



RSPB The Oa Peatland Restoration Project 2026 Phase 4

Historic Environment Assessment

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Introduction

This report has been produced to support an application for a peatland restoration project across part of the RSPB Oa reserve on Islay. The Site is centred at NR30244130, as indicated in Figure 1 below.

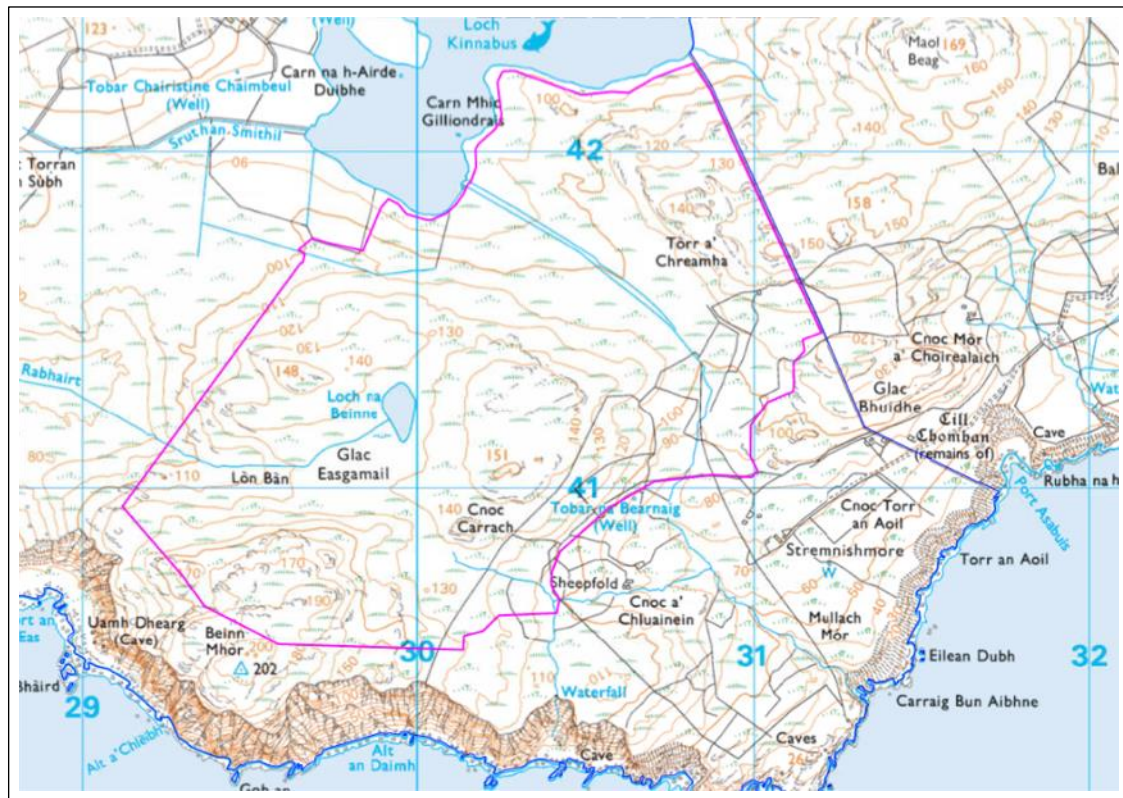


Figure 1 Site boundary in pink layered onto 1:25,000 OS map with 1km grid shown.

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Aims

The aims of this report are to:

- identify heritage assets at or in the vicinity of the Site;
- assess the impact of restoration proposals;
- provide advice to avoid or minimise negative impact on heritage features, including methods for archaeological recording where appropriate.

Method

Guidance

The format of this assessment follows the guidance for peatland restoration regarding the historic environment in Scotland issued by ALGAO in March 2022.

