

**15<sup>th</sup> JANUARY, 2019**

**Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project**

**Ward(s)                      All**

**Portfolios:**    Cllr Louise Harrison – Clean and Green

**Executive Summary:**

This report gives an overview of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project.

UNESCO Global Geoparks are areas of geological significance, administered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

In November 2015, the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA) submitted an application to UNESCO for Global Geopark status for the Black Country. Following assessments during 2016, UNESCO deferred the application in May 2017, giving two years for the management team to respond to seven recommendations.

To demonstrate to UNESCO that the partners of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project are unified and co-ordinated, it is proposed that they enter into a Partnership Agreement or similar.

**Reason for scrutiny:**

The Chairman has requested that a report on the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for information and comment.

**Recommendations:**

**That:**

1. That the Committee welcomes ABCA's application to UNESCO for Global Geopark status for the Black Country.

**Background papers:**

None.

## **Resource and legal considerations:**

### Financial implications

ABCA agreed in November 2015 and August 2017 that the Black Country Councils make an on-going specific financial commitment dedicated to co-ordination and administration of the UNESCO Global Geopark Project. These costs include a minimum of £1,500 per Council per year, and a four-year commitment of £32,000 (£8,000 per Council per year) for a Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project Officer. Walsall Council's contribution is built into the revenue budget held by the Economy and Environment Directorate.

The Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project Management Team comprises officers of the partner organisations. The costs of Walsall Council staff on the Management Team and who undertake maintenance and management work of Walsall Council's geosites are built into the revenue budget held by the Economy and Environment Directorate. The application and supporting information submitted to UNESCO have been prepared by Management Team, with Dudley MBC acting as the lead authority.

It is difficult to predict the additional income that UNESCO Global Geopark status could bring to the Black Country, but the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark management team estimates that it adds in excess of £1.2m to Torbay's economy.

### Staffing implications

A Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project Officer will be employed by Dudley Council, as the lead authority. Staff of the Economy and Environment Directorate represent Walsall Council on the Management Team and undertake maintenance and management work of Walsall Council's geosites.

### Legal implications

UNESCO Global Geopark is not a legislative designation – though the defining geological heritage sites within a UNESCO Global Geopark must be protected under indigenous, local, regional or national legislation as appropriate. UNESCO Global Geopark status does not imply restrictions on any economic activity inside a UNESCO Global Geopark where that activity complies with such legislation.

## **Council Corporate Plan Priorities:**

The Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project contributes to the following strategic priorities in the Corporate Plan 2018/21:

- Economic Growth for all people, communities and businesses. An infrastructure and business environment that supports job creation and accessibility throughout Walsall, supporting company expansion, relocation and competitiveness through sustainable job creation.

The Black Country played a very significant role in the Industrial Revolution and retains many traditional industrial activities and related communities.

UNESCO Global Geopark status for the Black Country would also boost the visitor economy sector.

- Communities are prospering and resilient with all housing needs met in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion. Access and use of green spaces improves health and wellbeing, and reduces social isolation.

UNESCO Global Geopark status for the Black Country would reinforce the strong senses of pride and unity across the area. Geosites will be continue to be managed for nature conservation and public benefits.

### **Citizen impact:**

UNESCO Global Geopark status for the Black Country would improve the quality of people's lives, bring economic benefits and contribute to physical and mental health and well-being.

There is considerable evidence that safe, clean spaces encourage people to visit more and therefore offer significant health benefits. Geosites offer places for informal recreation and quiet relaxation, benefiting physical health and mental wellbeing. There is evidence that access to good quality local spaces can help people live longer and green spaces can provide solutions to redress worsening public health.

### **Environmental impact:**

Securing UNESCO Global Geopark status for the Black Country would have significant positive environmental impact across the area. The geological heritage of the Black Country would be recognised internationally, bringing increased opportunities to promote and raise awareness of the geological and related heritage of the area.

UNESCO Global Geopark status would increase the potential of securing additional resources to our geosites (features or areas with geological or related heritage significance) for environmental and public benefit.

UNESCO Global Geoparks also contribute to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG – see table below). Part of their 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SDGs are a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all and address a number of global challenges.

### **Performance management:**

Scrutiny of the Council's efforts towards securing UNESCO Global Geopark status for the Black Country will help promote efficiency of service delivery. The Project has developed and evolved in response to UNESCO's recommendations and will continue to adapt and respond to future challenges.

