

# Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park (CSBNP) Proposal May 2023

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# 1 Background

## The Legislation

Designation and operation of national parks is a devolved matter.

### The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000

“The National Park aims -

- (a) To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area.
- (b) To promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area.
- (c) To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public, and
- (d) To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area’s communities.”

Since the Act was passed, there has been increasing concern about the growing impacts of human activities and of climate change on the already limited biodiversity of Scotland. Mitigation of these impacts and sustainability have become urgent issues. These problems must be addressed through a broad range of measures, too great to detail here. This brief proposal can only attempt to indicate some of the ways in which a National Park (NP) in the area would address these hugely important questions. It should be assumed that the approach implicit in the actions and mitigations described here is indicative of that which would be generally applied in the day to day functioning of the NP.

**NOTE :** this proposal was prepared in line with the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. It does not address any possible future changes in the legislation. All consultation by the Campaign for a Scottish Borders National Park (CSBNP) has been carried out exclusively in relation to the model presented here.

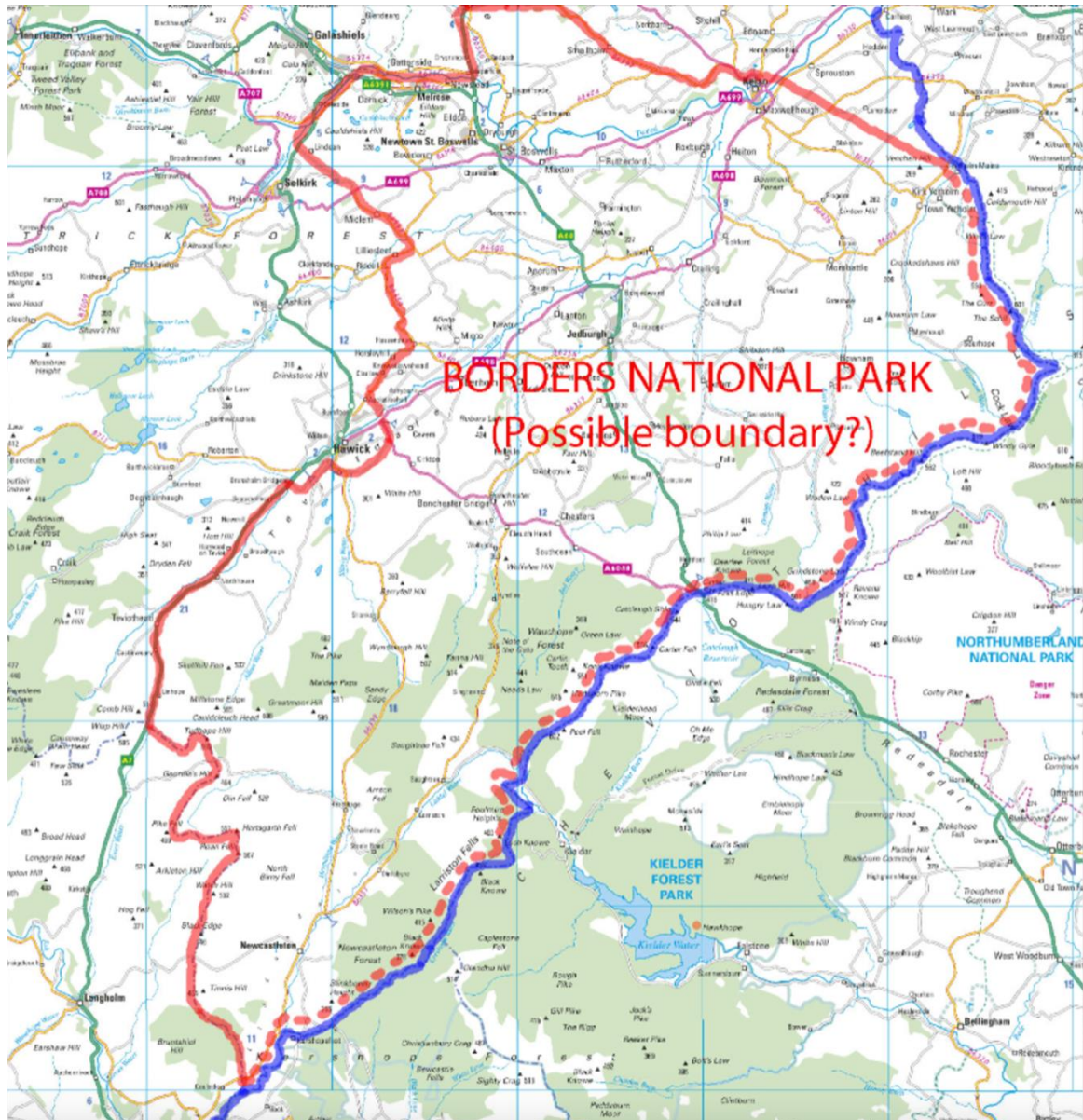
## Scottish Government policy and indicative timescale