Assessment methodology

The assessment methodology consisted of the following:

- Identifying known historic features and past surveys
- Carrying out a walkover of the area
- Assessing the significance of the assets and the impact of the proposed changes
- Producing recommendations and advice

Sources consulted

Heritage data sources accessed for known assets were:

- PastMap and the WoSAS HER with their associated links, including Trove.Scot, and the HES designations website
- RSPB records

WoSAS and HES were contacted to seek advice regarding this work. The reply from HES is provided in the Appendix in this report. WoSAS have been extremely busy over the last months and we have not received a response. We have therefore proceeded expecting that the sources we accessed should be sufficient.

Maps and data sources used to support existing information and identify new heritage features were:

- National Library of Scotland historic maps including 1st ed 6" Ordnance Survey
- National Collection of Aerial Photography
- Google and GetMapping satellite imagery from 2013 onwards
- RSPB-commissioned digital aerial photography of topography at 5cm intervals undertaken in spring 2023 and transformed to create slope and hillshade GIS map in ArcPro

Where possible, the above data has been collated in GIS using the RSPB's GIS system, and we trust that it is accurate. Potential heritage features from all sources have been transcribed into a shapefile layer. All new features will be submitted to WoSAS. H

Desk Assessment

Site Description

The Site, which is located across the moorland south of Loch Kinnabus, Islay, is managed by the RSPB as part of a large nature reserve. The landscape is one of rolling moorland that rises from c90mOD beside Loch Kinnabus in the north, to a high point of c200mOD at Beinn Mhor close to the south coast of the Oa. Loch na Beinne lies midway between the two at c130mOD. To its east at c100mOD, is a broad, open expanse that then rises to a ridge at c140mOD that includes Torr a' Chreamha. Today, parts of the landscape bear extensive evidence of past peat cutting. Across the south-east of the Site are old turf and boulder field banks associated with pre-1878 farming. The old areas of pasture are still evident in parts, although thick heather has encroached in place of the rough grasses and rushes across much of the ground.



Figure 2 Modern aerial photo of the Site showing the wide extent of the heather moorland and the varied vegetation across the north-west and south-east beyond the Site boundary. *Reproduced with the permission of GetMapping*

Details relating to the peat depths are available elsewhere in the supporting paperwork for the Prior Notification.

Previous Impacts

The post-medieval history of The Oa is one relating to grazing black cattle rather than that associated with the richer arable and pasture lands of other parts of Islay. The Oa, therefore, appears not to have been an area where tenancy changes and agricultural improvements were

introduced in the second half of the 18th century. Instead, small tenancies with access to low quality land and moorland grazings seem to have continued until around 1860 or 1870.

This part of The Oa was farmed from a tenancy at Stramnish Bog (confusingly it seems likely that this was the township that became known as Strimnishmore rather than the small number of buildings of Strimnishbeg). in c1750. As the population increased (peaking in c1830) it seems that new tenancies may have come into being, probably at Stremnishbeg, as well as Tighean Ura Strimnish and, possibly, at the un-named buildings on the upper south-facing slope of Torr a' Chreamha. The former two were probably created from parts of the pre-existing 'better' lands of Stramnish Bog. The ruins of the latter un-named building are aligned N-S downslope and therefore may constitute a byre/barn complex rather than a farmstead. As well as grazing rights across the moorland, the inhabitants would have had peat-cutting rights and there are large areas of hand-dug peat cuttings across the moorland. Travel would have been by small boat or via the only track on this part of The Oa – from Stremnishmore eastwards to Ballychatrigan and beyond. The tenancies clearly came with obligations, those working the land in the 19th-century seem to have been tasked with cutting large drains across the landscape: one northwest-wards from the bealach north of Stremnishmore to Loch Kinnabus and the other westwards from Loch na Beinne to Port nan Gallan.

