

Nisthill Wind Farm – Community Heritage Benefit Package

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Introduction

Nisthill Wind Farm Ltd are proposing a community heritage programme (CHP) which could constitute compensatory community benefit works to offset potential impacts of the proposed Nisthill Wind Farm on both on-site and off-site cultural heritage assets. The document sets out a range of possible options for the programme, including opportunities for community involvement in archaeological fieldwork and more general heritage engagement and capacity building. All the proposed options would leave a lasting legacy.

*Policy 7 Historic Assets and Places*¹ in the new National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) in Scotland puts emphasis on the protection and enhancement of historic environment assets and places, and specifically includes ‘activities to provide public benefit’ as an option for appropriate mitigation in instances where impacts to heritage assets by development proposals cannot be avoided. Two of the three intended outcomes of Policy 7 have been considered specifically with regard to the proposals put forth as part of this CHP:

“i) The historic environment is valued, protected, and enhanced, supporting the transition to net zero and ensuring assets are resilient to current and future impacts of climate change... and

iii) Recognise the social, environmental and economic value of the historic environment, to our economy and cultural identity.”

Historic Environment Scotland’s (HES) heritage strategy, *Our Place in Time*² places considerable emphasis on the demonstration of public benefit in heritage initiatives, with training and participation key aspects of developing public understanding and appreciation of archaeology and history. Guidance related to public benefit with regard to archaeology in the planning process has been produced by the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) Scotland³, offering a concise and structured guide for possible social opportunities, the benefits of these, and measurements of success that can be utilised.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2023/02/national-planning-framework-4/documents/national-planning-framework-4-revised-draft/national-planning-framework-4-revised-draft/govscot%3Adocument/national-planning-framework-4-revised-draft.pdf>

² <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/about-us/who-we-are/our-place-in-time/>

³ https://www.algao.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/ALGAO_Delivery_of_Public_Benefit_and_SocialValueGuidance.pdf

The CHP proposed here would aim to align closely with the objectives and opportunities outlined in the NPF4, HES and ALGAO documents to provide tangible benefit to the community. This benefit would be delivered through a series of fieldwork activities, potential post-excavation work, and various dissemination activities.

In addition to these social opportunities, the work carried out could have important implications for contributing to the Scottish archaeological record. The Scottish Islands Research Framework for Archaeology (SIRFA)⁴, currently in preparation and which is likely to also include similar aims and objectives with regard to public benefit when published, will outline specific research gaps in Orcadian archaeology. Considering the unique opportunity for investigating a monument type that is not well understood on a Scottish scale, indeed even a British, scale, it is likely that the CHP will directly complement proposals put forth in SIRFA.

Context

The Development Proposal for the Nisthill Wind Farm comprises the installation of four turbines and associated infrastructure around Hundland Hill (106m AOD), a hilltop in the northwest of mainland Orkney that rises between Loch of Swanney and Loch of Boardhouse. The Site boundary encompasses part of the southwest loch shore of Loch of Swanney and extends over the peak of Hundland Hill, with the hilltop affording long-ranging views over Orkney mainland and the islands beyond. The Site comprises both improved pasture and rough grazing and moorland, with a lack of modern development generally indicating good potential for the preservation of sub-surface archaeological remains.

Within the Site boundary are two Scheduled Monuments, **Hundland Hill, enclosure 500m NE of Nisthouse (SM13451)** and **Nisthouse, burial mound 270m ENE of (SM1318)**. Immediately northeast of the Site are a further two Scheduled monuments, **Stoney Holm, crannog, Loch of Swannay (SM1394)** and **Park Holm, artificial island and causeway, Loch of Swannay (SM1362)**. Additionally five non-designated heritage assets have been recorded on the Site, four of which were identified by AOC Archaeology during a walkover survey undertaken in March 2022. The non-designated assets comprise what are likely post-medieval quarries and a livestock enclosure, a modern rubbish dump, and a turf bank of unknown date. Direct impacts from the Proposed Development are predicted for two of these, but no works will directly impact the Scheduled Monuments.

The Scheduled Monuments represent an intriguing range both chronologically and functionally, although a lack of modern archaeological investigation limits present understanding and interpretation of these heritage assets. **Hundland Hill enclosure (SM13451)** comprises a sub-circular earth bank over 70m in diameter, occupying a prominent location at the crest of Hundland Hill and with potential internal features. HES have highlighted the rarity of hilltop enclosures in Scotland in previous consultation responses, remarking that only several putative examples exist across the

⁴ <https://scarf.scot/regional/scotlands-islands-research-framework-for-archaeology/>

entirety of the country. Recovery of bone from rabbit holes atop the Scheduled Monument have led to suggestions it could be a mortuary enclosure. In conjunction with the **Nisthouse burial mound (SM318)**, antiquarian investigation of which produced a cist and cremated human remains, the hilltop enclosure may represent a highly significant element of a mortuary-rich landscape. There is also a strong oral tradition amongst locals that indicates significant usage of the enclosure and Hundland Hill in general during the Second World War for target practice which has contributed to a sense of potential ambiguity with regard to the enclosure monument and its use over time.

In contrast to these monuments, the sites on Loch Swanney, **Stoney Holm (SM1394)** and **Park Holm (SM1362)**, represent ingenious architecture within a water setting. Whilst **Stoney Holm (SM1394)** has been interpreted as a crannog, a dwelling structure built atop the loch and therefore likely also making use of the surrounding land for agricultural purposes, **Park Holm (SM1362)** is less conclusively interpreted. It is however an artificial island, with access facilitated by a stone causeway, indicating the deliberate intention of permanent access to the site.