The Scottish National Party came to an agreement in 2021 with the Scottish Green Party in order to form a partnership for majority government. One of the joint commitments agreed was to “designate at least one new National Park by the end of this parliamentary session”, ie Spring, 2026.

The proposed timescale to achieve this is necessarily tight -

<b>Figure 1. Designation timescale</b>	
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
Public consultation on proposed evaluation Framework and invitation of expressions of interest in submitting a proposal.	Spring 2023 – Summer 2023
Nominations and Assessment of proposals for New National Park(s)	Summer 2023 – Winter 2023/4
Reporter Investigation (including public consultation on proposals for new National Park(s) and advice to Minister)	Spring 2024 - Winter 2024/5
Designation Order(s) (including public consultation, parliamentary scrutiny and order coming into effect to designate the new National Park(s))	Winter 2024/5 – Spring 2026

## 2 Possible Boundaries of the Proposed NP (see Appendix B)



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The Campaign has always proposed that the boundaries of the former county of Roxburghshire should only be the starting point for considering where the final boundaries might lie. Further consultation with communities would be required to finalise them. As can be seen in Appendix A, of the people who answered the supplementary question on boundaries in the MIR, 49% (the largest block by far) favoured a minimum of the former county of Roxburghshire.

The fact that Roxburghshire borders Northumberland National Park means that both NPs could work together on mutually beneficial projects, not least in terms of nature recovery, including habitat restoration and carbon sequestration (see also 'Northumbrian Neighbours' in Section 4).

### 3 The Proposal

Scottish National Parks are managed by a National Park Authority (NPA). Core funding is provided by a Scottish Government grant and is supplemented by funds raised from other sources for NP activities. The proposed model for the NPA is of a compact management with a very active coordinating role. It would be overseen in accordance with the 2000 act by a Board with mainly local membership. There are many bodies, public and private with ongoing activities and/or responsibilities in the proposed area. It is envisaged that the NPA would aim to facilitate, encourage and, where appropriate, partner with other organisations to deliver on its aims. It is not envisaged that it would usurp the responsibilities and activities of others, nor create added layers of bureaucracy. Following the example of other UK NPs it would raise project funding from a wide range of sources to complement its core Scottish Government funding. (The Campaign has been managing a demonstration project, “The Twelve Towers of Rule” which exemplifies the way an NPA in the proposed area could coordinate many public and private organisations and raise the funding or co-funding to deliver successful, community-driven projects – see Appendix D).

New jobs would be created by or because of the Park designation. As well as jobs in tourism (and the consequent construction and professional employment), and year-round and seasonal rangers, the NPA’s activities, partnerships and collaborations with e.g Borders College and Heriot-Watt University, would create - and attract funding for - more highly skilled, well-paid jobs. These would be in diverse areas, ranging from large-scale habitat survey and restoration, technology (eg use of AI to provide real time info for visitors), environmental and other scientific research and evaluation of other opportunities for large-scale carbon sequestration across the region, etc.

