



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Environment

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

National Parks: Fermanagh District Council
Briefing

4 October 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for the Environment

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Anna Lo (Chairperson)
Mr Simon Hamilton (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Tom Elliott
Mrs Dolores Kelly
Mr Barry McElduff
Mr Francie Molloy
Lord Morrow
Mr Alastair Ross
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Councillor Frank Britton	Fermanagh District Council
Councillor Seamus Greene	Fermanagh District Council
Councillor Robert Irvine	Fermanagh District Council
Councillor Bert Johnston	Fermanagh District Council

The Chairperson: Thank you very much. We have Councillor Irvine, Councillor Greene, Councillor Johnston and Councillor Frank Britton. We have all councillors, no officials. You are all very welcome, gentlemen. Thank you for your patience in waiting for us to ask you to come forward. We have certainly heard a lot of concerns. Perhaps you can just give us a couple of minutes from your point of view, because we are really running short of time, and then members will have lots of questions.

Councillor Robert Irvine (Fermanagh District Council): I will try to be succinct. You should already have a copy of my presentation on behalf of the council. I ask you to use that as an aide-memoire should you have questions at the end of the presentation, which I hope you will. Also, for your information, there are a couple of maps appended at the back. They are useful to refer to as I go through what we have.

I thank the Environment Committee for giving the council the opportunity to come forward with its position on the proposed designation of national parks in Northern Ireland, and particularly in County Fermanagh. The council has reached a cross-party consensus, and I will present the council's position on behalf of the members. At present, there are a number of issues that are giving rise to serious concern in Fermanagh regarding the designation of a national park. The first of those is the widely held belief that the designation of a national park will add yet another layer of planning constraint in the countryside. In clause 26 of the White Paper, the Department states:

"The model of national park that is being proposed for Northern Ireland is not a regulatory regime but a facilitating and enabling framework".

However, clause 58, referring to the park management body, states:

"it is suggested that the body could be given an influencing role by being made a statutory consultee in the planning process. It is envisaged that a management body could assist with efforts to ensure that the design of future development is sensitive to a park's natural beauty. It is also envisaged that the national park management plan would provide the overarching vision for the future of the park and that the relevant planning authority would have regard to this when preparing future development plans."

There is a worry that that is the thin end of the wedge where planning is concerned, and that the park could constrain development and diversification in the countryside. County Fermanagh presently has 83 areas of special scientific interest (ASSIs) — I refer to the documents appended — a number of special areas of conservation (SACs), two proposed areas of outstanding natural beauty (AONBs) and many more designated protected areas than any other area of Northern Ireland. More protection or planning constraint is not needed.

Secondly, in clause 9, the Department states:

"A key argument for national parks in Northern Ireland is based on the need to grow the economic opportunities of our most cherished landscapes in a managed way that conserves and enhances them and their communities."

We have a grave concern that the real aim is to conserve and, therefore, to maintain the status quo, so a national park would lean more towards conservation than development.

Thirdly, clarity is required regarding how much of County Fermanagh would actually be included in a national park. To date, a boundary has not been identified, and, at present, there are two proposed AONBs in Fermanagh. One is the proposed Erne lakeland AONB, and the other is the proposed Fermanagh cave land AONB. Those are two distinct, separate areas within the county. Would the national park designation cover the entire county, or only parts of it? Would those two AONBs provide the basis for a park? Clarity is, therefore, needed. That is very important, given some of the existing and potential development opportunities in the county.

The fourth issue relates to tourism development, particularly in the countryside. In the main, tourists coming to County Fermanagh are seeking a rural experience rather than an urban one. Consider the success of the county's five-star and four-star hotels, which are located in the countryside — for example, the Killyhevlin Hotel, where we are today. Would this development have been possible in a national park? There is a need to develop additional tourism facilities in County Fermanagh if the county, as a designation, is to play its part in meeting the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's 2020 tourism strategy. Many of these facilities need to be located in the countryside. It is generally believed that the national park designation would not permit this to happen.

