

West Lothian leads in Scotland

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Scotland's first Local Geodiversity Action Plan – the West Lothian Geodiversity Framework – is nearing completion. With help from West Lothian Council, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Lothian and Borders RIGS Group, the British Geological Survey (BGS) has finished the geodiversity audit and the associated report; the GIS & database and outline action plan are well advanced. The project, funded by the Scottish Executive Aggregates Levy Fund and BGS, assesses the state of geodiversity in the area in its local to national context, and its relevance to biodiversity, soil conservation and other protection designations. The audit will inform sustainable planning and development, management, conservation and interpretation of the Earth heritage of the area.

Beyond West Lothian, both the North West Highland Geopark and the Lochaber Geopark Association are actively considering local geodiversity audits and action plans for their respective areas. Across the Sound of Sleat, the Broadford and Strath Landscape Partnership on the Isle of Skye are interested in including a geodiversity audit as part of their Heritage Lottery Fund bid. Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority will also include geodiversity as a theme in their Park Plan.

On a national level we expect the new Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) regime to be an important driver for future geodiversity work. SEA is a systematic process for identifying, predicting, reporting and mitigating the environmental impacts of public sector plans and programmes.

The Consultation Authorities have a key role – Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) will advise on "... landscape and geological features (indicating if appropriate where these are the subject of national or international protection)... and where relevant, the soil, water, and material assets that are necessary to support these environmental features". The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) will advise on "...soil (land), water and air". SEA Regulations came into force in July 2004 and the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Bill is currently at committee stage in the Scottish Parliament. SEA is also a key part of the Scottish Executive's White Paper "Modernising the Planning System".

Geodiversity in England and Wales has received a welcome boost from the recent publication of Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation. In Scotland, we may soon have an opportunity to raise geodiversity awareness by input to the Scottish Executive's review and consolidation of existing natural heritage planning guidance (NPPG 14 Natural Heritage and NPPG 13 Coastal Planning).

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View taken from the volcanic Bathgate Hills across West Lothian's gently undulating lowlands underlain by varied Carboniferous sedimentary rocks to the Firth of Forth and beyond.

The varied volcanic and sedimentary geology underlying West Lothian has historically had a major influence on the development of the region, particularly the extraction of oil-shale which resulted in the world's first oil refinery to be located here. As demands on the landscape change from extraction to development and tourism, it is equally important that we are aware of what lies beneath and has shaped our landscape to use it to it's best potential. **BGS photograph ©NERC.**