Not all jobs would be full-time and volunteers would play an important role - the demographics of the Borders are such that there is a lot of untapped potential out there amongst older people, many of whom are still active and would appreciate the mental and physical benefits of volunteering along with like-minded individuals for different NP projects. Younger teenage volunteers could gain valuable pre-work experience in the NP, acquiring the transferable skills so sought after by potential employers.

#### Indicative costs and revenues (2023 prices)

Presented below are predicted costs (including externally funded projects) of a low cost, slimline Borders National Park (e.g not having an in-house, separate planning authority, but being a statutory consultee). Years 2,3,4 & 5 are used here to illustrate moderate growth plus affordability, because Year 1 funding would only cover set-up costs and therefore be restricted to Scottish Government funding.

**Figure 2 Indicative costs and revenues of first four operational years (at 2023 prices)**

#### Costs

Year two £2.75m	Year three £2.87m	Year four £2.96m	Year 5 £3.10m
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#### Revenues

Year two £2.79m	Year three £2.98m	Year four £3.15m	Year 5 £3.30m
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## **Expressions of interest and support for the CSBNP proposal (see also Appendix A)**

There has been an ongoing programme by CSBNP of contacting stakeholder organisations and individuals with information and invitations to contribute to discussion about the NP proposal, e.g. : In 2015 the CSBNP contacted all the functioning Community Councils in Roxburghshire with information about the proposed NP and possible boundaries, and invited responses. Seven responded positively and a number of others expressed interest and asked for more information and presentations (in response there is an ongoing programme of presentations ). In November 2016 a Townhall meeting in Jedburgh attracted 200. Feedback was positive with only a few mixed or negative responses. A large number of meetings have been held, some one-to-one some in groups, with a range of stakeholders local and national, including organisations focused on key local biodiversity environmental and cultural issues. Positive views have been expressed by most of the local business community and about half of the local farming and landowning community. SBC is still considering support. SBC's Main Issues Report consultation evoked a high level of positive views about the NP proposal. Results are analysed in Appendix A.

## **Feasibility Study**

The report of an independent Feasibility Study commissioned by the Borders Campaign was published in 2017. It found that the proposed area meets the three conditions for National Park status required by the 2000 Act, ie:

- that the area is of outstanding national importance because of its natural heritage or the combination of its natural and cultural heritage,
- that the area has a distinct character and a coherent identity, and
- that designating the area as a National Park would meet the special needs of the area and would be the best means of ensuring that the National Park aims are collectively achieved in relation to the area in a co-ordinated way.

The Study also stated that:

- designation would strengthen the economy of the Park area AND wider area surrounding (the "Halo" effect).
- there is enthusiastic support from local communities and businesses.
- current (2017) socio-economic trends in the southern part of the Borders are not encouraging.....however:
- NPs are proven contributors to sustainable economic growth in rural areas (see FS p 102 'Driving rural economies'.

Further points were made which confirm that the low cost model discussed in section 3 is certainly viable and that a Borders NP would contribute to local priorities of SBC and its partners.

## **Health and wellbeing, affordable housing, public transport**

Experience of the pandemic has since confirmed the importance of accessible green space for physical and mental health, with the designation 'National Park' as a guarantee of excellence. Similarly, the draw of an NP, with well-designed affordable homes, better

broadband and extension of the Borders Railway would combine to attract more and more young working families to our region.

### **Landscape and Natural Heritage (see also Appendix E)**

The emotional and cultural ties that Borders residents have with their landscapes is partly a pride of place but, more meaningfully, an identification and kinship with the magnificent landscapes they have grown to love and cherish, and to call home.

There is an increasingly urgent need to curate these threatened and unique landscapes in the face of 21st century pressures faced by all Scotland's beautiful places, and a National Park Authority would be the best possible vehicle for that duty.

NatureScot has updated its assessment of the Borders landscape<sup>1</sup> as recently as 2019 and declared "The Scottish Borders have a distinct cultural identity and geographical character" (as required by current Scottish legislation on NPs).

