



**PUBLIC PETITION NO.**

**PE01277**

### **Name of petitioner**

Mike Browne

### **Petition title**

Geodiversity duty

### **Petition summary**

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to through Scottish Planning Policies and Planning Advice Notes to establish a geodiversity duty which integrates all necessary local and national structures for the efficient collection, analysis and sharing of geodiversity data to inform better decision making processes.

### **Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition**

Discussion with Forward Scotland to access finance from the Aggregates Levy for local geodiversity audit work (as in England and Wales). Geodiversity only specifically included for financial support in last round; but not for site auditing.

West Lothian Geodiversity Audit/Action Plan funded by the Scottish Government from the levy after discussions between SNH, the British Geological Survey and local geodiversity voluntary body (Lothian and Borders Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) Group). UKRIGS Geoconservation Association dialogue with the Environment Cabinet Secretary, Richard Lochhead MSP: directed to Local Authority Single Outcome Agreements.

### **Petition background information**

[www.ukrigs.org.uk/html/ukrigs.php](http://www.ukrigs.org.uk/html/ukrigs.php)

The conservation of local geodiversity (the variety of rocks, fossils, minerals, landforms and soils, and all the natural processes that shape the landscape) in Scotland, unlike biodiversity, is under-represented and undervalued in current national planning guidance (in the Scottish Planning Policy documents and by the lack of a PAN for geodiversity). A consequence of this is that there are no duties on local authorities to protect and enhance their local geodiversity; funding for local geodiversity audits and action plans are difficult to obtain from any sources.

Unlike biodiversity there are no voluntary sector bodies like the RSPB and Scottish Wildlife Trust with a very public image together with substantial resources to support (local to national) geodiversity conservation. Also there are no Local Geodiversity Partnerships to parallel those of the biodiversity sector although one or two of the existing eight Scottish regional geodiversity groups function in a somewhat similar but immature manner. Likewise there is no Scottish Geodiversity Forum.

This situation reflects the lower profile for geodiversity and the fact that voluntary sector 'geo' groups have only been operating since the mid 1990's in Scotland with very limited human and almost no financial resources. However, largely as a result of unfunded voluntary activity, local geodiversity sites (LGS) are now being identified in southern Scotland (south of the Highland line) but only in genuinely representative numbers where our government (for West Lothian from Aggregates Levy) and local authorities (Edinburgh, East Dunbarton) have provided some funding for the site auditing process.

Recognising by auditing and officially designating LGS with the local authority not only allows conservation of local/regional geodiversity to take place but also ensures that in planning for development local geodiversity is a material matter taken into consideration even if the outcome of such decisions are sometimes unfavourable in the end.

Investment in LGS auditing has the potential for significant positive social outcomes: with very limited financial input, currently about 45 geodiversity walking leaflets have been published by local groups: these fit in with the 'green and blue gyms' health initiative approach. Opportunities for exercise through practical conservation work are being developed but currently at a low level of availability.

Working with educators such as the Scottish Earth Science Education Forum, our groups use local geodiversity sites to provide 'science outdoors' within the Curriculum for Excellence from primary school to Intermediate and Higher levels; but many more local sites need to be assessed to provide the local primary with its opportunity for an outdoor laboratory. In this respect, taking geodiversity to the local community (of all ages) is the best way of establishing value and care for our geodiversity heritage. BUT this needs help through explicit recognition for geodiversity in planning and good practice guidance from government and financial support from enough sources to speed this process to meaningful motion throughout Scotland.

In terms of the local structures we refer to in the petition text, I mean our local authorities because they effectively accept our voluntary groups' recommendations to designate and list local geodiversity sites; they also are responsible for the local plans that create the policies to protect listed sites (as with local biodiversity sites).

We are trying to influence their single outcome arrangements with national government but this is so recent that we have had no real impact. In terms of 'decision making processes', the reason for collecting data about local geodiversity sites and listing them as conservation sites with local authorities is to conserve those sites which are not quite good enough to be the exemplar (i.e. SSSI) for the particular features or are judged to be a local geodiversity asset within the local community; most of these sites will have potential for education and public enjoyment. So we are thinking about the councils and planning applications for the 'larger' scale proposals.

The local geodiversity site data might be collected by the group volunteers, the local authority (as Edinburgh and East Dumbarton are now doing), or even the government (West Lothian project).

We want to see conservation of the best of local geodiversity. However, if development goes ahead on a site with value for local geodiversity, we would like to think that there would be several levels of conservation happening:

1. The records of any site investigation (boreholes and trial pits) are made available to the national archive (British Geological Survey, Edinburgh) and potentially shared with interested parties.
2. Access to temporary excavations for recording (photography etc) of the temporarily exposed geodiversity features is offered to interested parties (subject to acceptable health and safety arrangements). and
3. In rare cases, site works (e.g. in quarries or opencast sites) through the planning process result in the production of 'conservation sections' as is currently intended at Spireslack Opencast Coal Site in Ayrshire.

**Unique web address**

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01277>

**Related information for petition**

**Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?**

**NO**

**How many signatures have you collected so far?**

344

**Closing date for collecting signatures online**

N/A

**Comments to stimulate online discussion**