

Evidence submitted by the Campaign for National Parks to The Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee inquiry on the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill

December 2019

1. Campaign for National Parks is the independent national voice for the 13 National Parks in England and Wales. Our mission is to inspire everyone to enjoy and look after National Parks – the nation’s green treasures. We have been campaigning for over 80 years to ensure that our National Parks are beautiful, inspirational places that are relevant, valued and protected for all.
2. Campaign for National Parks brings together a wide variety of people and organisations to address issues affecting National Parks and take action to keep these beautiful places safe and ensure that everyone can enjoy them. We draw on a large pool of experts among our members, many of whom are actively involved in designated landscapes and their communities, across Wales and England and further afield. We also work closely with the Alliance for Welsh Designated Landscapes.
3. We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to this inquiry. Our comments below focus on the parts of the Bill which we believe are of particular relevance to National Parks.

Part 5 – Collaborative Working by Principal Councils

4. Our main concern with the Bill is the lack of reference to National Park Authorities in Part 5 of the Bill and in particular the fact that they are not listed as organisations which should be consulted before the setting up of corporate joint committees in their area. If the Bill is not amended to address this issue, there is a risk that the particular needs and interests of National Parks will not be taken into account in the plans for collaborative working between Councils, thus putting at risk the significant benefits that National Parks provide and making it difficult for National Park Authorities to perform their duties effectively.
5. National Parks contribute significantly to the health and well-being of the nation, by providing attractive, healthy places for recreation. They also make a significant contribution to the economy through tourism, farming, and other related businesses. These areas are national assets, providing natural resources such as clean water and places of peace and tranquillity in a crowded island. They receive public funding in recognition of their special qualities and the fact that they provide a critical public service.
6. National Park Authorities are the local planning authority for their area and can use their planning policies to influence transport and economic development. They therefore have a strong and legitimate interest in three of the four potential areas for which it is proposed

that joint committees can be established. This means that National Park Authorities must be consulted when joint committees are being planned in their area.

7. While the legislation allows for other bodies to be consulted if “considered appropriate”, we believe that National Park Authorities should be statutory consultees to avoid any risk that they would not be consulted. They should therefore be added to the lists of organisations to be consulted as set out in Sections 76 and 78 of the Bill. Furthermore, we also believe that if a joint committee is established which includes an area designated as a National Park, then the relevant National Park Authority should be a statutory consultee for the proposals which these joint committees develop and clarification should be provided in the Bill that any such proposals must not impact on the statutory functions of the National Park Authority.

Part 7 – Mergers and Restructuring of Principal Areas

8. We welcome the fact that National Park Authorities are listed in section 121 as one of the organisations that principal authorities must consult before making merger applications. The fact that they are listed here provides a further argument for ensuring that they are also consulted when principal councils are proposing to set up joint committees.

Part 9 – Miscellaneous

9. We welcome the measures set out in section 165 which mean that the improvement regime set out in Part 1 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 will no longer apply to National Park Authorities. The requirements of this regime were not appropriate for organisations the size of the National Park Authorities resulting in them having to devote a disproportionate amount of their resources to the auditing and reporting process involved. Removing these requirements will ensure that National Park Authorities can spend more of their resources on delivering their statutory purposes and securing the benefits set out in paragraph 5 above.