### **Cultural Landscape and Historical Heritage (see also Appendix F)**

The Scottish Borders cultural and historical heritage spans centuries, indeed millenia. This Reiver society has resisted the relentlessly invading armies of Rome and England, not to mention the incursions of neighbouring warlords. Its story is writ large in the landscape and commemorated in song and story. It is rich, varied and vibrant, and it remains inextricably linked to the built and natural heritage of our surroundings. It has survived and evolved down to the present day in the everyday life and traditions of its communities. The contemporary relevance and celebration of the Borders identity is a unique selling-point, first for designation as a National Park, and secondly as one of the major attractions of that NP.

As yet, the extraordinary depth and relevance of the links between history, culture and landscape have not been as widely recognised as they could be. National Park status would help to unlock - as already demonstrated by SBNP's Twelve Towers of Rule project (see Appendix) - the benefits of our unique heritage to the people and ecology of the Borders, and the value of the Borders to the rest of Scotland, the UK and visitors from much further afield. Designation as a National Park could almost overnight provide the publicity, recognition and coordination needed, and allow the Scottish Borders to use its free and under-used assets (landscape, history and culture) as a springboard for significant economic revival.

### **Nature Recovery & Just Transition to Net Zero (see also Appendices G & H)**

The distinctive physiography of the Southern Uplands and its river valleys suffers from a high level of habitat degradation and colonization by invasive species, but conversely it offers outstanding opportunities for Nature Restoration. The proposed National Park in the Southern Borders would be well-positioned to make a considerable contribution to reversing the disastrous trend of biodiversity loss and habitat degradation in Scotland and, in the process, support a Just Transition to Net Zero. Working with stakeholders the National Park Authority would assess as a matter of urgency the current state of, and challenges facing, our natural capital. It would then work with and support the people on the ground, many of whom are already working individually or at a small scale - but few at the large-scale needed - to tackle these challenges. Indeed, there are many examples of local farmers and land-

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<sup>1</sup> [www.nature.scot/doc/landscape-character-assessment-borders-landscape-evolution-and-influences](http://www.nature.scot/doc/landscape-character-assessment-borders-landscape-evolution-and-influences)

owners (often working in tandem with other UK/Scottish NPAs) to provide key exemplars of effective practice which could be emulated in Scotland and elsewhere.

The National Park could work with partners to maximise the beneficial effect of existing large scale habitat regeneration projects underway in the Cheviots (peatland restoration), and wader and migratory bird habitats along the Berwickshire and Northumberland coast and cross-border Tweed Catchment area.

In order to respond to known existing threats, the SBNP would actively work across a broad range of problem areas in partnership with public and private bodies. Some of those which would offer particular scope in the Borders are:

- (1) Threats to the iconic North Atlantic salmon's spawning grounds;
- (2) The Golden Eagle project in southern Scotland, due to run out of funding shortly;
- (3) Peat restoration across our hillsides, including the extensive areas of deep peat currently blanketed with mature conifers planted before the importance of peat for carbon sequestration was understood, and which will soon be felled leaving severely damaged peat.
- (4) Genetic Conservation Units (GCUs). In Scotland NatureScot with the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology is in process of identifying a large number of areas, including in the two existing NPs, in Scotland where genetic diversity of native trees is being managed to promote adaptation to future climatic changes. No GCUs have been identified in the very different habitats of the Southern Uplands nor in the river valleys of South Central or South East Scotland. The proposed NP would aim to fill this gap and complement the work going on in the other Scottish NPs. It would aim to join EUFORGEN, the Europe-wide network of GCUs. The NP would also join the International Plant Sentinel Network which monitors pest diseases affecting key host species. An NP can make an important contribution in collaboration with experts in e.g. the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh (RBGE) and Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) through engaging younger generations and raising awareness.
- (5) In addition to conserving genetic diversity of native species, Scotland is playing an important role in global species conservation. Thanks to the great plant collectors of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries a vast range of threatened, and in some cases extinct, plant species thrive in Scottish environments. This has been fostered by the RBGE, not only in its own gardens, but through coordinating the recording and protection of valuable rare trees in the policies of rural mansions, many of which have cherished specimen trees from distant countries. The proposed NP would assist in recording and assisting landowners to participate in global biodiversity conservation.

