karting, horse racing, rifle club, outward bound activity providers)
- Motor sports organisations
- Public

### **Other issues**

- Sea defences/Green lanes