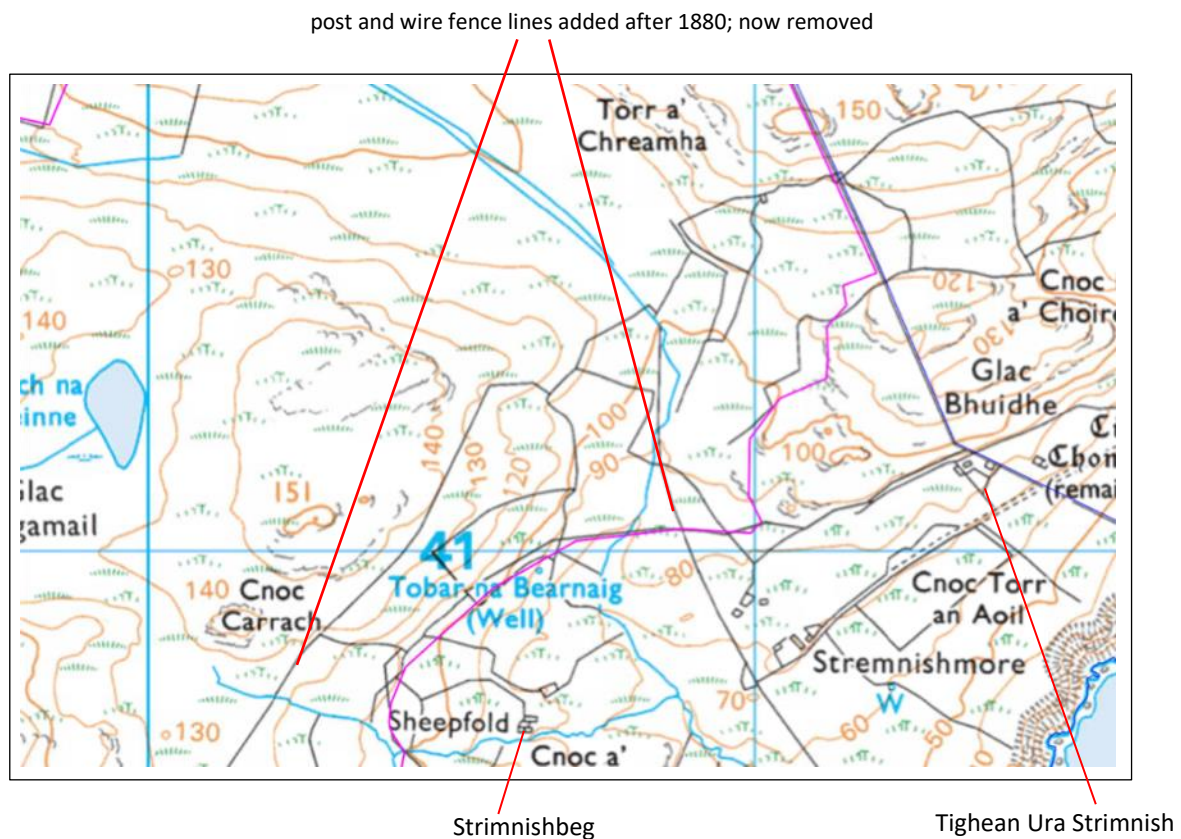


Figure 3 The area south of Loch Kinnabus. The vast majority of the mapped boundaries can still be traced today as earthen and boulder banks. The few straight fence lines have been removed leaving only the occasional cast iron fence post. © Crown Copyright OS licence number AC0 00 0 813580 (2025).

Records indicate that by the 1890s these new small farms had been abandoned, perhaps after being occupied for only two or three generations. The clearance of the township at Strimnishmore and building of the new farmhouse in the late-19th/early-20th centuries was a significant change but the grazing of cattle and sheep continued. This 'new' farm doesn't seem to have resulted in great landscape changes – there are very few 'improvement' boundaries across the Site.