*Wildlife Corridors* are strips of appropriate habitat which can link areas of local species richness, to reduce species isolation and preserve genetic diversity. An SBNP would encourage the development of wildlife corridors. The beginnings of such linkages are already visible in several parts of the proposed SBNP area and could readily provide the start point of a larger network of corridors. NatureScot recently announced that it is supporting 185,000 hectares of native woodland planting centred on the upper catchment of the Tweed (into the proposed NP area) which will form part of that network.



## 4 Socio-economic Benefits

The Southern Borders has a demographic which is ageing faster than the Scottish average, with young people leaving due to lack of employment possibilities. Tourism (which accounts for 7.1% of UK GDP - [tourismalliance.com](http://tourismalliance.com)) leads to money spent locally on goods and services.

There is much evidence that the National Park (NP) designation gives a significant boost to visitor numbers and spend. This increased spend occurs both in the Parks and in the wider area around them in what is internationally known as the 'halo' effect. A Scottish Borders NP would give a boost to tourism and the wide range of associated services.

The creation of a Borders National Park would hence, due to tourism, have positive economic consequences for local residents and businesses, for the Scottish Borders as a whole, and for the Scottish Government. Jobs would be created, both from the public funding obtained and from the increased tourism and project activity. This would lead to increased income to SBC (Council tax, fees etc) and to the Scottish Government – (increased income tax receipts, 10%, stamp duty etc); private sector income would increase from higher charges, more transactions, sales, more businesses. The Borders Railway could expect increased passenger receipts.

Some new businesses could focus on special interest holidays and short breaks that tap into, for example, the Borders' unique cultural and natural heritage (Roman site walking tours, James Hutton geological workshops with field trips to the Berwickshire coast, archaeological digs/workshops etc).

Economic growth would not be restricted to direct tourism activities but would extend to those public and private sector services which support tourism but also support increased general economic growth created by tourism, ie professional services (lawyers, accountants, PR, online marketing and booking etc) as well as more traditional trades (such as builders, electricians, plumbers, sign-makers, gardeners).

Tourism would not be the sole engine of economic activity. As well as new employment generated by environmental restoration and other ecosystem restorative activity as described above, National Parks attract new or expanding businesses of many other types. This is even more relevant post-pandemic during which time businesses and services across the world came to realise that much of the modern working week for many people can be spent at home. Young professionals feel that they can improve their family/home lifestyle by re-locating to a recognised desirable place. The name National Park provides that guarantee.

### *Farming, Land Management (see also Appendix H)*

A Scottish Borders National Park could assist every one of the actions identified by Scottish Government as needed from farmers, land managers, ghillies and gamekeepers by supporting, informing and, where invited to, coordinating farmers and landowners/managers to achieve mutually successful outcomes. The latter would benefit by maximising their contribution to these aims (and so maximise their entitlement to payments), and the Scottish Government and the NPA would benefit from all of that activity being aligned to the values and principles stated earlier. A Scottish Borders National Park could thus become an early test-bed and exemplar for many of these activities.

## *Northumbrian Neighbours*

The Northumberland National Park would have a contiguous border with the SBNP. This would provide opportunities to bring an even greater boost to the Borders' biodiversity and habitat with large scale regeneration projects straddling natural boundaries irrespective of which side of the border they lie (as in Scandinavia). The LIFE WADER (Water and Disturbance Environmental Restoration) on the Northumberland Coast and cross-border Tweed Catchment area (managed with input from SEPA, Tweed Commission, Tweed Forum) is an ongoing project which would benefit from the support of both NPAs.

## *Green Transport*

The NPA would work with public and private bodies to create adequate infrastructure for electric vehicles. It would ensure availability of appropriate maps, signage and online visibility. It would encourage provision of charging points for electric vehicles in ever more places in the Borders, for the benefit of locals and visitors alike. While the nation-wide infrastructure of chargers seems likely to remain an issue for some years, it is inevitable that the ease of charging will become increasingly important to those holidaying in the UK by car or motorhome, to the extent that areas with a higher proportion of chargers per population could establish a competitive edge in that respect.