The fifth issue is that the Department has failed to identify benefits to the community that lives and works in the proposed national park. Would small rural businesses get the chance to develop and/or grow? Would the value of land and homes be affected, and if so, in what way?

The sixth issue is the impact that a national park designation would have on farmers in the park. Would they be assisted to manage their land within the park and, if so, would that be more than the assistance offered for land managed outside the park? Fermanagh is not a natural landscape. It is a managed natural landscape that needs the intervention of the farming community to maintain it in the condition that it is in today. The farming community must be kept in the countryside to continue to maintain the landscape. Would the public expect the right to roam and try to exercise that option? Would farm diversification be possible in the park, or would it be more difficult because of the designation? Clarity is needed here also.

The seventh issue pertains to the cost of managing a national park. The White Paper mentions a cost of £3 million per annum for each national park. Although the White Paper identifies increased income in the area of a national park, the managing body could not access that except in the form of levy or taxation. The managing body should not have this to do, or indeed have such powers. Funding must come from central government, but the availability of funding has not been clarified in the documentation.

The last issue is on governance. The council suggests that the most suitable form of management structure would be to have an independent body for each national park, with membership drawn from the district council, the local community and the Department. The council should hold more than 50% of voting rights, as the need for local accountability is paramount.

Before I finish, I draw the Committee's attention to the fact that we have the Marble Arch Caves Geopark, which is the first cross-border geopark in the world. It operates in Fermanagh and Cavan. The model used here is that the geopark has no statutory powers, but delivers a sustainable tourism product and environmental education and operates several conservation projects. The geopark in Fermanagh consists of a mix of publicly owned land from the council, Forest Service and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, along with privately owned land that is managed by agreement with the owners, including Cuilcagh mountain. The geopark operates in parallel with existing farming activities. The council manages the geopark and delivers access through paths, car parks and the like, as well as organising events for locals and tourists alike. Perhaps this could be an option for national parks.

In conclusion, we respectfully suggest that if the Department wishes to progress the designation of national parks, it needs to provide clarity regarding the concerns that we have raised this morning. It would appear that our concerns are mirrored across Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation. You raised a lot of issues that need to be clarified. To go back to our experience last week, I see the national park as an enabling body and one that will bring in funding. A large part of the funding comes from central government, but it is able to raise funding from different sources. It helps businesses and farmers, and that is what it should be, rather than be a restricting body. It is really the co-ordinator, and it has a common vision and ambition for the area, enabling everybody to work together. That is all I can say. I will leave it to others to ask you questions.

Mr Molloy: Thank you for your presentation. I am just a wee bit confused about where you are actually saying you have concerns about it, and whether the council would actually be in favour or not. In relation to the idea of an independent body, one of the things that I picked up last week was the question of why the local authorities in the Lake District or Loch Lomond could not manage it. In their situation, they had several local authorities; here you actually have one local authority that could manage the situation. There was concern about how you would actually get this independent body set up.

Councillor Irvine: Francie, the answer to that is that we cannot, politically, provide an informed opinion on what is on the table. There is not enough clarity in the document; there is no substance, there is no form. It is very generic in format, and one way of describing it would be aspirational. The Chairman has just said that national parks are for the benefit of those who live in and come into them. However, that is not shown in the document. For us to make an informed opinion, we want our concerns addressed, and the paper redrawn and brought back. We could then look at a document that we think will provide clarity, form and substance, so we can say either yes or no. Until those queries are answered, to a certain extent, we are leaning towards saying no. We do not want to say no, as it would just be a blanket no, as, in essence, we would not know what we are saying no to.

Mr Molloy: The other point is in relation to the £3 million that is suggested. In the Lake District, I think it is £6.5 million, and for Loch Lomond it is £9 million, with a staff in one case of 220 employed by the quango for running it, and 150 for the other one. From a council point of view, I think that it is very important that you not allow another body to take over the role that a local authority has, and that accountability to the local community. A quango of this nature would not have that. I know that you have said that a council should have a majority within that situation, but it just seems like duplication.

