



## Final report on the Review of Somerset's Local Geological Sites (LGS) 2016 - 2022

*extracted from Somerset Geology Group (SGG)'s Update No 13 (May 2022) covering Year 5 (2021/22) of the review. NB reports for Years 1-4 and the initial preparatory year in 2016/17 can be found in earlier SGG Updates available on its 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). *(NB a further Taunton area report was finalized in 2023 to provide complete coverage for the county.)*

**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 SGG Co-coordinator, Garry Dawson, 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.

*Wendy Lutley, SGG Co-coordinator and a SERC key volunteer for the project*

**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.