Glyndŵr National Park – Next Steps

Decision required

Cabinet is invited to:

- Note that, as the Cabinet Minister for Government Effectiveness and the Constitution, I am minded to refuse to confirm the Glyndŵr National Park Designation Order submitted by Natural Resources Wales.

- Note that a further opportunity will be provided for evidence and representations to be submitted before a final determination is made.

- Note the reasons for my provisional view and the implications for relevant portfolios.

- Note the proposed communications and stakeholder handling arrangements.

Summary

1. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) submitted the Glyndŵr National Park Designation Order to Welsh Ministers in January 2026 following completion of the statutory designation process, which included establishing an evidence base, statutory notifications and a series of consultations.

2. The proposal attracted considerable interest with views supporting and opposing the designation of a new National Park (see para 11). All five local authorities within the proposed designation area objected to the Designation Order during the statutory notification period.

3. The process for designating a new National Park is set out in legislation – the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Under section 6 of that Act, NRW is under a duty, from time to time, to evaluate the case for designation and, where appropriate, submit a designation order to Welsh Ministers (WMs) for consideration. Under section 5, NRW can recommend that an area be designated as a National Park if it considers that, by reason of its natural beauty (taking its wildlife and cultural heritage into account) and the opportunities it offers for open-air recreation (having regard to the area's character, position in relation to centres of population and the extent to which it is possible to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of its special qualities by the public) it is especially desirable to designate that area as a National Park.

4. WMs may then choose to confirm, confirm with modifications or reject any Designation Order submitted by NRW. The 1949 Act does not set out criteria for the Welsh Ministers when making this decision (unlike those from NRW under section 5). The Welsh Ministers' decision is subject to public law decision-making principles.

5. Having considered a range of evidence, affordability, and wider Government priorities, I am minded to refuse to confirm the Designation Order.

6. Before reaching a final determination, I intend to provide an opportunity for interested parties to submit any further evidence or representations relevant to my decision.

7. While I have reached a provisional view that the Designation Order should not be confirmed, I recognise the significant work undertaken by NRW and NRW's view that the area included within the proposed Glyndŵr National Park meets the criteria for designation under the 1949 Act (see above). I remain open to considering any additional evidence or further representations submitted during this process before making a final determination.

8. The proposal was developed under the previous administration and does not form part of this Government's published commitments in the Manifesto or First 100 Days programme. This has been one of the factors considered in reaching my provisional view.

Objective of the paper

9. This paper updates Cabinet on my intended response to the Glyndŵr National Park Designation Order submitted by NRW.

10. The proposal for a new National Park covering parts of north east Wales and north Powys was developed under the previous administration. Following completion of its statutory assessment, NRW concluded that the proposed area meets the legislative tests for designation and submitted a Designation Order for consideration by Welsh Ministers in January 2026.

11. A total of 429 responses were received during the Notification Period with 233 in support (54%), 192 opposed (45%) and 4 unstated/undecided (1%), with all five local authorities within the proposed designation area formally objected to the Designation Order. As a result, Welsh Ministers cannot confirm the Designation Order without first holding a public local inquiry.

12. The previous administration subsequently announced its intention to hold a public local inquiry. Preparatory work commenced but no inquiry was established

and Welsh Ministers retain discretion regarding how to respond to the Designation Order.

13. The available options in response to the Designation Order in this context are:
    - Option 1 – Hold a public local inquiry to consider the representations and objections raised to the Designation Order before reaching a decision as to whether to confirm, confirm with modifications or refuse the Designation Order. An inquiry must be held where the Minister intends to confirm the Order. The Minister may choose to hold a public inquiry where unsure whether to confirm or refuse the Order or minded to refuse the Order.
    - Option 2 – Be minded to refuse to confirm the Order, providing an opportunity for further evidence and representations to be submitted before a final determination. The 1949 Act is silent on any administrative process for this.
    - Option 3 - Refuse to confirm the Designation Order now based on existing evidence. The legislation does not expressly require a local inquiry to be held where the Minister intends to refuse an Order.

14. Having considered the evidence assembled through NRW's assessment, representations received through the statutory process, affordability considerations, the Regulatory Impact Assessment, the Integrated Impact Assessment and wider Government priorities, I am minded to refuse to confirm the Designation Order. While I am satisfied that NRW has applied statutory criteria when making the Designation Order, I am minded to reject the order for the reasons set out below (see para 20).

15. I am satisfied that the evidence currently before me provides a sufficient basis for a provisional view. Nevertheless, given the significance of the proposal, I consider it appropriate to provide a further opportunity for representations before reaching a final determination.

16. In reaching this provisional view, I have taken account of the objections submitted by all five local authorities within the proposed area, the significant long-term financial implications associated with establishing a new National Park Authority (est. range of £4.4m to £5.8m per annum), and the availability of alternative mechanisms for pursuing many of the environmental, landscape and rural development outcomes identified through the designation process.

17. Before making a final determination, I intend to provide an opportunity for interested parties to submit any further evidence or representations relevant to my proposed decision. Representations should focus on any material considerations, evidence or arguments which have not already been taken into account, or which Ministers should consider further before reaching a final decision.

18. I will carefully consider any such submissions before determining whether to hold a local public inquiry or refuse the Designation Order without holding a local public inquiry.

19. I consider that this represents a proportionate course of action. It enables further representations to be considered without the cost, delay and resource implications associated with a public local inquiry, while nevertheless providing an additional opportunity for stakeholders to comment before a final decision is made.