Councillor Irvine: I agree with you. We are the local representatives, and we stand or fall with regard to the opinion of the people we represent. That is why we feel that, should this go forward and take form and substance, we should have a majority and should manage it on behalf of the people in the county. However, as the representatives from the Ulster Farmers' Union said, a lot of the national parks that you looked at in England, Scotland, Wales and even in the Republic of Ireland sit, predominantly, on publicly owned land.

The Chairperson: No.

Councillor Irvine: Chairman, the majority are. Where they impact on private ownership, there is constraint, and any managing authority can manage the strategy and move forward because it has

public land to work within and on. Therefore, it can become as big or as small as it wants and can generate its own income and funds. We do not have that facility here because, as it is proposed, we do not have enough of the land in public ownership.

Mr Molloy: One of the things that I picked up when the Committee of the Regions had a meeting on national parks was that, in some areas, they actually have toll gates in and out of the national park area, so the tolls pay for the national park. That would be the likely funding source.

Councillor Irvine: A frivolous answer would be that I know that a lot of people from the east of the Province have difficulties getting to the west. I would not want to put toll gates on Fermanagh. That would place an unfair constraint on letting people in.

Mr Elliott: It is a good job that they do not have toll gates in or out of Fermanagh; it would cost me a fortune.

To pick up on Francie's point, are the representatives of Fermanagh District Council saying that, irrespective of what it looks like, they have no opinion on the principle of a national park? The previous delegation clearly said that the principle of a national park was out. Are the representatives saying that the council has an open mind? Councillor Irvine said that it is leaning towards saying no. I am trying to establish, just as I think Francie was, what the decision or opinion of the council is on the principle of a national park, irrespective of what it looks like.

Councillor Bert Johnston (Fermanagh District Council): I think that the position of the council — and I have listened carefully to the councillors as we discussed this — is that we are waiting to be convinced. You will have seen that in Councillor Irvine's presentation. We have to be persuaded that it is advantageous for Fermanagh to be included in this park. In fairness, Tom, you will notice that there is a difference in our presentation to the previous one. We are not throwing the baby out with the bathwater at this stage. We will wait to see whether we can be convinced that this is in the interests of the people of Fermanagh.

Councillor Seamus Greene (Fermanagh District Council): How can we make a decision on it when we do not even know the size or the frame of it? It could be a small part of Fermanagh or the entire county. Given that, it is impossible to make a black-and-white decision.

Mr Elliott: There is an issue, though. In fairness, you are not going to know that under the current legislation proposals, because they are intending to draw up enabling legislation for national parks before starting to designate any area, whether Fermanagh or otherwise. I thank Councillor Johnston for clarifying the fact that the council does not have an opinion and is saying that it will wait and see, which, if you do not mind my saying so, is slightly dangerous at the moment, because it does not give the Committee a clear guide on whether there should be opposition or support for the national park principle. I know where I stand on it: I oppose the principle of a national park. The Ulster Farmers' Union is opposed to it in principle. However, the council appears to be sitting on the fence and saying that it will suck it and see.

Councillor Johnston: I think that a national park does not have to include the entire county of Fermanagh. The geopark and caves are two proposed AONBs that the council never supported or accepted, but they could form part of the national park, and would have little or no impact on the agricultural community. Those are things that could still identify Fermanagh with a national park without including the whole of Fermanagh. I am not prepared to say that we should not have a national park. I would hate to live to see the day when we could look back and say, "Well, here were the advantages that we threw out".

The Chairperson: A missed opportunity.

Councillor Johnston: So, we have to be very careful about that.