Known historic features

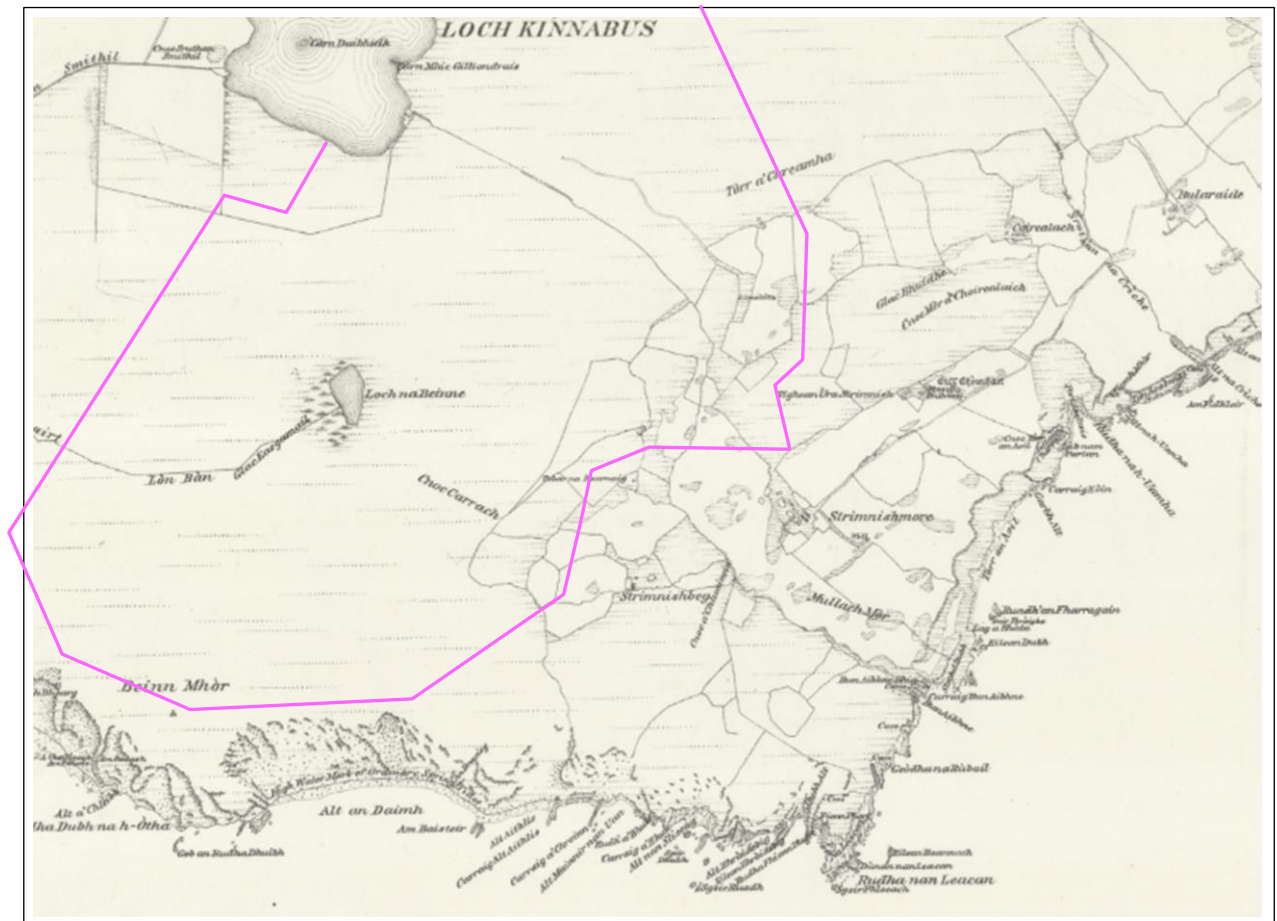


Figure 4 The Site as mapped in 1878 with a very approximate Site boundary added
OS map surveyed in 1878 Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

Scheduled Monuments beyond the Site boundary

There are no designated heritage assets within the Site but there are two Scheduled Monuments (SM 2240; WoSAS 2335 and SM 13271; WoSAS 1903) at a distance from the Site boundary. The former is a medieval chapel known as Cill Chomhan located c350m south-east corner of the Site boundary. The latter is a promontory fort named Dun Athad located c650m south-west of the south-west corner of the Site boundary.



Figure 5a Medieval chapel SM 2240 viewed from immediately west of SM.



Figure 5b Iron Age fort SM 13271 viewed from Site boundary above Loch na Beinne

Historic Environment Scotland has been consulted and they have no concerns about the proposed works (see copy of correspondence in Appendix).