### **Reducing inequalities:**

State here the potential effect of the scrutiny exercise on the management of the Council's performance in respect of service delivery, policy, etc.

### **Reducing inequalities:**

Geosites reflect the heritage significance of a UNESCO Global Geopark, helping to shape a sense of place and contributing to civic pride. They have a key role to play in bringing people together on common ground, uniting diverse communities through activities, education, celebrations, cultural events and engagement. They are also open to all and no Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out.

### **Consultation:**

The following Council services have been consulted in preparing the Cabinet Report:

- Legal Services
- Finance
- Property Services
- Public Health
- Human Resources
- Planning, Transport and Engineering
- Development Management
- Leisure, Culture and Operations
- Communications

Partner organisations of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project Management Team have been involved throughout the process.

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## Report

### 1. UNESCO Global Geopark

- 1.1 UNESCO Global Geoparks are as defined '*single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed.* They combine conservation with sustainable development, while involving local communities. At present, there are 140 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 38 countries and there are seven in the United Kingdom (UK).
- 1.2 UNESCO's work with geoparks began in 2001. In 2004, 17 European and eight Chinese geoparks came together to form the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) where national geological heritage initiatives contribute to and benefit from their membership of a global network of exchange and co-operation.
- 1.3 In 2015, the 195 Member States of UNESCO (including the UK) ratified the creation of a new label: UNESCO Global Geoparks. This expresses governmental recognition of the importance of managing outstanding geological sites and landscapes in a holistic manner. UNESCO supports Member States' efforts to establish UNESCO Global Geoparks, in close collaboration with the GGN.
- 1.4 Such high profile world class status raises the profile and appeal of an area and can have a very significant impact on the visitor economy. UNESCO Global Geoparks must have a sustainable development strategy, with a strong management structure that can ensure their long-term protection.
- 1.5 UNESCO Global Geoparks contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Part of their 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the 17 SDGs (see table below) are a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all and address a number of global challenges.

1	No Poverty – end poverty in all its forms everywhere
2	Zero Hunger – end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
3	Good Health and Well-Being for People – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4	Quality Education – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5	Gender Equality – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6	Clean Water and Sanitation – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7	Affordable and Clean Energy – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9	Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure – Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation
10	Reducing Inequalities – Reduce income inequality within and among countries
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable
12	Responsible Consumption and Production – Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13	Climate Action – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by regulating emissions and promoting developments in renewable energy

14	Life Below Water – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15	Life on Land – Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17	Partnerships for the Goals – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

## **2. Association of Black Country Authorities**

2.1 UNESCO only accepts applications from organisations that cover the whole territory of an aspiring Global Geopark. For the Black Country, this is the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA), which consists of the elected Leaders from Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council and Wolverhampton City Council, supported by the Chief Executives of all four Councils.

2.2 The objectives of ABCA are:

- To provide a forum for discussion of matters of common interest to member authorities
- To provide a means of co-ordination joint action and working between member authorities
- To consult and liaise with other bodies on behalf of the joint interests of member authorities
- To represent the collective views of member authorities
- To provide the governance route for professional officer groups working on a joint basis e.g. the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project

## **3. Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project**

3.1 At its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2013, ABCA agreed to support Dudley Council to make an application on behalf of the partners of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project, namely:

- Dudley Council
- Sandwell Council
- Walsall Council
- Wolverhampton City Council
- Natural England
- Black Country Consortium Limited
- Canal and River Trust
- The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country
- Birmingham and the Black Country Local Nature Partnership

3.2 It was agreed by ABCA in November 2015 and August 2017 that the Councils make an on-going specific financial commitment dedicated to the UNESCO Global Geopark Project co-ordination and administration. These costs include a minimum of £1,500 per Council per year and a four-year commitment of £8,000 per Council

per year for a Project Officer, totalling a minimum commitment of £9,500 per Council per annum for the co-ordination of this project.