Councillor Irvine: Rather than being an ambivalent local politician and shirk a direct question, which is what Tom is after, the council, in previous consultations about AONBs, took the stance that it did not want an AONB in the county. It has had that position before. Tom's question is two-pronged. Enabling legislation is coming in with regard to national parks per se. The designation, which would have a direct effect in certain areas, is, to a certain extent, a side issue. I think that we in the county would not, at the moment, be in favour of having a national park here. However, we have grave

concerns about the format of the enabling legislation that is coming forward. So, we cannot provide a blanket answer and say that we are totally against national parks — full stop, away you go, we do not want to see them. That is because there is no clarity here at all.

The Chairperson: You want a lot of questions answered.

Councillor Irvine: It is more than a lot of questions. It has to go further and dig down into the detail, because — as the previous representative said with respect to you sitting around here — we all have limited lives as politicians, but legislation will go on until it is changed. The people who carry out legislation are your executives, your civil servants. It is in the interpretation of legislation that the issue will come about. The framework legislation might have perfect sense — could have perfect sense — but it is the interpretation, and the devil is in the detail in carrying it out. We already see where we are enacting legislation from Europe through Westminster and back to Stormont — even into Dublin and any other sovereign regime that you want — but it is not exactly the overall legislation: it is the interpretation that people put on it to enact it. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, at the moment, is going through sheer misery because of the interpretation.

Mr Weir: Thank you, gentlemen, for a very good presentation. I think that you said that the council was leaning towards no. I know that, as a council, you are not committing yourselves because the full information is not out there for you to comment on. However, to anybody looking at the presentation when it goes over the eight areas of concern that you have, it would be fair to say that the council, at least, is taking a fairly sceptical approach to this, and that it is saying that if there is scope for anything, it is on a limited basis in geographical area. To take up Francie's earlier point about the governance issue, I suppose you are saying that if this does happen, your preference would be what may be described as "local control". Judging from what you have said about a model of governance, it reminds me, to some extent, a lot more of district policing partnerships, where you have a structure in place where the elected representatives have a majority of at least one. Would that be a fair assumption, roughly speaking, of where you are coming from?

Councillor Irvine: It would.

Mr Weir: Secondly, you are coming at it from a sceptical angle. We have heard from the Ulster Farmers' Union that scepticism would probably be somewhat understating its position. In the week of the commemoration of the Ulster covenant, where we heard about some people writing their name in blood, I suspect that some of your colleagues from the Ulster Farmers' Union may have been writing their names in blood against the national park. I was going to ask whether there are any other groups in Fermanagh that are hostile or sceptical. However, it might be easier to put the question the other way round. Are you aware of any particular groups in Fermanagh that actually enthusiastically support this, or is pretty much everybody in Fermanagh on either the hostile or sceptical wing of things?

Councillor Irvine: I do not think that everybody in County Fermanagh is against national park designation. There are some in the countryside access groups who would look to see national parks as possibly opening up more of the countryside. Therefore, there is an element of support, although it is not that vocal in the countryside. However, if you look at the various groups — you have heard from the farming community, and you will hear from the tourism grouping who will do their own presentation after us — business groupings that we directly interact with say no, because they see it as an issue with regard to planning.

Mr Weir: With regard to business groupings, I do not know precisely what your structures are here in Fermanagh, whether there is a chamber of commerce, or —

Councillor Irvine: There are chambers of commerce in most of the minor towns, and there is a business development partnership in Enniskillen.

Mr Weir: Have those groups formally taken a position on it?

Councillor Irvine: They have not taken a formal position. The informal position is that they are against it.

Mr Weir: OK.

The Chairperson: Why?

Councillor Irvine: They see it as a constraint on future development. The point that we raised, and we have tried to carry through, is that, in the documentation, one of the major points is conservation — enhancing the natural and built environment. There is a perception and a worry that it is like a picture in time, a snapshot of the way that Fermanagh will be, the way that it should be, and the way that it will be in 20 years.

Mr Boylan: Straw hats.

