

SGG Update No 13: May 2022



Working in partnership with Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) and Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) to encourage appreciation, conservation and promotion of the geology of Somerset <http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/>

Dear all

We have now largely completed our joint five-year project with SERC to review Somerset's existing Local Geology Sites (LGS) - a major achievement given the Coronavirus epidemic of the last two years! See final report below.

There are only a few tasks to complete over the summer and Garry Dawson, my SGG Co-coordinator, will be working on some additional columns for the project spreadsheet - to assist, for example, with identifying priorities for future activity, such as LGS where further review, site monitoring and/or practical conservation work is ideally needed.

Our next SGG network get-together will provisionally be on **Tues 11 October 2022**. We hope to share what everyone is doing and gather views on what SGG might best focus on in the next few years – with some potential themes already emerging from our LGS review project. Further details to come in the next *Update* in early September.

We are also sad to report the deaths of two of our SGG network members, Chris King and Clive Nicholas.

Chris, as many of you will know, was actively involved in developing Geo-week in recent years. This year it will run from 7 to 15 May 2022, but do consider it for events in future years (see box at the end of this newsletter for the web link).

Clive was a member of Devon RIGS, but was also on the SGG contact list we inherited in 2016. He led the *Geodiversity Audit of Active Aggregate Quarries in Somerset* project in 2003/4, for David Roche GeoConsulting, and wrote the 2004 Project Overview Report for it.

Review of Somerset's Local Geological Sites (LGS) – report for Year 5 (2021/22) of our joint project with SERC (final report).

NB reports for Years 1-4 and the initial preparatory year in 2016/17 can be found in earlier SGG Updates available on our web page on SERC's website.

In total we have reviewed 254 sites over the five years of the project (234 in Somerset plus 20 in the Devon part of the Exmoor National Park). There will now be c 221 in Somerset (plus 14 in the Devon part of the ENP), slightly less than the original figures due to a few de-designations and amalgamations.

The evidence base held by SERC for each LGS site is now much more comprehensive and the full forms will be sent (or at least offered) to the owner/manager where permission was granted for a site survey. Both the improved evidence and details being held by more owners are big steps forward on the past situation.

We held a final LGS Panel meeting in November 2021, when all but one of the remaining sites for South Somerset were considered. We had been unable to recruit SERC-based graduate volunteers for a second summer, but our team of SGG-sourced SERC volunteers made great progress with these remaining LGS (see *Update No 12*).

A few final LGS (in Somerset West & Taunton and Sedgemoor districts) were then reviewed by the Panel via email in March.

Wesley Harris, our Local Geology Sites (LGS) Project Officer, finished his two-day per week contract with SERC at the end of April and has been able to complete the bulk of the post-LGS Panel processing stages needed at SERC.

The only remaining task will be emailing the last few forms to landowners, where they have granted permission for survey (or writing to offer to email them, where no email address is currently held).

About 150 of these forms for the Somerset LGS have or will be sent (or offered) and Leon DeBell,

SERC's manager, has undertaken to organize sending the last few over the summer.

Identifying ownership and following up the initial approach proved a time-consuming task and SERC has had limited resources for this, so in many cases a line needed to be drawn. Our review has therefore needed to be as a desk study, with reconnaissance information where possible, where ownership could not be traced, or where a reply was not forthcoming.

A good percentage of owners were contacted for Exmoor and other more westerly parts of Somerset, but in the case of South Somerset and Mendip districts c 50 per cent of the LGS have needed to be reviewed as desk and reconnaissance studies only.

In some instances, where for example there was a public footpath, this was quite adequate. In other cases, for example cuttings on active railway lines, assessment was by desk exercise only, but again these were often straightforward candidates for reconfirmation.

Precautionary approach – LGS can be of regional to more local interest and the LGS Panel has needed to develop a consistent approach across the county. It therefore adopted a robust but precautionary approach, especially where review was possible only as a desk study. Only a few of the original selection of LGS in the 1990s (then RIGS) have therefore been recommended for de-designation. In other cases, additional work is ideally needed and the LGS have been reconfirmed with a note indicating that further work beyond the scope of this review is ideally required.

Boundary adjustments – LGS need a clearly defined and accurate boundary as a planning designation, and we have made several adjustments for accuracy along the way. In Mendip AONB/district in particular boundary adjustments have been made to c 30 of the 54 LGS reconfirmed, with about 15 of these quite substantial, including corrections where the SERC digital boundary had been developed at slightly the wrong location or as, for example a generalised oval, but where our more detailed work has indicated that originally a more precise area was intended.

