



How to develop Dark Sky potential

There is growing interest in the UK's dark skies - how to protect and how to promote them. You have several options for how to develop and harness your area's dark sky potential. This guidance note helps you find the information to enable you to choose the right approach for you.

Reasons for developing the dark sky potential of an area are often one of the following:

- as a resource for practical **science education** and wider educational use;
- as a resource for **tourism** activity based on the natural qualities of rural areas, providing a distinctive product - especially in the shoulder seasons;
- as a natural resource to be protected as part of our wider natural **environment**; and
- any or all of the above can make dark skies a good focus for **community** activity.

Whatever your starting point, there are broadly two complementary aspects of dark sky work:

- Protecting dark skies. In one sense, it is very simple to protect dark skies: don't shine light upwards. In practice, protecting dark skies involves a combination of lighting engineering techniques, working with local authorities and property owners and legislation.
- Engaging people with dark skies. Whether its education, tourism or community activities, much of dark sky development is about helping people enjoy and learn about the night sky.

There are several organisations, within the UK and internationally, that can help you with both aspects of dark sky development. They work together but each offers you something different:

The UK Campaign for Dark Skies www.britastro.org/dark-skies is a charity that provides a national focus and **advice and advocacy** on protecting dark skies.

International Dark Sky Association www.darksky.org is the international focus for dark skies. This includes the accreditation of areas as Dark Sky Places, such as **Dark Sky Parks, Reserves or Communities**. These places must have very dark skies and plans to protect them and promote public access to them. They are large areas, often part of national parks. In the UK, currently two places have these accreditations: Galloway Forest Park www.forestry.gov.uk/darkskygalloway and the Isle of Sark www.sark.info/ and Exmoor Dark Sky Reserve <http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/about-us/news/news-2011/international-dark-sky-reserve>.

The UK Dark Sky Discovery partnership www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk is a network of mainly astronomy organisations, led by the UK Science and Technology Facilities Council's Royal Observatory Edinburgh Visitor Centre, that runs programmes to engage people with dark skies. It works with Dark Sky partners in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and nine English regions to offer:

- **Events and activities** for the public and schools.
- Accreditation of locations as **Dark Sky Discovery Sites**. These are places, in cities or the countryside, nominated by local groups as the local best places for stargazing.
- **Training** for individuals and organisations - including teachers, outdoor learning professionals, tourism businesses – develop their capacity to engage people with dark skies.
- The partnership is also investigating other schemes such as a **Stargazers Welcome** scheme to accredit tourism businesses.

What next?

To sum up, there are probably two main routes for you to follow:

1. Everyone -whatever your starting point and however large or dark your skies - can investigate support from CfDS (for protecting dark skies) and the Dark Sky Discovery partnership (for engaging people with dark skies).
2. If your area has large, very dark skies and you are in a position to stimulate or coordinate an approach to dark sky protection in the area, then you could also consider bidding for status as an IDA Dark Sky Park, Reserve or Community.

Dark Sky Discovery partnership

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