The typologies and chronologies for such monuments are constantly undergoing redefinition as a result of archaeological investigation, interpretation, and post-excavation analyses. Crannogs, for instance, were thought to be monuments confined to the Iron Age until recent evidence for Neolithic structures challenged the long-held model.⁵ Active research-driven investigations such as this can unsurprisingly contribute significantly to the understanding of monuments within not only their local context but within wider national contexts. Therefore, whilst the Proposed Development would not impact directly on the Scheduled Monuments within the Site, it is proposed that the CHP related to the Proposed Development focus on a research-driven programme of archaeological investigation. The heritage asset that has the potential for the most gain is that which we know the least about – the Hundland Hill enclosure (**SM13451**).

This proposal comprises a multi-staged approach to the CHP, with each stage having the potential to further inform the subsequent stages. These stages would entail non-intrusive recording and investigation of the asset through topographic and geophysical survey; limited but targeted evaluation of the site through excavation, guided by the results of the surveys, and with the intention of recovering material for post-excavation analyses, particularly for dating; and dissemination of the results. Each stage could offer opportunities for community engagement through participation and dissemination through a variety of methods.

As the proposals involve the undertaking of works within the Scheduled Monument, seeking and obtaining Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) from HES in advance of any work undertaken would be required. Consultation with HES, as well as the Orkney Islands Archaeologist (OIA), would therefore be necessary in advance of the implementation of any such works.

⁵ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/antiquity/article/neolithic-crannogs-rethinking-settlement-monumentality-and-deposition-in-the-outer-hebrides-and-beyond/41A5D2F1C5E678B9EABB50BB17F7990E>

Item	Description
Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) and Section 42 License regarding works within Hundland Hill enclosure (SM13451)	<p>AOC Archaeology will seek SMC for the on-site archaeological fieldwork items proposed (topographic survey, geophysical survey and archaeological evaluation) from Historic Environment Scotland. Through this process, a research agenda aimed at dating and refining our understanding of the Scheduled Monument will be set out through consultation with HES and OIC.</p> <p>The principal research aims of the works would be to expand our knowledge and understanding of the asset through evidence gathered during multiple phases of work. The community benefit aims would be to involve the community directly with the investigation through excavation participation and dissemination activities.</p> <p>Such aims would feed into the envisioned outcomes in NPF4, the public benefit agenda within HES' Our Place In Time and the ALGAO guidance, and likely research agendas within SIRFA when published.</p>
Topographic Survey of Hundland Hill enclosure (SM13451)	<p>Topographic survey of the Scheduled enclosure that would include 2D and 3D topographic survey, drone aerial photography and photogrammetry, and a report on the works.</p> <p>The fieldwork could potentially be carried out simultaneously alongside the geophysical survey works.</p>
Geophysical survey of Hundland Hill enclosure (SM13451) and immediate surrounds	<p>A combination of gradiometer and earth resistance geophysical surveys are proposed, and a report on the works.</p> <p>The geophysical survey would comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A gradiometer survey of an area of approximately 2 hectares, centred on the Scheduled Monument, and extending to the area surrounding it, and; - an earth resistance survey for the Scheduled Monument Area itself, an area of 0.8 ha. <p>This would be led by two AOC staff with up to five community volunteers.</p>
Community Archaeological Evaluation of Hundland Hill enclosure (SM13451)	<p>Evaluation</p> <p>A 2-week long community archaeology excavation project led by AOC Archaeology (minimum of 3 AOC staff to supervise)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilising data gathered in the topographic and geophysical surveys to inform potential research questions and allow for targeted trench location/s - Opportunities for community participation engagement, including training in excavation and recording techniques, advertised site tours and an Open Day (existing access tracks are already present on the Site which would facilitate access to the Scheduled Monument itself somewhat) - Recovery of samples and artefacts/ecofacts for potential post-excavation

Item	Description
	<p>work (see below).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Production of an archaeological Data Structure Report, the standard report for archaeological projects in the UK.
<p>Post-Excavation Work</p>	<p>A programme of post-excavation work would potentially be required following the archaeological evaluation. The scope and cost of such work would be highly dependent on the findings of the evaluation and cannot be quantified prior. A tailored Post-Excavation Research Design (PERD) would be produced after the fieldwork was complete that would outline the research agenda of the post-excavation works, the proposed methods, and the associated costs*.</p> <p>Such work could include, but would not necessarily be limited to, the following: sample processing; artefact and ecofact analysis; skeletal analysis; conservation; radiocarbon dating; publication in an academic journal*; and archiving and finds disposal.</p> <p>*Publication in an academic and peer-reviewed journal, such as the Scottish Archaeological Journal (SAJ), would incorporate the reports from all fieldwork phases as well as post-excavation results in order to present the work in its entirety.</p>
<p>Various Public Engagement and Dissemination Activities</p>	<p>Cultural Heritage Interpretation Panels</p> <p>Interpretation panels for the 4 principle Scheduled Monuments. These would be crafted following all approved stages of the archaeological works so as to incorporate all new evidence gathered through the CHP and through consultation with stakeholders. Similar products AOC have produced in the past have comprised A1 panels of text and images on metal-styled lectern frames and stands which can be set into the ground. AOC would be responsible for the preparation and delivery of the items, and the developer would be responsible for the installation.</p> <p>Local and National News Press Release</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Based on the archaeological results and stakeholder consultation, AOC would prepare text and images for submission to local and national news outlets for publication. <p>Digital Publication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A digital publication of the project could be produced and hosted on AOC Archaeology's <i>In Situ</i> platform (https://insitu.org.uk), a free-to-use online digital resource which offers mixed media content through text, visualisations and video. <p>Local Community Talk/Conference Talk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of archaeological works to local audience through an in-person or digital lecture.

Item	Description
	- Further opportunities for presentation of works at Scottish archaeological conferences.