
UKRIGS GEOCONSERVATION ASSOCIATION: DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION - GEODIVERSITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

A CODE OF PRACTICE FOR EARLY CONSULTATION

INTRODUCTION

In partnership with geologists, geomorphologists and soil scientists, developers have a key positive role to play in the conservation, preservation and enhancement of the UK's geodiversity for the benefit of the present and future generations as well as contributing towards sustainable development.

Development undertaken without consideration for existing geological features whether protected to some measure by nature conservation designations or not, can rapidly and needlessly damage and destroy them. However development can also create new exposures, both temporary and permanent, and the opportunity to utilise these for research, education or recreation.

This code sets out the procedures developers should follow wherever their proposals affect existing geological features or are likely to expose fresh sections through bedrock and unconsolidated deposits.

The code is relevant to all those involved in promoting new development; council officers, statutory bodies and government agencies, as well as private developers and voluntary organisations interested in nature conservation.

In every case, geodiversity matters can be considered most efficiently and cost effectively if discussions and consultations are held from the outset of planning for new development. At this stage it may become obvious that the development is too small to have significant effect on the local geodiversity or, regardless of size that no conservation interest is likely to be enhanced or degraded.

The key to the successful co-existence of new development and geodiversity is early consultation with the geodiversity/ biodiversity officer(s) in the Local Authority who will provide links to key bodies as appropriate, including Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage, British Geological Survey, UKRIGS Geoconservation Association and most importantly organisations at local level with geological interests such as RIGS Groups/ Geology Trusts, Geological Societies and Wildlife Trusts.

1. Local Authority Requirements for Geodiversity

Local Authorities are committed to the preservation, conservation and use of their unique geological heritage wherever possible. Policies in Strategic and Local Plans and in Environmental Strategy Statements provide the framework for protecting national and local geodiversity (as well as biodiversity) and the encouragement for their improvement and interpretation. The protection of soils is an increasing matter of urgency and consideration.

Geodiversity in this context includes the Bedrock Geology, Quaternary sub-soils such as sand & gravel and peat, Soils, and Geomorphological features and Landscapes. It can also include the built environment where local stone has been utilised although this aspect may be covered by archaeological policies. Traditional conservation of geodiversity is site based as SSSI's, RIGS (or equivalent designation), LNR's and SINCS etc. This code also applies more generally to subject themes in geodiversity, for example coal bearing rocks or raised bogs. Thus development may provide the opportunity to create new exposures of bedrock as conservation sections that previously were not available as natural sections or in quarries and pits.

Every site is likely to be different but policies may be used to require:

1.1 Conservation of existing designated geological sites

This will always be sought as a first option and can often be achieved by the sensitive design of new development. Planning permission may be refused where development proposals would result in unacceptable damage or loss of important geological sites or features and rare soils.

1.2 Site Geological Assessment

This is achieved by a desk-top study of all known information relating to the geology of a development site prior to planning application. It is reasonable for developers to fund geological recording work arising from their proposals as they already do for archaeology and biodiversity. Geodiversity should also be included in Environmental Appraisal Reporting.

1.3 Conservation by the recording of temporary exposures

This is achieved through sampling, photography, site mapping and recording. This will be required through planning condition or legal agreement where physical preservation cannot reasonably be achieved. It includes making available relevant geological factual information (preferably digitally) from site investigations to the site recorders and deposition in the National Records Archive held by the British Geological Survey and/or Local Records Centre.

2. Definition of Developers

All those who promote, facilitate or undertake new developments should consider themselves as developers in the context of this Code of Practice. Developers should therefore include:

- National Government departments, agencies and officers
- Local government departments and officers
- Statutory undertakers (Water, gas, electricity etc)
- Private sector developers (housing, commercial, industrial)

3. Activities that can affect Geological Sites or create New Sites

- Road schemes, rail links, canals, tunnels and related infrastructure including methods of protection from rockfall and landslip
- Water, gas, electricity and other energy infrastructure including Wind-Farms
- New building development; housing, commercial and industrial
- Derelict land reclamation schemes and other landscaping projects
- Tourism development of geological sites
- Landfill operations/tipping and discharge of any materials
- Agricultural and forestry activities, including planting and afforestation and grading or seeding of rock and other faces
- Council and other environmental improvement schemes of all types
- Council plans and policy formulation affecting geodiversity including geological sites and surface and subsurface geological features
- Council highways, building schemes/structural engineering services, including those affecting mines and caverns
- Council land and building acquisition, management and disposal/sale
- Council economic development activity
- Mineral extraction and quarrying
- Unsolicited removal of geological materials from sites, including commercial collecting and over collecting, legal or illicit
- Use of non-native hardcore on or adjacent to geological sites

4. All Developers should recognise....

- Obligation to assess the geological implications of development proposals at the earliest possible stage and to provide as full information as possible as to the likely impacts of the proposals
- Consultation of records held by the Local Authority or Local Ecological/Geological Records Centre, BGS and RIGS groups etc is the most effective way of accessing geological information
- Council requires that effective early consultations must have taken place between the Heritage Sector and prospective developers before schemes affecting geological features are offered for planning approval or brought towards implementation through the development process.
- It may be necessary for a full geological assessment to be undertaken of a development site prior to consideration of a planning application
- Council's first priority is the preservation and interpretation of geological sites and be prepared to discuss mitigation of any impact the development may have on significant geological features

- If the most appropriate course of action is deemed to be conservation by recording only, access and time will need to be made available by the developer. A contribution towards associated costs of conservation surveying may also be requested as is already the case with archaeological features..
- If it is deemed necessary to remove an existing geological feature in the course of development then where appropriate a new/alternative should be created in its place and the cost borne by the developer.
- Council will, if available internally, provide guidance on all geological matters or more likely will maintain a list of suitable expertise for site investigation and geological recording on behalf of developers, if requested.
- Council will provide developers with details of geological bodies and contractors capable of carrying out the necessary recording work
- Council will monitor or arrange to have monitored geological work carried out for the developers to ensure compliance with the specification and completion of any work to the satisfaction of the local planning authority.
- Council will require relevant geological factual information gathered during site investigations to be available to Site Recorders and to be lodged preferably in digital format with National Records Archive at the British Geological Survey and Local Ecological/Geological Records Centre.

5. What the Council will typically require

- Early Consultation on design and layout proposals
- Access to site before and during works for recording and sampling by agreed geological recording body.
- Design and layout to avoid damage to or obstruction of geological features and allow future access for scientific and educational purposes, where practical.
- Creation of equivalent replacement exposures where damage or destruction is unavoidable
- Consideration of opportunities to improve geological features and/or access to them
- Consideration of opportunities to create new geological features
- Provision for long-term maintenance and management of geological features
- Consideration of provision of interpretation of geodiversity heritage, appropriate to the scale of the development

Conditions and/ or planning obligations will be used to secure these requirements
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