The Park would inevitably want to encourage and support stakeholders in providing greener public transport to increase urban-dwellers responsible access, and to better serve local residents, both while contributing to a just transition to net zero.

Extending and linking cycling infrastructure within and beyond the NP would increase the benefits.

## *Food and Drink*

An NPA could create or support some coordination of effort in this area and spread good practice much more widely than individual pioneers operating in a vacuum. "Quality not Quantity" should be the message.

Likewise an NPA might have the PR influence to persuade more large scale retailers such as supermarkets to increase locally sourced food and drink. The Scottish Borders National Park Authority could become the farmer's friend and support in many ways, including the achievement of net zero and promotion of produce which contributes to that end result.

## **5 Accessibility**

### **Location**

Jedburgh, the central town in a Borders National Park, is 60-90 minutes from the city centres of Edinburgh, Newcastle and Carlisle, each of which has a sizeable railway station and an airport.

The total population of Edinburgh, Glasgow and the Central belt of Scotland is estimated at 4.2 million, ie 78% of the population of Scotland within easy reach of the Borders. Add to that

the 1.4 million combined population of Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside, Cumbria and Carlisle<sup>2</sup> and you have, literally, 5.5 million potential visitors on the doorstep.

However, the intention would *not* be to maximise the number of visitors to the Borders, rather to make the benefits of visiting a Borders National Park available to a greater proportion than before of the people who would benefit from that experience – Quality not Quantity.

The benefits to Borders residents and the wider population centres nearby would accrue through exposure to Nature and the mental and physical wellbeing which that supports, with the added available benefits of ecological, historical and cultural education and recreation in situ, and through greater understanding of responsible behaviour in rural settings (reference to the small minority who behave irresponsibly is made in Section 6, 'Potential Negatives - prevention and mitigations').

### **Extension of Borders Railway**

Although the East Coast mainline provides rail connections north and south for residents of the Eastern Borders, the largest concentration of Borders residents, ie in the Galashiels and Hawick areas, have only a rail link to the north, from Tweedbank. In fact residents of Hawick, the largest town in the Borders, must have access to private transport to get to Tweedbank in much less than an hour, or use public transport to make it a total of over two hours to get to Edinburgh.

Extension of the railway from Tweedbank to Carlisle, through the heart of the NP, would greatly enhance its accessibility. Similarly, designation of a Borders NP would strengthen the arguments for extension of the railway.

The National Park proposal and the Railway extension proposal are not mutually dependent but, should both be followed through, the benefits gained would undoubtedly be greater than the sum of the parts (an NP would create more demand for rail journeys while the Park itself would benefit from a larger proportion of its visitors choosing to leave cars at home, and the environment would benefit from the same circumstance). Indeed it might seem short-sighted and unambitious for one to be created without the other.

## **6 Potential negatives and mitigations**

### **Visitor Management**

The challenge for a Scottish Borders National Park will be to attract responsible tourists/visitors *and* keep special all that makes the southern part of the Borders unique.

The Scottish Government has promised to increase funding to improve visitor facilities, safety measures and access opportunities. But there is much that can be done at a local level to provide practical solutions.

Establishing a professional countryside Ranger Corps, backed up by volunteer rangers, and improving public transport, parking, camping, toilet and recycling facilities would help hugely

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<sup>2</sup> Newcastle-upon-Tyne 298,264; Northumberland 321,558; North Tyneside 209,151; Carlisle 110,255; Cumbria 500,821 - Office of National Statistics mid-year estimates for 2021

in alleviating the visitor infrastructure and management issues experienced in many parts of the Borders countryside during and since the pandemic. Such establishment is a key feature of the draft Visitor Management Implementation Plan for a Scottish Borders National Park included as Appendix I. A case study of the work that Rangers do in East Lothian is included as Appendix J.

