

Scotland's Geodiversity Charter: a step forward for Scottish Geoparks

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ABSTRACT

Scotland's Geodiversity Charter was launched in June 2012 to demonstrate and promote the wider values of Scotland's geological heritage. The four main aims of the charter are to raise awareness of the importance of geodiversity, integrate geodiversity into relevant policies, conserve and enhance geodiversity, and to improve our understanding of the wider role of geodiversity.

Led by the voluntary geoconservation sector through the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, the Charter has over 45 signatories to date including public bodies, NGOs, industry and landowner representatives, geoconservation groups and Geoparks. Both Shetland Geopark and North West Highlands Geopark are actively embracing the aims of the charter, primarily by raising awareness of geodiversity and through the integration of geoconservation into relevant policies, both locally and regionally.

Ultimately, Scotland's Geodiversity Charter will encourage a large number of stakeholders to work together to provide positive benefits for both people and the environment.

KEY WORDS: Scotland, geodiversity, Geopark Shetland, North West Highlands Geopark

INTRODUCTION

The role and relevance of the conservation and promotion of geodiversity have gained much greater appreciation throughout Europe in the last decade. The significant role that geodiversity plays in relation to landscape, biodiversity, economic development, climate change adaptation, the built and cultural heritage, and people's health and well-being was recognized in the **European Manifesto on Earth Heritage and Geodiversity (2004)**.

At an international level the importance of geological heritage has also been highlighted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe particularly when implementing the European Landscape Convention, and also by the IUCN who have identified that "the conservation and management of geological heritage needs to be integrated by governments into their national goals

and programmes" (IUCN 2008).

In addition, since 2004 the Global Geoparks Network (GGN), supported by UNESCO, has been promoting geodiversity as a tool for sustainable tourism and economic development, and to demonstrate the wider influence of geodiversity on society (McKeever et al. 2010).

SCOTTISH GEODIVERSITY FORUM

Scotland's geological heritage has long been recognized by the geological community as being internationally important, notably in the Geological Conservation Review (Ellis 2011). However, relatively little consideration has been given to the wider value of such geodiversity, except by a few select enlightened organizations and individuals. The Scottish Geodiversity Forum was established in 2011 to address this issue, and aims to promote and widen the influence of Scotland's geodiversity in addition to providing a mechanism to influence national and local policies in education, community involvement and health, the development of tourism and the wider economy. There are three key areas of the Forum's work: 1) local site conservation, Government and Local Authority policy and Geodiversity Action Planning; 2) geodiversity interpretation and tourism development; and 3) events for young people and families.

Members of the Forum include local geoconservation groups, the industry, education and academic sectors, related government and non-governmental organizations, interested individuals as well as the two Scottish Global Geoparks, Geopark Shetland and North West Highlands Geopark.

SCOTLAND'S GEODIVERSITY CHARTER

In recognition of the value of Scotland's geodiversity, the voluntary geoconservation sector, through the Scottish Geodiversity Forum and facilitated by key organizations such as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the British

Geological Survey (BGS) and the Scottish Government took the lead in developing Scotland's Geodiversity Charter.

Developed to demonstrate and promote the wider values of geoheritage, Scotland's Geodiversity Charter also sets out a more integrated and strategic approach to the conservation of geodiversity and landscape, and the associated biodiversity. In a report prepared by SNH and the BGS it was demonstrated that geodiversity delivers or underpins many different types of ecosystem service and provides a wide range of benefits for society and the environment (Gordon & Barron 2011). Furthermore, the provision of a strategic framework would highlight the wider role and benefits of geodiversity and associated geoconservation activities, and would facilitate their

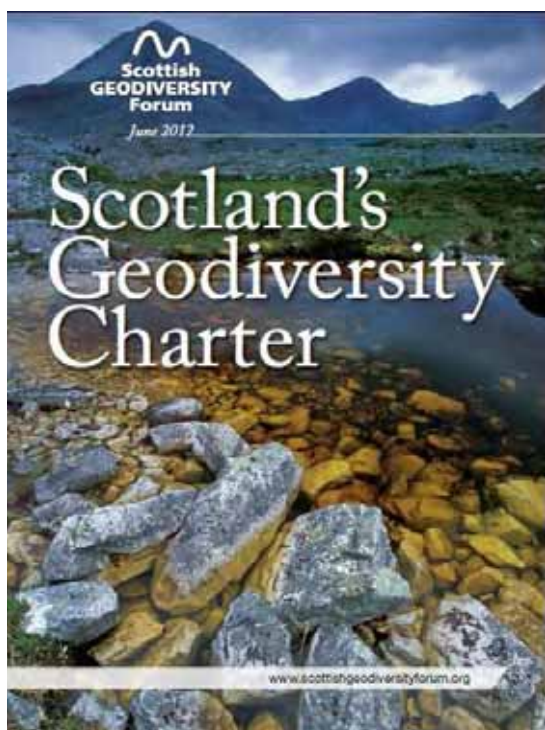


Fig. 1 – Scotland's Geodiversity Charter

integration into the existing policy framework (Gordon & Barron 2012).