- 3.3 ABCA submitted the application to UNESCO in November 2015, with Dudley Council recognised as the lead authority. ABCA has since stated, “This important initiative has a fundamental strategic fit within our ambitious programme for future development of the Black Country”.
- 3.4 The Black Country’s submission received the support of the other seven UK UNESCO Global Geoparks and the National Commission of the UK to UNESCO (UKNC). UKNC is the hub for all UNESCO-related matters in the UK, supports the UK’s contribution to UNESCO and brings the benefits of UNESCO to the UK. Its functions are:
- To provide expert, independent policy advice to the UK and devolved governments on UNESCO related issues.
  - To support the UK government’s agenda to help UNESCO achieve its core goals.
  - To advise and assist individuals and institutions in the UK, and its’ Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, on accessing UNESCO accreditation and prizes.
  - To support and enhance the value of the UK’s 150+ UNESCO sites and projects e.g. Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites (there are none within Walsall Borough)
- 3.5 During spring 2016, UNESCO carried out a desk-based assessment of the application, which satisfied them that the Black Country has the necessary quality of heritage features to be a UNESCO Global Geopark. Two international UNESCO inspectors visited the Black Country in June 2016 to carry out an on-the-ground mission based on our application.
- 3.6 Representatives of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project Management Team presented the application to the biennial International Conference on UNESCO Global Geoparks at Torbay in September 2016.
- 3.7 The UNESCO Global Geoparks Council considered the application later that year – possible outcomes were stated as:
- Refusal – does not meet required standards
  - Deferral – meets required quality but additional work required to meet full operational status
  - Endorsement – meets required standards and operational requirements (see Appendix 1)
- 3.8 In spring 2017, UNESCO’s Executive Board endorsed the decision of the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council to defer the Black Country’s application. UNESCO confirmed their decision in May 2017, inviting the Black Country Management Team to respond to the following recommendations for further work or further assurances / clarification by 5<sup>th</sup> May 2019:
1. Ensure that the managing body meets the requirements of Operational Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks

2. Unify and co-ordinate the many partners that are already active and integrate all of the geosites under one single banner as opposed to the plethora of independent organizations that currently exists
3. Ensure that financial stability is ensured, as a corresponding budget is fundamental for maintaining and managing a UNESCO Global Geopark
4. Significantly increase the visibility of the UNESCO Global Geopark Project through interpretive signage, and a better developed website
5. Improve the impact of sustainable development in the territory by developing collaborations and partnerships with the commercial and industrial sector
6. Strengthen the networking with other UNESCO Global Geoparks at a regional, national and global level, and actively contribute to international conferences and meetings on UNESCO Global Geoparks
7. Strengthen the role of women in senior management positions within the UNESCO Global Geopark Project staff, in accordance with UNESCO principles

3.9 UNESCO added that the Black Country has all the necessary internationally important heritage assets of sufficient breadth and quality to become a member of the GGN. They specifically identified exceptional partner contributions, but were looking for more coherent working and better visibility to ensure that the UNESCO Global Geopark Project is properly unified.

3.10 In April 2018, the Black Country hosted an evaluation visit by the chairs of two UK UNESCO Global Geoparks. They confirmed that ABCA, with a lead authority, satisfied the requirements of Operational Guidelines for UNESCO Global Geoparks (see Appendix 1). ABCA confirmed that the four Black Country local authorities continue to make a financial commitment to the Geopark Project co-ordination and administration, and to fund a Project Officer post for four years.

3.11 A report is to be submitted to UNESCO in response to their recommendations by May 2019. This will be considered and a final decision made by the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council. The Black Country will be informed of the decision by December 2019 – this will be endorsement or refusal, with no further deferral. UNESCO’s Executive Board will consider ratification of the Black Country as a Global Geopark and formally notify us by spring 2020. If successful, UNESCO Global Geopark status will be valid for four years, after which UNESCO will undertake further revalidation visits every four years to ensure that the Black Country’s obligations continue to be met.

3.12 Walsall’s Green Space Strategy 2018-2022, which Cabinet approved for adoption at its meeting in April 2018, includes the strategic objective to “Continue to be a partner in the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project and to manage the borough’s geosites”.

#### **4. Black Country Geosites**

4.1 A geosite is a feature or area with geological or related heritage significance whose characteristics meet one or several criteria for classifying it as outstanding and/or rare.

4.2 We have many exceptional geosites across the Black Country. The Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark application proposes 45 geosites to explain its special heritage, nine of which are in Walsall Borough (see Appendix 2 for further details):

- Barr Beacon and Pinfold Lane Quarry
- Brownhills and Walsall Wood Mining Heritage Monuments
- Daw End Railway Cutting and Linley Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Hay Head Quarry Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Moorcroft Wood
- Park Lime Pits
- Shire Oak Park
- Walsall Arboretum
- Walsall Geotrail, Museums and Galleries

4.3 Further work will be done to ascertain the suitability of the geosites, including continued consultation with partners and owners of those sites that are not Council-owned.

