



Dark Sky Discovery Sites

DRAFT Guidance Notes for completing the Nomination Form

Please read these notes before completing the Nomination Form.

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 chosen by a local organisation to encourage local people, visitors, schools and groups to enjoy the night sky.

The Sites will be 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 between 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. Ideally, the site will be freely open to the public. However, it may be necessary for people to make special arrangements to visit. For example, it may be necessary for visitors to contact the managers of the site in advance because the site is part of an operation such as an outdoor learning centre. If so, you should explain this in the Form.
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 in a group with a responsible adult – 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.

How to submit your nomination

Post your completed Nomination Form with all the required supporting documentation to:

Dave Chalton
Dark Sky Officer
Science and Technology Facilities Council
Royal Observatory Edinburgh
Blackford Hill
Edinburgh
EH9 3HJ
0131 669 8343
dave.chalton@stfc.ac.uk

In assessing the nomination we may consult with:

- Your organisation, if we require further information
- the organisations who have supported the nomination
- Dark Sky partner organisations <http://www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk/>

We will endeavour to reply to you within 20 working days of receiving your nomination.