

Integrating geodiversity into the planning system: An example from west Lothian, Scotland

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West Lothian's Carboniferous bedrock and superficial deposits display a variety of Earth heritage features set within a varied landscape. In the first project of its kind in Scotland, this local geodiversity was audited by the British Geological Survey (BGS) in partnership with West Lothian Council (WLC), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Borders RIGS Group (LaBRIGS).

The main objectives of the audit were to: initiate Scottish geodiversity auditing and action planning and act as a guide to further work in other areas of the country; allow incorporation of geodiversity into the development planning system along side and through integration with the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process, and; guide the sustainable management, conservation and interpretation of all aspects of the Earth heritage of West Lothian.

A total of 51 sites were selected as West Lothian Geodiversity Sites (WLGS) to complement and expand the existing network of four nationally designated sites (SSSIs) and five locally protected sites (RIGS).

Key benefits of protection and enhancement of local geodiversity include:

Enhancement of local biodiversity

Enhance understanding of historical, cultural and social significance of local earth resources

Recreation and green space provision and enhancement

Educational and scientific value

Potential economic development through tourism by linking geodiversity with cultural history, wildlife and archaeology

Together, BGS, WLC, SNH and LaBRIGS will set up Scotland's first LGAP partnership, implement the West Lothian LGAP, and produce geodiversity best-practice guidance for planners. For European Geoparks, a geodiversity audit is a very useful tool for Geopark development.