4.4 UNESCO Global Geopark is not a legislative designation – though the defining geosites within a UNESCO Global Geopark must be protected under indigenous, local, regional or national legislation as appropriate. UNESCO Global Geopark status does not imply restrictions on any economic activity inside the territory or on its geosites where that activity complies with such legislation.

## **5. Partnership Agreement**

5.1 The partners of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project have undertaken to obtain and, subject to UNESCO's endorsement, maintain Geopark status for the Black County.

5.2 To help demonstrate that the partners are unified and co-ordinated (UNESCO's recommendation 2 in paragraph 3.15), it is proposed to enter into a Partnership Agreement or similar. Through this, the partners will continue to work collaboratively in order to achieve the objectives of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project, namely:

- To co-ordinate the activities of and facilitate the process to obtain and maintain UNESCO Global Geopark status for the Black Country within the guidelines and processes of the GGN.
- To promote, support and facilitate, encourage and enable local, national and international projects, initiatives and events that help protect heritage assets of the Black Country and raise awareness of the UNESCO Global Geopark Project and the Black Country's interrelated geological, environmental, historical and cultural heritage.
- To strengthen existing partnerships and develop new networks to ensure that the geological, environmental, historical and cultural qualities of the Black Country UNESCO Global Geopark Project are sustained and promoted for current and future generations

## Appendix 1

### OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARKS

#### CRITERIA FOR UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARKS

1. UNESCO Global Geoparks must be single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education, research and sustainable development. A UNESCO Global Geopark must have a clearly defined border, be of adequate size to fulfil its functions and contain geological heritage of international significance as independently verified by scientific professionals.
2. UNESCO Global Geoparks should use that heritage, in connection with all other aspects of that area's natural and cultural heritage, to promote awareness of key issues facing society in the context of the dynamic planet we all live on, including but not limited to increasing knowledge and understanding of: geoprocesses; geohazards; climate change; the need for the sustainable use of Earth's natural resources; the evolution of life and the empowerment of indigenous peoples.
3. UNESCO Global Geoparks should be areas with a management body having legal existence recognized under national legislation. The management bodies should be appropriately equipped to adequately address the area of the UNESCO Global Geopark in its entirety.
4. In the case where an applying area overlaps with another UNESCO designated site, such as a World Heritage Site or Biosphere Reserve, the request must be clearly justified and evidence must be provided for how UNESCO Global Geopark status will add value by being both independently branded and in synergy with the other designations.
5. UNESCO Global Geoparks should actively involve local communities and indigenous peoples as key stakeholders in the Geopark. In partnership with local communities, a co-management plan needs to be drafted and implemented that provides for the social and economic needs of local populations, protects the landscape in which they live and conserves their cultural identity. It is recommended that all relevant local and regional actors and authorities be represented in the management of a UNESCO Global Geopark. Local and indigenous knowledge, practice and management systems should be included, alongside science, in the planning and management of the area.
6. UNESCO Global Geoparks are encouraged to share their experience and advice and to undertake joint projects within the Global Geoparks Network (GGN). Membership of GGN is obligatory.
7. A UNESCO Global Geopark must respect local and national laws relating to the protection of geological heritage. The defining geological heritage sites within a UNESCO Global Geopark must be legally protected in advance of any application. At the same time, a UNESCO Global Geopark should be used as leverage for promoting 38 C/14 Annex II – page 3 the protection of geological heritage locally and nationally. The management body must not participate directly in the sale of

geological objects such as fossils, minerals, polished rocks and ornamental rocks of the type normally found in so-called “rockshops” within the UNESCO Global Geopark (regardless of their origin) and should actively discourage unsustainable trade in geological materials as a whole. Where clearly justified as a responsible activity and as part of delivering the most effective and sustainable means of site management, it may permit sustainable collecting of geological materials for scientific and educational purposes from naturally renewable sites within the UNESCO Global Geopark. Trade of geological materials based on such a system may be tolerated in exceptional circumstances, provided it is clearly and publicly explained, justified and monitored as the best option for the Global Geopark in relation to local circumstances. Such circumstances will be subject to approval by the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council on a case by case basis.

