

Local Geodiversity Action Plans: a review of progress in England

Geodiversity is the variety of rocks, fossils, minerals, soils, landforms and processes which form the landscape. Local Geodiversity Action Plans (LGAPs) set out actions to conserve and enhance the geodiversity of a particular area. The concept of LGAPs was developed from the Biodiversity Action Plan model and has now been adopted across the UK. LGAPs provide a structured approach to local geoconservation delivery and aim to raise awareness and appreciation of geological sites and geoconservation. 23 LGAPs have been launched, focusing on county or other administrative areas. Company Geodiversity Action Plans (cGAPs) are also being developed for company land-holdings, with the initial focus on the aggregates industry.

What was done

The purpose of this study was to:

- review the current status and format of LGAPs
- evaluate their achievements and benefits
- identify what should happen next to assist LGAP development.

Background information for this research was obtained from two sources; published LGAPs and a questionnaire survey of the organisations/individuals responsible for the production and/or implementation of each LGAP.

Results and conclusions

A total of 41 LGAPs were identified and investigated. These comprised 23 launched LGAPs, 14 LGAPs in the process of development, and 4 proposed LGAPs. The majority of launched LGAPs were published between 2004 to 2007. Six of those in development are planned for launch in 2008.

The results of this survey show that:

- LGAPs are widely seen to be an effective mechanism for raising the profile of geodiversity with public, private and voluntary sector organisations, and in creating a

structured approach to the delivery of geoconservation at the local level.

- A broad understanding of the geology of the LGAP area needs to exist, or be acquired, before an LGAP can be developed. Additional information can then be acquired in future years and incorporated in any review of the LGAP. There is no evidence to suggest that an audit is required prior to the production of an LGAP.
- The purpose of LGAPs is to promote geodiversity and geoconservation to a wide, and sometimes inexpert audience, especially within the public sector. If LGAPs are to be effective, they should be pitched at a level that takes account of the geological knowledge of this audience and presented in a way that can capture peoples' imagination and interest.
- Funding has been made available from a variety of sources to facilitate the production of LGAPs, but it is becoming apparent that there is often a lack of resources for implementation, impacting both on budgets for specific projects and on the availability of staff time to manage the delivery process.
- Some local authorities in Devon have developed an integrated biodiversity and geodiversity action plan on the grounds this is a more intuitive approach

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and better reflects the interdependence between biodiversity and geodiversity interests. A down-side of such an approach is that it may lead to geodiversity issues being subsumed within a more high profile biodiversity agenda.

Conclusions

Local Geodiversity Action Plans have been launched, or are in the process of development, across many parts of England. They are widely seen as being an effective mechanism for raising the profile of geoconservation and promoting a structured partnership approach to the protection, management and interpretation of geological features. Key problems relate to LGAP implementation and in some cases, these are leading to disillusionment and reduced motivation.

Given the widespread support for the concept of LGAPs, they clearly have the potential to play an important role in promoting and delivering geoconservation. If this potential is to be fully realised it is important for Natural England, in collaboration with partners, to address some of the outstanding issues that are hindering progress.

Specific actions could include:

- Reaching agreement with partners on the role that each should play in the development and implementation of LGAPs - this applies especially to the BGS, local authorities, local geoconservation organisations and Wildlife Trusts.
- Seeking to achieve greater coordination and integration between LGAPs and company GAPs.
- Seeking to achieve greater parity between geoconservation and biodiversity conservation, consistent with the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act and Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9).
- Looking at ways in which LGAP partnerships might engage more closely with BAP partnerships with a view to evolving a closer or more integrated relationship.
- Providing updated guidance on LGAP development and implementation.

- Establishing a consistent approach to LGAP monitoring to measure progress and demonstrate the success and challenges faced by LGAPs.

Natural England's viewpoint

This report provides a comprehensive review of the development and progress of LGAPs. It provides commentary on what has worked well in developing and implementing LGAPs and the challenges that have emerged.

Natural England welcomes the positive progress made in LGAP production from a starting point of one integrated action plan (Devon) in 2002.

Since the initiation of the LGAP process there has been wider recognition of the importance of LGAPs as a useful operational framework in the supporting guidance document for PPS9, the Defra local sites guidance and most recently (post completion of this research) as part of the guidance on the delivery of the Local Authority Performance Indicator for biodiversity. These are critical tools in providing additional profile, credibility and momentum to the LGAP process.

The report also identified a number of potential obstacles to progress including resource constraints (both funding and available time), over-reliance on the voluntary sector and a wider lack of commitment to the LGAP process and what it aims to achieve.

Natural England will take full account of the findings of this report in planning its work at national, regional and local levels and in formulation of policy and advocacy relating to geoconservation. Natural England will continue to help and encourage the development of LGAPs and sharing good practice and practical experience.

Natural England believes that a UKGAP could play an important role in providing context for LGAP production and will continue to work with partners to explore the feasibility of establishing a UKGAP.

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Selected references

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Further information

For the full details of the research covered by this information note see Natural England Research Report NERR027 - *Local Geodiversity Action Plans: a review of progress in England*.

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