



Dark Sky Discovery Sites

Guidelines and Criteria for nominating sites

We are now inviting nominations for new Dark Sky Discovery Sites! Anyone can nominate a site using the Nomination Form on our website and by following these guidelines.

We are particularly keen to receive nominations from schools and community groups and from organisations such as local authorities and charities that own or manage potential sites.

What is a Dark Sky Discovery Site?

Every community has its best local place for seeing the stars on a clear night. In an urban area this could be a park, a playing field or some other open space. In a rural area, it might be somewhere that is a short walk or drive from village. A Dark Sky Discovery Site is a place that helps local people, visitors, schools and groups to enjoy the night sky.

The Sites are publicised on the website www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk and as the list of nominations grows a network of good local stargazing sites will take shape.

Criteria for Dark Sky Discovery Sites

A Dark Sky Discovery Site must meet all the following criteria:

1. Size. The Site should be 100m² (10mx10m) in area. This is small enough to be defined clearly by an 8 figure Grid Reference and large enough to be used by a visiting group of 30 people. In many cases, the Site will be part of a wider park or open space which has other locations which don't match the other criteria (e.g. darkness, sightlines, access, safety) in the same way as the core Site. For example, they may have better sightlines but not have wheelchair access. If so, you can explain this briefly in the Other Comments section of the form.
2. Darkness rating. The site must meet one of these levels:
 - One Star Site: The seven main stars in Orion are visible to the naked eye. Typically this means away from, or shielded from, bright lights such as street lights, security lights or approaching car headlights.

- Two Star Site: The Milky Way is visible to the naked eye. This will be a much darker site only found in more rural areas.

Ideally, please ask a local astronomy organisation such as a local club or university to confirm this rating. Local clubs in the UK can be found here www.fedastro.org.uk/fas/. If you are able to take a Sky Quality Measurement for the site, please include tell us the figure. Here are some guidelines on how to do this <http://darkskydiary.wordpress.com/2010/12/18/how-to-carry-out-a-dark-sky-survey/>.

3. Sightlines. The site should provide relatively good sightlines of the horizon in all directions. Typically this means away from tall building, trees and high ground. There is no absolute measure required here and you and you may find it helpful for a local astronomy group to help with this judgement.
4. Public access. The site must be freely open to the public for significant periods of darkness during the year. It may be necessary for groups to make special arrangements to visit. For example, it may be necessary for groups of more than 6 to contact the managers of the site in advance because the site is part of an operation such as an outdoor learning centre. There could also be a restriction on times, for example no visits after midnight. If so, you should explain this in the Form.

The spirit of this criterion is that small, informal groups of people can, without having made any special arrangements, arrive at the Site and find it accessible. This is the criterion that most often leads to difficulties with the nomination of a Site. If you have any concerns, we are very keen to discuss these with you early on – even before other aspects of your nomination are in place.

5. Wheelchair access. The Site must be accessible to a wheelchair user. As explained above, the Site might be a short walk from other observing locations that do not meet this criteria.
6. Safety. The site must have been Risk Assessed by the nominating organisation. Please use your own Risk Assessment form. In Risk Assessing your site, hazards to be considered should include:
 - Uneven or wet ground.
 - Open water/steep drops.
 - Traffic.
 - Anti-social behaviour.

Any risks that you identify should be able to be mitigated by the information you provide in the Safety Notes on the form, in addition to the following general safety information that will be provided on the Dark Sky Discovery website:

- Visit with a group of people – it's safer and more fun!
- Check the website for the Site (linked from the google map) for the latest access information.
- Follow the countryside code for England, Scotland, Wales or North Ireland.

A Site for which the Risk Assessment identifies the need for hard measures such as installation of a fence or steps, will not meet this criteria.

Whilst the Science and Technology Facilities Council will recommend the site as a good place to see the stars, we do not accept any responsibility for any harm, injury, damage, loss or prosecution as a result of people visiting these sites.

7. The nomination must be supported in writing by the landowner and local authority. For the local authority, the Parks and Open Spaces Department is likely to be the appropriate Department to approach for this support.

Examples of information in the pop-up windows on the google map that is drawn from the Nomination Form:

Name of site	Joppa Quarry Park
Darkness rating	One Star
SQM reading	
Short description (20 words)	A public park in north east Edinburgh that is not directly overlooked by any streetlights.
Access routes	Access is via paths from xx road, yy road and zzz roads.
OS Grid Ref (6-8 figure)	Xxxx xxxx
Free, open access?	Yes, no restrictions
Wheelchair	There are hard surface paths leading to the edge of the park but not across the park.
Stargazing events	None
Nominating organization + url (optional)	Portobello Primary School
Contact for site	http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/10861/joppa_q uarry_park
Safety notes (20 words)	There is a 3m slope running east to west across the middle of the park.
Other comments (20 words)	The levelled upper playing field gives a good vantage point in all directions.

Name of site	Blackford Hill
Darkness rating	One Star
SQM reading	
Short description (20 words)	A car park for an open hillside in south Edinburgh, that is also home to the Royal Observatory Edinburgh.
Access routes	The best access is via Observatory Road. There are several

	other footpaths onto the hill.
OS Grid Ref (6-8 figure)	Xxxx xxxx
Free, open access?	Yes, no restrictions
Wheelchair	The car park is tarmac. There is a tarmac path from the car park further on to the hill along the south side of the Observatory.
Stargazing events	None on the hill – but the observatory Visitor Centre hosts regular activities. http://www.roe.ac.uk/vc/
Nominating organization + url (optional)	Friends of Blackford Hill
Contact for site	http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/directory_record/10799/blackford_hill_and_pond_local_nature_reserve
Safety notes (20 words)	There is no pavement beside the final 40m “dog-leg” on Observatory Road. A footpath, starting at the turn and leading onto the hill itself, provides an alternative, unlit route to the car park. If you are venturing to the top of the hill there are crags on the south and east sides.
Other comments (20 words)	The hill just above the Observatory site gives better sightlines, especially to the West.

Name of site	Flotterstone Visitor Centre
Darkness rating	Two Star
SQM reading	
Short description (20 words)	A Visitor Centre in the Pentland Hills south of Edinburgh.
Access routes	The Visitor Centre is next to the Flotterstone Inn on the A703.
OS Grid Ref (6-8 figure)	Xxxx xxxx
Free, open access?	Yes, no restrictions

Wheelchair	The car park for Centre is tarmac. There is a tarmac road leading into the hills from the car park.
Stargazing events	None
Nominating organization + url (optional)	
Contact for site	Pentland Regional Park http://www.pentlandhills.org/
Safety notes (20 words)	There is no pavement or lighting on the public road from the car park into the hills.
Other comments (20 words) eg to darker/clearer view	A quiet public road, and then tracks, lead to better observing spots further into the hills.