Councillor Irvine: Exactly. We asked the question: would the likes of Fisher Engineering in Ballinamallard or the Quinn Group in Ballyconnell/Derrylin have been able to rise up if a national park had been here for the past 20, 30 or 40 years? I very much doubt it. We are crystal-ball gazing, but the worry is that a layer will be put on and we will be frozen in time.

The Chairperson: Councillor, one sentence that I remember quite clearly and took away from our visit to Scotland and England was this: it is not about preservation, it is about conservation. They are saying that they are not preserving the past, but conserving.

Mr Elliott: I remember quite a lot that I took away from last week, and it was not just one line.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you for your presentation. It was precise and explicit in some of the concerns that you raised. However, it takes a sensible approach and still leaves the way open for an open mind in relation to some of the plans in the strategy. Has the presentation been submitted as a response to the strategy document?

Councillor Irvine: Not formally, no.

Mrs D Kelly: So, there is no indication of how some of those questions may be answered. Have you teased out any of the planning issues with your local planning service as to whether some of the developments would have been allowed to go ahead?

Councillor Irvine: Dolores, the unfortunate thing about that is you are talking down to people working in the policy and their interpretation. They would have to back-check. With the best will in the world, they will not be able to give an answer because it has passed in time. At the time when some of those developments went forward, we had to fight along with the developers tooth and nail to get them in. I would hate to think what it would have been like had there been another layer of constraint overriding the whole issue. That is the worry.

Mrs D Kelly: I can understand how difficult it is for rural areas to get any development.

Councillor Irvine: Our worry in regard to planning is that the planning authority and the developers control work within their development plans, and they have statutory consultees with regard to water, roads, etc. The proposal is that the national parks will become a consultee. The insinuation in the White Paper is that the national parks will develop their own plan for the national park. One then wonders where primacy of legislation sits. Who has the control, and where does it sit? You say it sits with the primary authority, which is the planning authority, but not if a subservient plan is already in place with regard to another quango. What you are getting is indirect control and direction from another body that may have a totally different agenda. That is what we are worried about.

Mrs D Kelly: How up to date is the Fermanagh district plan?

Councillor Irvine: It is about seven years out of date.

The Chairperson: From my understanding, the planning authority in a national park would follow the same guidelines and planning policy statements (PPS).

Councillor Greene: When we were agreeing this document, I found it very hard to keep an open mind about national parks, because I am a small farmer and I am bogged down with red tape. It is unbelievable, these designations, one after another. It comes in every year and it just a nightmare to think that there will be another layer of bureaucracy. Farmers are so fearful of this, and I can see

exactly where they are coming from. To remain open-minded on it, we have to see the detail of what is being proposed.

The Chairperson: That is fair.

Councillor Frank Britton (Fermanagh District Council): Our position is that we have to be persuaded about this, but there is one area that we will never be persuaded on, and I have to make that quite clear. That is the area of costs — the costs of the national park insofar as they may be levied on the population of this county. Costs of £3 million are mentioned. I am not sure what those costs refer to, but it is not clear how that money is to be raised and where it will come from. Is it to be a levy on people, or a form of taxation? Is it to be a levy on the people who live in the area? Is it to be a taxation on business in the area or in the county? I can say quite categorically that the ratepayers of Fermanagh will not contribute to the management costs of a national park. The argument is that the funds should come from the Executive in Belfast. Until that is quite clear, we will be opposed completely on the cost issue. That will, in some ways, affect how we feel about the rest of it.

The Chairperson: The Minister's proposal is for £3 million to come from central government's main pot of money.

Mr Boylan: Thanks for your presentation. Looking at your map, I do not think that there are any other areas that you could designate in Fermanagh. There are a lot of ASSIs. The reality is that —

Mr Elliott: There are too many of them.

Councillor Johnston: There are 83 altogether.