Non-designated sites within the Site boundary

There are no known prehistoric or medieval sites or finds on the Site. The surrounding landscape is also largely devoid of upstanding non-designated prehistoric-medieval sites or areas. There is a possible standing stone (WoSAS 61624) c300m east of Cill Chomhan as well as a number of very ruinous possible small duns along the coast from Dun Athad eastwards to beyond Ballychatrigan. It is also recognised that post-medieval farming could have removed land-use evidence for these millennia, or that features could have been buried by the peat.

The Site has almost no post-medieval structures within its boundaries. The only ruins are at the unnamed location on the south-facing upper slope of Torr a' Chreamha (WoSAS 44759) with a limekiln c200m further downslope.

The landscape between the southern boundary of the Site and the sea is characterised by a few post-medieval small farms, as noted in the previous section. The main 18th-century township was presumably at Stremnishmore (WoSAS 2238). Other small farms were subsequently established, presumably at Strimnishbeg, as well as at Tighean Ura Strimnish and other named places further east, beyond the Site boundary.

Site visit

Site visits were carried out by RSPB Peatland Project staff and, subsequently in September 2025, the RSPB Reserves Archaeologist to walk over the areas to be restored, as well as the access routes, to note any known or additional archaeological sites. The weather was clear and bright. Photographs were taken of the landscape, the setting of the field boundaries, and the very ruinous farm buildings mostly beyond the Site boundary.

No additional features or structures were recorded within the Site boundary

The boundaries formed by boulder and turf dykes/banks rather than post and wire fences were noted on fieldwork maps. They have been added to the GIS plot (see Figure 7).

Beyond the Site boundary:



Figure 6a Stremnishmore WoSAS 87391 & 2238, looking NW



Figure 6b Stremnishbeg WoSAS 2235 , looking N

Within the Site boundary:



Figure 6c The un-named ruins below Toss a' Chreamha WoSAS 44759, looking S



Figure 6d The large drain as it flows westwards from Loch na Beinne out of the Site, from the ridge above and N of the loch, looking SW



Figure 6e The other large drain as it flows north-west into Loch Kinnabus in the middle distance, with an old peatbank in the foreground and the north-east part of the Site beyond. Looking NE from the ridge above and N of Loch na Beinne



Figure 6f View across the boundary banks that cross the SE part of the Site, taken from the ridge above and N of Loch na Beinne, looking E



Figure 6g The uppermost boundary bank below Cnoc Carrach, looking NE

Next page: Figure 7 Historic environment sites within and around the Site boundary



The Oa Phase 4 Peatland Restoration Project

Legend:

-  The Oa Archaeology
-  pre1878 turf-boulder dykes within Site boundary
-  Scheduled Monuments (UK)
-  Peatland Restoration Site Boundary
-  RSPB Reserve boundary

Acknowledgements & Notes:

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Using data from NLS, NHER and WoSAS

Map scale = 1:9,257

Date printed: 22/03/2026



Gazetteer

This table lists the heritage features within and beyond the Site. The land-use associated with these sites will have had an impact on the landscape history of the Site. Coastal and natural features have been omitted from the table.

WoSAS	Description
2335	Scheduled Monument 2240: chapel Cill Chomhan This lies 350m beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works (see Appendix X). Its setting will be unchanged by them. Historic Environment Scotland have stated that they have no concerns about this peatland restoration project.
1903	Scheduled Monument 13271: promontory fort Dun Athad The fort lies 650m beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works (see Appendix X). Its setting will be unchanged by them. Historic Environment Scotland have stated that they have no concerns about this peatland restoration project
44759	Long rectangular ruin aligned NNW-SSE situated at the top of the slope under the quarried outcrops of Torr a' Chreamha. It is c12.5m by c5m over walls c0.6m thick with an addition c4m long at its N end which abuts or crosses a pre-1878 boundary. Some 175m downslope are the remains of a circular limekiln c3m in diameter at its top. These structures are within the Site boundary but all forms of works will be excluded from buffered areas around the features.
44760	Ruinous rectangular structure close to an old boundary but buried in deep heather - may have been associated with WoSAS 44759. It lies beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.
44762	Tighean Ura Strimnish - a small farm in ruins. It lies beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.
87391 & 2238	Stremnishmore - an abandoned township and more recent farmstead. It lies beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.
2235	Strimnishbeg - a small farm in ruins subsequently used as a sheepfold. It lies beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.

