Protection of Quaternary Sites

Quaternary sites in the UK are protected through a variety of statutory and non-statutory designations.

Assessment of nationally and internationally important sites for geoscience research and education in Great Britain was conducted through the Geological Conservation Review (GCR) and in Northern Ireland through the Earth Science Conservation Review (ESCR). The statutory nature conservation agencies (Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage) are responsible for providing statutory protection for GCR sites through their designation as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Out of a total of c.3000 GCR sites, 564 were selected for their Quaternary interests and a further 301 for geomorphology and geomorphological processes; most but not all have been designated as SSSIs. ESCR sites are designated as Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) by the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland. Out of a total of c.350 ESCR sites, 114 are selected for Quaternary and geomorphology interests; over half have been designated as ASSIs.

Locally important geosites (known as Local Sites or Local Geological/Geodiversity sites in England, as Local Geodiversity Sites in Scotland and as Regionally Important Geodiversity Sites (RIGS) in Wales) do not have the same level of statutory protection as SSSIs. They do not fulfil the strict designation criteria set for SSSIs but are nevertheless of significant value at a regional or local level. They have discretionary protection under planning guidance and their value lies in the fact that they can be designated for a much broader range of criteria than SSSIs, including their educational, aesthetic and historical significance. Many Local Sites include important Quaternary landforms, features and stratigraphy and are often managed by local geoconservation groups.

Although not a protected area category as such, Geoparks are areas with outstanding geoheritage established primarily to combine conservation of geoheritage with promotion of geotourism to support sustainable local economic and cultural development. Geoparks may wholly, or in part, include protected areas and help to ensure their conservation. They may be set up through community-led initiatives or top-down designation. Currently in the UK there are 7 members of the European Geoparks Network (EGN), part of the wider Global Network of National Geoparks or Global Geoparks Network (GGN), assisted by UNESCO. The GGN provides an international framework of accreditation and standards for Geoparks. Geoparks provide opportunities for geotourism, interpretation, research, connecting people to the landscape, and sustaining local economies. The international importance of Quaternary sites and landscapes may also be recognised through their inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List (e.g. the Jurassic Coast).

For further information, see:

Natural England: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/

Scottish Natural Heritage: http://www.snh.gov.uk/

Natural Resources Wales: http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/

Northern Ireland Environment Agency: http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/land-home/earth_science.htm

Joint Nature Conservation Committee: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/

The European Geoparks Network: http://www.europeangeoparks.org/

Global Network of National Geoparks: http://www.globalgeopark.org/

UNESCO Earth Sciences: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/earth-sciences/global-geoparks/

See also: Brown, E.J., Gordon, J.E., Burek, C.V., Campbell, S. & Bridgland, D.R. (2014). Geoconservation and the Quaternary Research Association. In: Catt, J.A. & Candy, I. (eds), *The History of the Quaternary Research Association*. Quaternary Research Association, London, 405-431.