Mr Boylan: I agree with the points that you made. Obviously, you do not have a crystal ball and you do not know exactly what is coming down the tracks in what areas. That is an aside in terms of legislation because, if the enabling legislation comes through, it will allow you to designate an area for a national park. Anybody can enact that at any time, so let us be straight about that. The reality is that we have been sold this thing about tourism and the benefits to business and everything else. I have a few figures from Cumbria: 14.8 million people visited the Lake District. You imagine the area that that is and the amount of people. That generated something like £900 million or close to £1 billion, but when you ask the question of what section went to the locals, there were four or five different council areas involved. Would it not be better to have a link with a proper tourism strategy, with all the local groups involved and selling Fermanagh as a tourism brand as opposed to having a national park brand? Clearly, that is what is happening in other areas. It is only about a brand name. Let us be realistic. Would you not be better looking at PPS 16, which is the tourism policy, and PPS 21? Obviously, we want to look at PPS 5 and all those policies in how you would develop and grow business and grow your tourism product.

Councillor Irvine: Cathal, without trying to take away the thunder of three representatives sitting on my back — and I do not want daggers thrown —

Mr Boylan: You see, the three things —

Councillor Irvine: The council has always been proactive in promoting tourism. We sit on Fermanagh Lakeland Tourism (FLT); some of our councillors are on the management committee. We fight along with tourist providers in Fermanagh to make sure that we are a designation. The issue — I will let FLT say it when it comes along — is that we did not become one of the flagship projects of the Tourist Board. It designated all other areas. It was only when the council tried to knock the door and say, "Come on; why are you not doing anything?" that it tried to give us money for a signature project to come down to Fermanagh. We realise that tourism is a major provider in the county. We, as a council, do all that we can, directly and indirectly through FLT, to do that. The issue with national parks is that a lot of the work, such as putting in the infrastructure and creating the buoyancy to attract people, will need private money. The national park, if it is in Fermanagh, is going to be on private ground. There are very few public areas. You are looking to the private sector to finance it.

Mr Boylan: I understand that. That is what we saw; it is all about the activity in the national park and what you can charge for it. We have seen all of that. Basically, the Minister has sold it on the basis that it will increase your tourism and your business opportunities. Besides all of that, should we not look at different policies and try to grow that in a different way as opposed to having one brand? That

is possible. People are here from the tourism section; I will talk to them about that. We have discovered that you do not necessarily just need a national park brand to increase tourism and everything else. Some people benefit from it and others do not. If we are going to do something, let us do it for the whole of the community.

Councillor Irvine: I will not go into that, because the realms in regard to tourism promotion and strategy are quite intricate. There are professionals behind me. In England, Wales and even the Republic of Ireland, there are tourist designations that have been promoted and branded and accepted worldwide. Those are not in national parks. It is about the way that they are promoted; the way they have government and all the agencies behind them; and the way that they have been marketed at home and abroad. National parks per se will not create that, and I agree that the policy has to be right. However, I throw it back to you, because you are our representatives at Stormont. It is up to central government to help to pump-prime that. The willingness is down here, and I put it back to you that the resistance is up in Belfast.

Mr Boylan: Thanks very much for that. Clearly, you have answered the question. I know, Bert, you were up when we discussed PPS 16, or some members from Fermanagh District Council were up talking about that, and I think that that is another way forward. You answered the question about promotion outside the national parks. There are other areas that have done it better, without hindering anyone else or impacting on others.

Lord Morrow: Some of the questions that I was going to ask have already been dealt with. I congratulate the council on its report and presentation. Robert, you said and confirmed further that although you are leaning towards the no position, you have not reached a definitive position as yet. The first line of your report says that you have got consensus on it, and that strikes me as meaning that you have not got a definitive position and are open to persuasion. Your report goes on to ask — and I suspect, maybe, the farmers answered it when they were here — whether farmers would get assistance in managing their land. Having listened to them, I suspect that they are not looking for assistance to manage their holdings. The assistance that they would like is to be steered clear of. They would say that they have enough issues of bureaucracy to deal with and do not need any more. You rightly cite the Marble Arch Caves as a model, and you state that there are 83 ASSIs. You would nearly think that Fermanagh was already designated as a national park. As someone else said, there is not that much left to designate when you take all these restrictions and bring them into play. Robert, are you saying that you will never be convinced that there should be a national park in Fermanagh? I think that I know the answer already.

