

## Valuing Geodiversity in Edinburgh and the Lothians – Designating Local Geodiversity Sites

Local Geodiversity Sites are a springboard for valuing, interpreting and celebrating geology in local communities. Local Authorities – working in partnership with regional and national expertise – can designate sites and include them in Local Development Plans to ensure recognition of their value for education, recreation and in supporting biodiversity.



Over 100 Local Geodiversity Sites have been identified throughout Edinburgh and the Lothians over 25 years, the result of collaboration between Local Authorities, volunteers and the British Geological Survey. Designation of these sites is important for a range of reasons. Potentially damaging development proposals can take specific geodiversity interest into account at an early stage. However the value of identifying a network of local sites goes beyond planning, and activity in the Lothian area shows how these sites can form a focus for promotional activities such as events and publications.

*“City of Edinburgh Council is proud of our long standing and effective partnership with the volunteers of Lothian and Borders GeoConservation. Our network of Local Geodiversity Sites ensures that Edinburgh’s geodiversity is protected and promoted, enabling Edinburgh’s geodiversity to be enjoyed by all.” Julie Dewar, Senior Planner, City of Edinburgh Council.*

### Local Geodiversity Sites – what are they and why are they important?

Local Geodiversity Sites are places where the variety of geology of the local area can be enjoyed and appreciated. They are places with a significant and notable geological feature – rock, landform, soil/sediment or natural process. They are often highly valued as recreational spaces, and can have strong potential for educational use to explore stories of the local landscape.

#### They are important:

**For Planners:** a Local Geodiversity Site network provides a robust mechanism to ensure that the value of geodiversity is given appropriate recognition. Scottish Planning Policy includes an expectation that Local Authorities will notify sites for their geodiversity value: *“Local nature conservation sites designated for their geodiversity should be selected for their value for scientific study and education, their historical significance and cultural and aesthetic value, and for their potential to promote public awareness and enjoyment.”* (Scottish Planning Policy 2014, policy 198.)

**For Teachers, Educators and Countryside Rangers:** well-presented, accessible information can highlight significant resources for learning, and for enhancing recreational experiences.

**For the Geoscience Community:** identifying, designating and supporting ongoing management of Local Geodiversity Sites helps to protect, celebrate and share important resources and knowledge. Partnership approaches can also identify resources to support further activity, for example in relation to interpretation, research and education.

#### In Partnership – Local Authorities working with local specialists

The first Local Geodiversity Sites (then called RIGS) were designated in Edinburgh between 1994 and 2004, such as Craighleith Quarry and Corstorphine Hill. The British Geological Survey undertook the first systematic survey of local sites in Scotland in 2006, for West Lothian Council: over 200 potential sites were considered and a network of 51 selected as being representative of particular geodiversity features in the context of West Lothian. This was followed by a smaller survey in West Edinburgh, and a comprehensive East Lothian audit in 2015.

Volunteers from Lothian and Borders GeoConservation Group work closely with Local Authorities, providing the geoscience expertise necessary to propose and assess sites so that they can be integrated in the planning system.



*Not all LGS are natural bedrock exposures: the Balm Well in Edinburgh is a natural oil seep with important historical connections as a place for treatment for people with skin diseases.*

## Planning and Protection – different approaches

Local Authorities take different paths to including Local Geodiversity Sites in their planning.

**City of Edinburgh Council** designated 30 Local Geodiversity Sites as Local Nature Conservation Sites, including each site in a Proposals Map associated with the 2016 Local Development Plan. A specific Environment Policy sets out the protection given to landscape and geological features of local importance.

**West Lothian Council** adopted the West Lothian Local Development Plan in September 2018. This includes an Environment Policy with a presumption against development affecting areas of regional or local natural heritage importance such as Local Biodiversity and Local Geodiversity Sites, or their settings. Supplementary Guidance on Green Networks is to be published including site boundaries and citations covering specific geological merit, socio-economic value and recommendations for retention and interpretation.

**East Lothian Council's** Local Development Plan (September 2018) fully integrates geodiversity and biodiversity within its Natural Heritage policies. Sites designated in the 2015 Geodiversity Audit as Local Nature Conservation Sites are shown on the Proposals Map, with those of national importance given the same status as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

## Sharing, Promoting, Celebrating

Local Geodiversity Sites offer opportunities to stimulate interest in geology and share its importance and relevance at a community (and national) level. In the Lothian area many sites are publicly accessible. Collectively they showcase the variety of local geology, including historical links (e.g. former quarries that have supplied building stone), globally significant elements of the story of geology, and popular recreational venues such as the East Lothian coast.

Local Authorities have worked with the Lothian and Borders GeoConservation Group to develop 25 leaflets; volunteers have attended events, organised activities at environment fairs, and led visits to local sites.

This work presents a model for Local Authorities throughout Scotland to value and protect the diversity of geology in their stewardship.



*The Witch Craig Wall in the Bathgate Hills, West Lothian, is designated as a Local Geodiversity Site. This special viewpoint includes 43 different rocks collected from locations visible from here.*

## Further information

- [Lothian and Borders GeoConservation \(LBGC\)](#) is a committee of the Edinburgh Geological Society. The LBGC Committee includes representatives from Local Authorities and Scottish Natural Heritage, and coordinates the designation of Local Geodiversity Sites. The LBGC Volunteer Group promotes these sites through publications and events.
- [The Scottish Geodiversity Forum](#) is a network of individuals and local groups that promotes Scotland's geodiversity and organises network and training events.
- Local Development Plans are available online for [City of Edinburgh Council](#), [West Lothian Council](#) and [East Lothian Council](#).
- Scottish Natural Heritage – information on geodiversity and [Local Geodiversity Action Plans](#).
- [British Geological Survey – support for Geodiversity Audits](#)

*Scotland's Geodiversity Charter presents a vision that geodiversity is “recognised as an integral and vital part of our environment, economy, heritage and future sustainability to be safeguarded for existing and future generations in Scotland”. The Charter was first published in 2012, and refreshed in 2017. It is currently supported by 93 signatory organisations. Further information at [scottishgeodiversityforum.org/charter/](http://scottishgeodiversityforum.org/charter/).*