## **Infrastructure**

Apart from a few hot-spots, lack of footfall may be more of a problem than congestion for much of the Borders. At present, Dumfries and Galloway experiences double the annual amount of visitors who travel to the Scottish Borders. Our neighbours to the West do not appear overcrowded and the infrastructure there seems capable of coping with that volume, so doubling the visitors to the Scottish Borders would seem to be a target which is achievable without undue pressures locally, while providing a significant boost to our economy.

## **Landowners' concerns and visitor behaviour**

Some landowners/managers fear that National Park designation would bring too many more irresponsible visitors to their land than at present. However, experience in other UK NPs has shown that visitors are much more likely to follow the country code when, as in a National Park:

- paths are connected up and maintained
- information is highly visible
- country rangers are there to assist them *and* the landowners/managers
- parking, waste bins, toilets and other facilities are appropriate and maintained.

Following the kind of Implementation Plan drafted in Appendix I, the Borders Park could deal effectively with the type of visitor management issues that will affect our region in any case without national park designation, but which, without designation, would be much more difficult to address.

A Borders National Park could seek Scottish Government review and updating of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code to take account of the larger numbers of visitors (tourists and locals) wishing to access the countryside, and so ensure that what is special remains special.

A critical element of the Draft Implementation Plan in Appendix I is coordination of a pan-Borders rangers corps that complements and builds on both Police Scotland's work on rural crime and the National Rural and Acquisitive Crime Partnership.

## **Housing, holiday homes and second home ownership (see also Appendix K)**

Many National Parks are already involved in innovative housing projects and so a Borders NP would have a number of exemplars to consider.

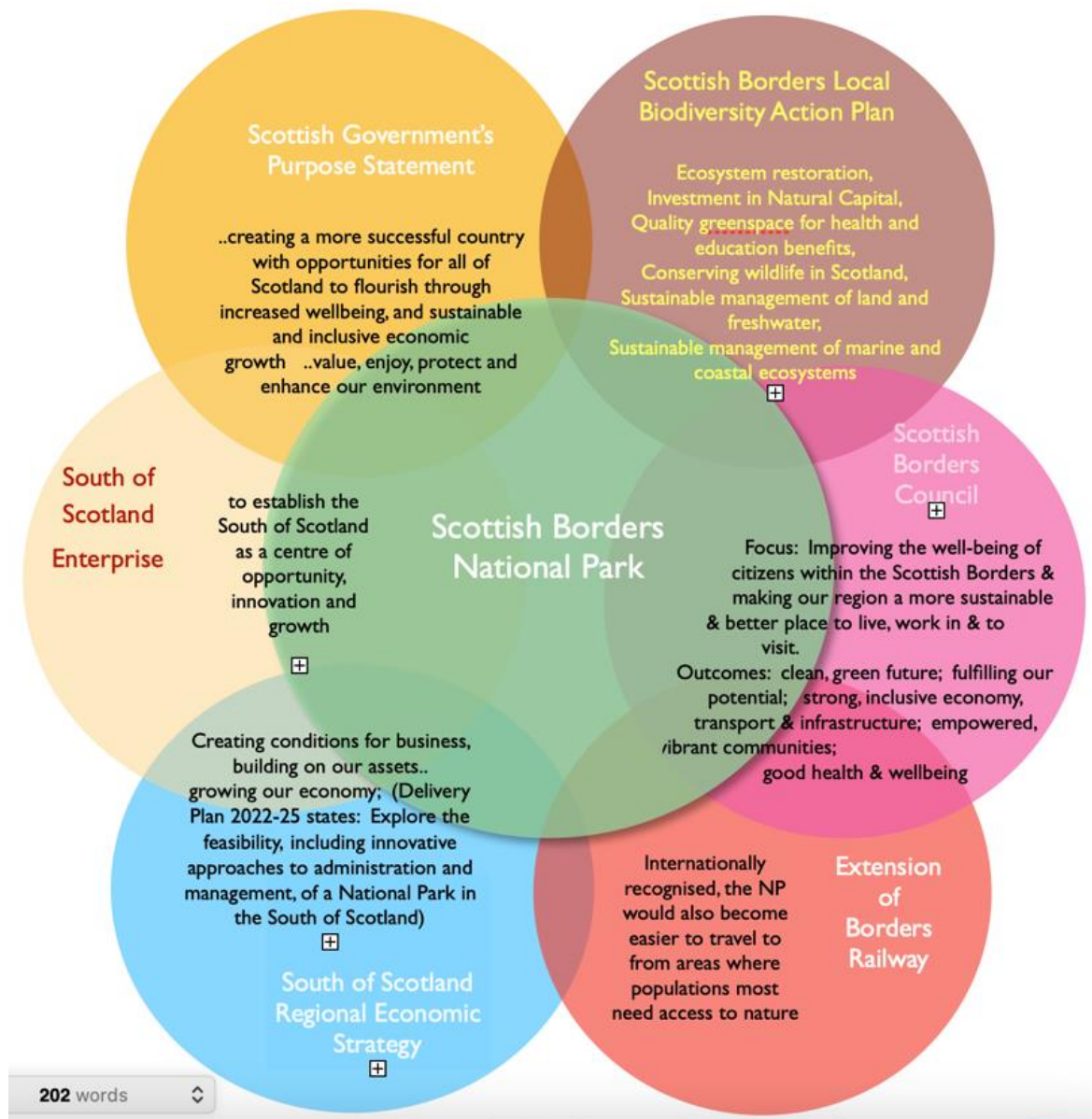
Here in Scotland, two main housing concerns in Cairngorms National Park are that too many house prices are unaffordable for many local people, and that there is too high a proportion of second homes (12%+) (see Appendix K on Housing). However, the housing situation in