20. In reaching my provisional view, I noted that:
    - the proposal does not form part of this Government's published commitments in the Manifesto or First 100 Days programme;
    - establishing a new National Park and creating a new National Park Authority would create significant long-term financial commitments at a time of continued pressure on public finances;
    - all five local authorities within the proposed area objected to the Designation Order; and
    - a range of the environmental, economic and social outcomes identified through the designation process could potentially be delivered through existing and emerging policy frameworks and delivery mechanisms without establishing a new National Park Authority.

21. This decision is relevant to a number of ministerial portfolios. The Cabinet Minister for Rural Resilience and Sustainability would ordinarily have taken the decision but has not done so in this instance due to a declared conflict of interest arising from residence within the proposed designation area and previous representations made by the Minister against the creation of the Glyndŵr National Park.

22. The Cabinet Minister for Enterprise, Connectivity and Energy will have an interest given the potential implications for infrastructure and energy generation and transmission projects within the region. The Cabinet Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning also has an interest because the proposal could result in the establishment of a new National Park Authority and because all the affected local authorities formally objected to the Designation Order. The new National Park Authority would have planning functions within the new National Park.

Impact

23. An announcement that I am minded to refuse to confirm the Designation Order will expressly invite people to submit further evidence or representations (in support or opposition of the creation of the new National Park) before a final

decision is made. The period for making representations will be four weeks from the date of my announcement.

24. I have given consideration as to whether to reject the Order at this stage. I have concluded it would be prudent to seek representations to test the conclusions I have drawn from the considerable evidence and analysis which has been undertaken.

25. The approach enables me to test whether there is additional information that may be material to the decision and helps ensure that all relevant evidence and views can be considered before a final determination is reached.

26. I recognise that the proposal has generated considerable interest and strong views, both in support of and opposition to designation. There remains a risk of stakeholder criticism and potential legal challenge regardless of the eventual outcome. However, providing an opportunity for further representations may help demonstrate that all relevant evidence and perspectives have been fully considered before a final decision is taken.

27. I recognise that a public local inquiry would provide an opportunity for representations to be made and to be considered independently. However, there has been considerable evidence gathering and consultation as part of the earlier stages of the process. I recognise that, were I to receive evidence which did persuade me of the merits of confirming the Designation Order, we would then have to proceed to a public local inquiry.

Communications and publication

28. I will issue an Oral Statement announcing that I am minded to refuse to confirm the Glyndŵr National Park Designation Order and setting out the reasons for that provisional view.

29. The Oral Statement will explain how interested parties may submit further evidence or representations and the timescale within which these should be provided. Interested parties will be invited to submit further evidence or representations over a four-week period via dedicated email and postal channels. Following closure of that period, officials will analyse all submissions, including any new material evidence, and provide further advice to me before I reach and publish a final decision, together with my reasons.

30. Communications will emphasise that no final decision has yet been taken and that Welsh Ministers remain open to considering relevant material evidence submitted before reaching a final determination.

31. I will make clear that this process relates specifically to the proposed designation and does not diminish the Welsh Government's commitment to landscape protection, nature recovery, sustainable land management or supporting rural communities.

32. Officials will engage with NRW, local authorities and other key stakeholders to explain the process and next steps.

33. Following consideration of any further evidence and representations received, I will reach a final determination on how to proceed in respect of the Designation Order.

Decision required:

Cabinet is invited to:

- Note that, as the Cabinet Minister for Government Effectiveness and the Constitution, I am minded to refuse to confirm the Glyndŵr National Park Designation Order submitted by Natural Resources Wales.
- Note that a further opportunity will be provided for evidence and representations to be submitted before a final determination is made.
- Note the reasons for my provisional view and the implications for relevant portfolios.
- Note the proposed communications and stakeholder handling arrangements.

Dafydd Trystan Davies
Cabinet Minister for Government Effectiveness and the Constitution
September 2026

[Redacted – s13 Personal data]

CABINET PAPER Glyndŵr National Park – Next Steps

Annex A

Statutory, Finance, Legal and Governance matters

Statutory Requirements

1. Under section 5 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, NRW considered whether it is especially desirable, by reason of the area's natural beauty and the opportunities it offers for open-air recreation, to designate the area as a National Park.

2. NRW undertook a detailed evidence-based assessment designed to meet the statutory requirements for National Park designation between 2023 and 2026. This was supported by extensive engagement and consultation with local authorities, communities and wider stakeholders. Following completion of this work, NRW concluded that the area met the relevant statutory tests. On 12 January 2026, NRW's Board approved the Glyndŵr National Park Designation Order and submitted it to Welsh Ministers. The Glyndŵr National Park Designation Order requires a decision by Welsh Ministers, who may confirm, modify or refuse the Order. The objections from the statutory local authority consultees mean that Welsh Ministers cannot confirm the Designation Order, either with or without modifications, without first holding a public local inquiry. A report would be produced by the person appointed to hold the inquiry and following consideration of this, WMs would decide whether to confirm the Designation Order (with or without modifications) or reject it.

3. The designation would only take effect if the Designation Order were confirmed by Welsh Ministers.

4. The available options in response to the Designation Order:
   - Proceed with a public local inquiry (as announced by the previous Administration) before deciding whether to confirm, modify or refuse the Order.
   - Be minded to refuse to confirm the Order and provide opportunity for further evidence and representations.
   - Refuse to confirm the Order without holding a public local inquiry.

5. **[Redacted – s12 (5) b Legal advice]**

Finance Requirements and Governance Implications

[Redacted – s12 (4)d Incomplete internal information]

Research and / or Statistics

5. Not applicable.

Joined up Working

6. Not applicable.