

Delegated Officer Report

Decision Maker:	Emma Barton, Executive Director for Place & Economic Growth
Portfolio:	Councillor A Chadderton, Cabinet Member Regeneration and Housing
Date of Decision:	18 July 2022
Subject:	Rocher Vale Regionally Important Geodiversity Site
Report Author:	Georgina Brownridge
Ward (s):	Alexandra

Reason for the decision: To designate the part of the Rocher Vale Regionally Important Geodiversity Site that is within Oldham. The advantage of this option is to give the site local planning policy protection regarding geodiversity and will aid enjoyment of the Green Belt.

Summary: The report is seeking to designate the part of the Rocher vale Regionally Important Geodiversity Site (RIGS) that is within Oldham. The remaining part of the site falls within Tameside. Officers at Tameside are also seeking to designate the RIGS.

A notification of the RIGS was received from the Greater Manchester RIGS group via Greater Manchester Ecology Unit.

The GeoConservation UK site explains that RIGS are important as an educational, historical and recreational resource. The designation of RIGS is one way of recognising and thereby protecting important Earth science and landscape features for the future.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing sites of geological value.

The adopted Local Plan vision, plan objective 4, Policies 1, 6 and 21 seeks to value, protect and enhance geodiversity. Designating the site as a RIGS will ensure that the local plan can be implemented. The Local Plan review that is currently under preparation also seeks to protect geodiversity.

The site is located within the Medlock Valley and hosts a wide array of geomorphological features (landforms) resulting from fluvial, mass movement and anthropogenic processes (human activities), both relict and active. The notification outlines particular features, which include an incised fluvial gorge understood to have formed during a period of fluvial rejuvenation; fluvially derived spurs; fluvial meanders and river cliffs; outcrops of sedimentary rocks; and outcrops of Pennine Lower Coal Measures and Blenfire Rock Sandstone.

The notification highlights the potential for a geological / historical trail as the site abuts the Park Bridge Iron Works and Heritage Centre (including the Park Bridge Quarry RIGS) in Tameside. Although this is not the subject of this report.

The Oldham way passes through the site. The site is within the Green Belt and partly within the Rocher Vale Site of Biological Interest, which is already designated under the Local Plan. There are no known conflicts with projects of a strategic nature (Northern Roots and main bridge works bridge between Oldham and Ashton) or sites within the strategic housing land supply.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

Option 1 - To designate the part of the Rocher Vale Regionally Important Geodiversity Site that is within Oldham. The advantage of this option is to give the site planning policy protection regarding geodiversity and will aid enjoyment of the Green Belt. There are no known disadvantages to this option.

Option 2 – To not designate the part of the Rocher Vale Regionally Important Geodiversity Site that is within Oldham. There are no advantages, non-designation would mean the site remains being designated as Green Belt alone. The disadvantages are that the site will have less planning policy protection in relation to geodiversity and will not provide an opportunity to enhance the Green Belt. In addition, as this is a cross boundary designation it will not be consistent with the intentions of Tameside Council.

Consultation: including any conflict of interest declared by relevant Cabinet Member consulted.

The RIGS has been recommended by the Greater Manchester RIGS Group, who are a member of the GeoConservation UK via Greater Manchester Ecology Unit.

Recommendation(s):

Option 1 - To designate the part of the Rocher Vale Regionally Important Geodiversity Site that is within Oldham. The advantage of this option is to give the site planning policy protection regarding geodiversity and will aid enjoyment of the Green Belt. There are no known disadvantages to this option.

Implications:

*What are the **financial** implications?*

Designation of a RIGS brings no statutory protection, and does not allow the authority any additional powers of control over the land. The land also remains in its present ownership. Designation does, however, bring additional protection from adverse effects from development to the site through the borough's Local Plan and NPPF.

As the site is not owned by Oldham Council there will be no anticipated costs involved in this report.

Jamie Kelly

*What are the **legal** implications?*

Designation of an RIGS can be regarded as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan and therefore the report can be approved by the Portfolio Member in consultation with the Executive Director. (A Evans)

*What are the **procurement***

N/A

implications?

*What are the **Human Resources** implications?* N/A

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason) None

*What are the **property** implications* There are no property implications for the Council as the site is not in Council ownership (Bryn Cooke).

Risks: No comments received (Mark Stenson).

Co-operative agenda The decision will support the council's co-operative agenda by helping to create thriving communities by working with partners to create strong communities through identification and designation of a geodiversity site, which can aid people's sense of involvement in the local community.

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

There are no background papers for this report

Report Author Sign-off:	
	G. Brownridge
Date:	8 July 2022

Please list and attach any appendices:-

Appendix number or letter	Description
1	Notification of Regionally Important Geodiversity Site

In consultation with Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E. J. Forder", is written over a light gray, textured rectangular background.

Signed:

Date: 18 July 2022