the southern part of the Borders is different, with average house prices lower, a substantial number of empty properties (6.8% of Borders dwellings), and many others in need of upgrading.

Second homes can bring money into an area and support its services, but too high a proportion of second homes can also have potential negative impacts on the vitality and vibrancy of communities. Planning Departments have powers to address this and maintain an economically and socially healthy balance.

## 7 Policy Fit with Local and National Government

All of the aims, objectives, outcomes or purposes of the outer circles in the following Venn diagram have been mentioned and promoted in this document as fundamental aspirations or benefits of a Scottish Borders National Park. (For Agriculture policy, see Section 4 under the heading: Farming, Land Management and Nature Recovery with Just Transition.)



The independent Feasibility Study (at page 87, para 11.30) points to a balance between local and national benefits arising from national parks. “National Parks, although national in status, are all individual economic drivers for their surrounding region. Governance of a NPA requires members to weigh up local, regional and national interests when making their decisions. An appropriately structured National Park in the Borders would primarily contribute to local communities while delivering strategic national, regional outcomes [as in, eg, the Accessibility factor described above]. The so-called ‘halo ’effect”.

## 8 Conclusion

This report demonstrates, with evidence from independent sources, that the Scottish Borders meets all the criteria currently in legislation for a Scottish Park, and that such a Park is not only feasible but desirable because of the benefits it would bring to the Park area and much further afield.

Local benefits include a sustained economic boost both within and outwith the Park; preservation and celebration of cultural and historical heritage; promotion of nature restoration and just transition to net zero; responsible access to nature; and improved health and wellbeing, particularly of those Borders residents who currently do not have easy access to nature (especially older people and teenagers, and those with mobility or mental health conditions). Other public services, particularly SBC, would benefit from the contribution that a National Park would make to, eg, the SBC strategic focus and outcomes, its Local Biodiversity Action Plan, and contributions to the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy and the aims of South of Scotland Enterprise.

The benefits outwith the Scottish Borders would include the Park’s relatively easy accessibility to over 5 million people, albeit the aim is not to increase visitors beyond capacity but rather to make the Park accessible to more of the people (such as urban dwellers and those on low income) who would benefit most. Furthermore, increased tourism and the services which support tourism, as well as a general boost to the Borders economy, would benefit Scottish Government through its share of income tax, business rates etc.