Signatories of the charter commit to maintaining and enhancing geodiversity as well as recognizing its contribution to natural heritage, habitats and species, adaptation to changes in climate, sustainable economic development, historical and cultural development, and public health. In addition, the Charter encourages determined and collective action from all sectors to ensure that Scottish geodiversity is adequately conserved and promoted.

There are four main areas of activity within the Charter:

1. Raising awareness of the importance of geodiversity and its wider links with landscape, culture and sense of place, and encouraging a sense of pride through education

(at all levels including schools, universities and life-long learning, promotion and interpretation;

2. Integration of geodiversity in relevant policies to ensure sustainable management of the natural heritage, land and water at a landscape/ecosystem scale for the wider benefit of Scotland's people, environment and the economy;

3. Conservation and enhancement of our geoheritage and its special character within existing designated sites and areas, by further designation of local sites, and in the wider rural, urban and marine environments; and

4. Research to improve our understanding of the role of geodiversity in providing benefits to ecosystems and people, and to address key knowledge gaps such as the functional links between geodiversity and biodiversity in terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments.

Scotland's Geodiversity Charter was launched by Stewart Stevenson MSP, Minister for Environment and Climate Change in June 2012. There are now over 45 signatories to the Charter, including public bodies, NGOs, industry and landowner representative groups, geoconservation groups and of course, Geoparks.

GLOBAL GEOPARKS IN SCOTLAND

Scotland has two UNESCO-endorsed Global Geoparks, both of which are signatories to, and whose key strategic aims align very closely with Scotland's Geodiversity Charter. The aim of all Global Geoparks is to use their geological heritage as a tool for sustainable development and economic development, and at the same time, actively promote and protect not only the geodiversity, but also the biodiversity, and the built and cultural heritage of the area.

Within the context of Scotland's Geodiversity Charter, the key strategic aims of Scottish Global Geoparks are to help conserve Scotland's geological heritage and highlight its links with natural and cultural heritage. At the same time the Scottish Geoparks aim to derive economic and social benefits from sustainable use of Scotland's geological heritage, and to work with stakeholders such as communities, schools and other organizations to realize Geopark potential through a range of projects and activities.

Geopark Shetland

Shetland is a group of more than 100 islands, and a community of around 22,000 people. It has long been recognized for its wildlife and archaeology and since 2010 for Geopark Shetland.

Geopark Shetland played a key role in developing Scotland's Geodiversity Charter and has made significant achievements in delivering some of the key strategic aims,

most notably in raising awareness, integration of geodiversity into relevant policies and in the conservation and enhancement of geodiversity.

Some of the ways that Geopark Shetland has raised the awareness of Scotland's geodiversity include: 1) working with local authorities to provide gateway signage into the Geopark at both Sumburgh Airport and Northlinks Ferry Terminal; 2)



Fig. 2 – School pupils learning about Shetland's geodiversity in Geopark Shetland

provision of information for tourists and tourism providers on local geology; and 3) providing specialized outdoor learning opportunities for a wide ranging audience.

Policy integration has been achieved by including geodiversity within the Shetland Development Plan, and the Shetland Geosites register created by Shetland Geopark is now being used by the Shetland Islands Council Planning Department to offer local protection to sites of geological significance.

North West Highlands Geopark

North West Highlands Geopark is a company limited by



Fig. 3 – Interpretation panels along the Rock Route in the North West Highlands Geopark

guarantee, supported by the five community councils of the Geopark, together with the relevant statutory bodies and their representatives.

The North West Highlands Geopark has made significant achievements in helping to deliver the aims of the charter most notable through raising awareness of the area's geological heritage and also through the integration of geodiversity into relevant policy.

In association with SNH, the Geopark has developed a series of innovative geodiversity interpretation facilities including the Knockan Crag interpretation centre and the Rock Route, which is a series of interpretation panels along roadsides throughout the area. In addition to this, a very successful accredited evening geology course is organized, with special focus on the geology of the Geopark.

The Geopark is strongly supported by The Highland Council, the local authority responsible for one-third of the landmass of Scotland. Scotland's Geodiversity Charter was adopted as policy by the Council after a report was produced by the Environment and Development Strategy Committee, thus ensuring that the aims of the charter are incorporated into local authority policy.

CONCLUSIONS

Integration of geodiversity in wider policy and decision frameworks is now essential to ensure a more realistic approach to looking after our geological heritage. By taking a more holistic approach it means that geodiversity will be viewed in a broader context and its influence on biodiversity and landscapes as well as its contribution to broader environmental, economic and social issues will encourage stakeholders to work together to achieve a greater awareness and understanding of geodiversity so that it can deliver positive benefits for both people and the environment at local, national and international levels.

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