Area reports - Two further area reports, for the Mendip and South Somerset areas have also been completed for project partners. Shortened versions of both will be developed over the summer to be added as pdfs to SGG's page on the SERC web site (along with the Exmoor and Quantocks area reports already available there).

Tips for other counties - It is worth realizing that our review has been a very substantial project - roughly equivalent to a full-time post for six years (including the development year), with over two thirds of the input being on a voluntary basis.

It was only possible to develop the project and complete it in this way, because the three of us that attended the meeting organized by Andy King in 2016 to re-establish SGG (where the need for a full review was agreed) happened by chance to be at the right stages of our retirement to have time to commit to help organize it. Then part way through the project, as the scale and value of the work became more apparent, SERC was able to allocate some core funding to establish the temporary part-time paid post for the project.

Close partnership working and team work has also been critical in enabling us to maintain a consistent approach across the county - and Garry is organizing a small celebratory event for us in June to bring together those who have been actively involved. We hope especially that some of the graduate volunteers from the first three years will be able to join us.

We will, of course, be happy to share our experience in more detail with other counties if they are considering similar projects – and have been gathering views from those actively involved with our project to help with that.

The future

We held a final LGS Steering Group meeting for the project in February and it will meet again in February 2023 – to look at making the best use of the review information in the future and at how we might handle any potential new LGS. We also agreed to continue the LGS Panel, which will meet as and when necessary.

By this time next year (ie starting in April 2023) we will also have a new Somerset unitary

authority to liaise with, which will replace the current planning authorities of Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West & Taunton and South Somerset. Exmoor National Park Authority will remain a planning authority in its own right.

Thanks - our thanks to all those from SGG and SERC who have helped with the LGS Review: our SERC-based graduate and student volunteers in the first three years; SERC staff; SGG volunteers who have assisted as SERC volunteers with site reviews; other SGG members who have helped with site information and in other ways; to all those who have assisted with funding, including contributions from: the Curry Fund of the Geologists' Association; the Pat Hill-Cottingham Memorial Fund of Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society; Exmoor National Park Authority; the Quantocks and Mendips Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; South Somerset District Council Community Fund; Wessex Water; and Geckoella geological consultancy; and to all those who have assisted with help in kind, such as hosting meetings, including the Mendip-based Somerset Earth Sciences Centre, information on GCR sites from Natural England and initial advice from GeoConservationUK.

Other activity

Ham Hill - Our LGS review was timed to help with the Country Park's second-stage Lottery bid and we are now a member of the Park's consultative group. Sheila Alderman and myself attended a meeting for the first time in October.

Nature Recovery Areas - New Local Nature Recovery Strategies are being developed and we are trying to keep in the loop as these changes happen in Somerset. We are encouraging the inclusion of geological SSSIs and LGS, as well as biological SSSIs and Local Wildlife Sites, within the forthcoming Nature Recovery Areas.

We have also recently contributed our views on the Government's *Nature Recovery Green Paper*,

on which DEFRA is currently consulting, to GeoConservationUK.

Events

As mentioned in our last *Update*, a new UNESCO-recognized International Geo-diversity Day will take place for the first time on 6 October 2022. We hope the box below may be useful to help with ideas and timing for those organizing geo-conservation and related activities.

Wendy Lutley, Coordinator

- **International Geodiversity Day – 6 Oct 2022** - <https://www.geodiversityday.org/>
- **GeoWeek** - <https://earth-science.org.uk/geoweeek/> - a week of activities in May
- **Earth Science Week** - <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/Policy-and-Media/Earth-science-week-2021> - a week usually in October
- **Mendip Rocks Festival** – see <http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/event/s/> and/or <https://www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk/mendip-rocks> - a programme usually running from the summer into the autumn
- **South West Open University Geological Society (SW OUGS)** - see <https://ougs.org/events/>
- **Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS)** - see <http://www.sanhs.org/>

See also Graeme Churchard's events calendar <http://westcountrygeology.com/> and his blog at <https://geologywestcountry.blogspot.com/>. You can contact Graeme from there to submit an event or request publicity.

The Geologists' Association's website also has inspiration and ideas: from geo-walks, and guides to them, to *Geology from your sofa* - see <https://geologistsassociation.org.uk/>

NB Not intended to be comprehensive.

SGG is a member of **GeoConservationUK** (<https://geoconservationuk.org/>) which *encourages the appreciation, conservation & promotion of local/regional geological and geomorphological sites for education & public benefit*. We also aim to encourage delivery in Somerset of the UK Geodiversity Action Plan www.ukgap.org.uk and England Geodiversity Charter www.englishgeodiversityforum.org. Our Web page with previous *Updates* and reports is at <http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/>.