Councillor Irvine: It is very dangerous to say never, Lord Morrow. We should all be mindful of that. A lot depends on the conditions that are prevalent at the time that you make a decision. Without trying to be wishy-washy, conditions can sometimes change, so you would like to change your position. Our current position is leaning towards no, because there is so much smoke and mirrors and vagueness to this that we do not see it as being good moving forward. In reply to Cathal, I alluded to the fact that there are other ways to brand products rather than using national parks. If the national parks were to be purely a tourism promotional vehicle, I would definitely question it. There is more to it than that.

On the issue that we had with regard to farmers and their assistance, our angle coming back — and without speaking for them; we are just speaking about them — is that we perceive that the idea of conserve and preserve was actually trying to capture an image and preserve that image. Therefore, we were wondering whether there would be any assistance to make up for the restrictive practices pertaining to that preservation or whether it was up to the farmers to suck it and see and do as they are told.

Lord Morrow: Robert, politicians will come and go, but legislation goes on forever, so to say never can be dangerous.

Councillor Irvine: If you were to ask me now, the answer would be no.

Councillor Greene: You said that there does not seem to be much left to designate. That is true to a degree, but if this comes in, people who are running this will have to justify their jobs, so they will always find other rules and regulations to come in and look at and enforce. I will give you, as a wee example, the time that the single farm payment was coming in. For years, Ministry men used to come out to view and count people's cattle. That was being done away with, but there was an idea that they would come out and count how many tyres you had on top of your silage pit. You were going to have a certain number of tyres; you were not going to be allowed to have any more or any less. Men were

going to come out and count tyres. That was people coming up with ideas to save their jobs; another layer of bureaucracy.

Lord Morrow: Was that the "bright ideas" Department? *[Laughter.]*

Councillor Greene: Thankfully, they did not do it.

Mr Molloy: I cannot understand why councils would abdicate the authority. Why would they give that authority over to another body? The idea of an independent body, when you have a council that is democratically elected and accountable — one thing we found in Scotland and England was that, where the authority has been taken over, the councils sitting on the body are just a small part of it and have little or nothing to say. You are proposing a slightly different thing here.

On the whole issue of a national park, some were saying that maybe you would not designate all of Fermanagh. The title of national park has a certain international design. We could not meet that here in all of Fermanagh, never mind a section of Fermanagh. If you are talking about a park smaller than Fermanagh, you are talking about a picnic park, not a national park.

Councillor Johnston: I do not think that that is right.

Mr Molloy: That is what it would turn out to be.

Councillor Johnston: There are 83 ASSIs that could be added to it. There are SACs and the two proposed AONBs, which include the caves.

Councillor Irvine: You have raised two points, Francie. One is the size of the national park; you say that the whole of Northern Ireland should be a national park —

Mr Molloy: I am not saying that it should be; I am saying that it would not even match that.

Councillor Irvine: I believe that, in Wales, there are one or two smaller areas; Snowdonia national park is somewhere in the region of only 1,200 to 1,500 acres. It is part of the upland farmland going up into the mountain. National parks do not have to cover 20,000 or 30,000 hectares; they can be small.

Secondly, the council is not proposing to walk away. As we said in our document, you would need an independent body, probably at arm's-length to the council, but with council predomination in regard to representation. The reason for our thinking behind that — this is only me replying quickly; it is not a consensual idea — is that, one, you have to have buy-in from the community for any organisation like that; and two, you need the involvement of the business community because, essentially, you are trying to model it on a business model. Invariably, local councils are not good as private business organisations. They are better having input from the commercial sector to give that extra drive. On the governance issue, the council should predominate in regard to representation. That is what we are proposing. However, we have not delved into that — again, because there is no clarity in the document.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, gentlemen. That was very useful.