8. These criteria are verified through checklists for evaluation and revalidation.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Walsall's Geosites**

#### **Barr Beacon and Pinfold Lane Quarry Site of Importance for Nature Conservation**

Under the remit of Barr Beacon Trust, this is the only accessible geosite where key features in Triassic sandstones and conglomerates may be seen, as well a wide range of other sedimentary structures. Pinfold Lane Quarry is a large, abandoned sand and gravel quarry that previously supplied large quantities of building materials for construction across Birmingham and the Black Country. Barr Beacon and Pinfold Lane Quarry are a Local Nature Reserve, key geoscience and educational site, and is the subject of community based geoconservation work.

#### **Brownhills and Walsall Wood Mining Heritage Monuments**

The Brownhills Colossus and Walsall Wood Mine Pithead are just two of many pieces of mining themed public art that celebrate and commemorate the rich deep underground coal mining of the Black Country Coalfield.

#### **Daw End Railway Cutting and Linley Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest**

The railway cutting is nationally important for geoscientific interest and features a reef formation from the Silurian period. Consisting of limestone, the eastern end of the cutting shows an unconformity with the Carboniferous Coal Measures, as well as a geological fault. Linley Wood has important mining heritage, though many of the limestone mines are flooded. There is no public access to these private sites.

#### **Hay Head Quarry Site of Importance for Nature Conservation**

Owned by Walsall Council, this regionally important geosite lies within the Cuckoos' Nook and Dingle Local Nature Reserve. It is important as being the only site at which the effects of the Eastern Boundary Fault of the Black Country Coalfield can be seen and as the type locations of the Barr Limestone and 'Barr Trilobite'. This is an important geoscience site in ongoing research on microfossils and carbon isotope correlation.

#### **Moorcroft Wood Site of Importance for Nature Conservation**

Owned by Walsall Council, this was a busy centre of industry at the start of the Industrial Revolution with coal mines, canals and early blast furnaces; however, as the coal was worked out it was abandoned. This is one of only two sites remaining in the Black Country where blocks of iron and steel making wastes can be seen and as such it is of particular importance in relation to these industries of the area. Woodland was planted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of pioneering urban forestry work. Moorcroft Wood is a Local Nature Reserve, key geoscience and educational site, and is the subject of community based geoconservation work.

### **Park Lime Pits Site of Importance for Nature Conservation**

Owned by the Canal and River Trust, and leased by Walsall Council, this geosite is a former quarry working the Wenlock Limestone. Abandoned quarries, known locally as 'the pits', contain clear pools surrounded by mature Beech woodland and species-rich calcareous grassland and meadows making this a prime geobotanical asset of the Black Country. Limestone from the quarries may have been used by the Romans for paving Watling Street to the north; however, large scale extraction occurred during the Industrial Revolution, when limestone was transported from the pits by rail trucks and canals to the iron foundries. When quarrying ceased some 150 years ago the old workings and quarries became flooded to form the pools that occupy the site today. Park Lime Pits are a Local Nature Reserve and key geoscience and educational site.

### **Shire Oak Park Site of Importance for Nature Conservation**

Owned by Walsall Council, this sand and gravel site contains exposures of Triassic rocks overlain by Quaternary Age glacial deposits of the Ice. With Barr Beacon, this site demonstrates the variability of the Triassic deposits across the area. Shire Oak Park is a Local Nature Reserve and important geoscience and geoeucational site.

### **Walsall Arboretum Site of Importance for Nature Conservation**

Owned by Walsall Council, this was formerly the site of limestone mines that were active during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries until they became flooded by groundwater. These mines were extracting Silurian limestone. The Arboretum also contains a glacial boulder from the Ice Age (with interpretation) adjacent to the main lake. This is an important geotourism and recreational site, in close proximity to Walsall geotrail, museum and art gallery in the town centre.

### **Walsall Geotrail, Museums and Galleries**

This geosite is a classic town centre rich in architectural stones and imported decorative rock-types that provide a rich geotrail. Walsall's town centre sits immediately adjacent to Walsall Arboretum, whilst the town includes a Local History Centre, Walsall Leather Museum and Walsall New Art Gallery, which provide very well-presented cultural heritage attractions within the town.