not WoSAS/NHRE	The well Tobar na Bearnaig (?Well of the Giving - <i>ie</i> it never dries up?) is marked on OS maps. It lies beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.
1893	Natural features noted in the 1970s as man-made but subsequently discounted by archaeological field surveyors. Not visible today due to changes in vegetation and waterlogging around Loch Na Beinne
44761	Coirealach - a small farm in ruins. It lies beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.
61624	The site of a possible standing stone. This is beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.
60255	Slipway below the high tide line in the very small bay known as Port Asabus. It lies beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.
45266	Ballychatrigan - a small farm in ruins. This is situated beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.
not WoSAS/NHRE	Various areas of peat cutting within the Site boundary have been plotted for this restoration project from the aerial photos publicly available as well as from the a/ps taken for the RSPB.
not WoSAS/NHRE	The two main drains within the Site boundary and noted in the text above have been plotted for this restoration project from the aerial photos publicly available as well as from the a/ps taken for the RSPB.
1894	Possible crannog in Loch Kinnabus. It lies beyond the Site boundary and will not be affected by access or any of the works.

Restoration Proposals

Details of the peatland restoration plan and methodologies are provided in the Prior Notification associated papers. The methodologies described are extremely detailed and will not be repeated here. The techniques of reprofiling edges and blocking drainage (by creating very small dams and bunds) will be undertaken using machinery that has an extremely low weight impact - less than a human footprint in most conditions.

Potential impacts

There are very few archaeological / historic features within the Site boundary, listed above, which could be impacted by machinery if mitigation measures are not put in place. It is also recognised that the following could physically impact unknown archaeological features, and they too require mitigation measures:

- Creating peat mini dams and bunds
- Inserting timber or plastic dams
- Re-profiling

Access routes for the machinery will also be controlled. There will be no access from the southern part of the reserve. All access will be via Kinnabus Farm and the number of journeys by the large machines will be minimised as much as possible.

In the longer term, fortunately, the restoration will result in visually imperceptible changes to the appearance of the landscape. No permanent visual impact is anticipated.

Potential benefits

Maintaining and increasing the water level may help to preserve unknown waterlogged archaeological deposits across the Site.

Impact Assessment

The small number of archaeological features noted within the Site boundary could have been impacted by the proposed works but the principle of exclusion is being applied to them. It is recognized that the boundary banks/dykes over the south-eastern part of the Site will need to be taken into account but their linear character should enable a more flexible approach. It is important that the works do not destroy the visual line of a boundary but if small interventions at an interval of c7-10m to stop waterflow within any associated drain is required it should not seriously impact on these features.

There is also potential for unknown archaeological features within and below the peat layer. In particular, when taking scoops of peat to create mini dams and bunds care will have to be taken not to impact the mineral layers below the peat unless absolutely necessary. This approach should minimise damage to unknown archaeological deposits in the lowest peat layers and sealed below them. The insertion of small timber or plastic dams rather than peat dams where necessary for the restoration will have minimal impact. However, there may be

instances where the mineral material has to be used. The mitigation outlined below should ensure that the archaeological risk is minimised.

Contractors will be made aware that machines must use the agreed access routes and must not track elsewhere. But across the Site the occasional crossing of boundary bank/dykes will be required to enable the works to progress. Crossings will ideally be restricted to two points along any one boundary – one for entry and one for exit from each bounded area – and should only be used once, but the light impact of the machines being used will also minimise impact. Whenever possible the crossings will be at places where the bank/dyke has already broken down. In specific instances it may be that protective matting will have to be used.

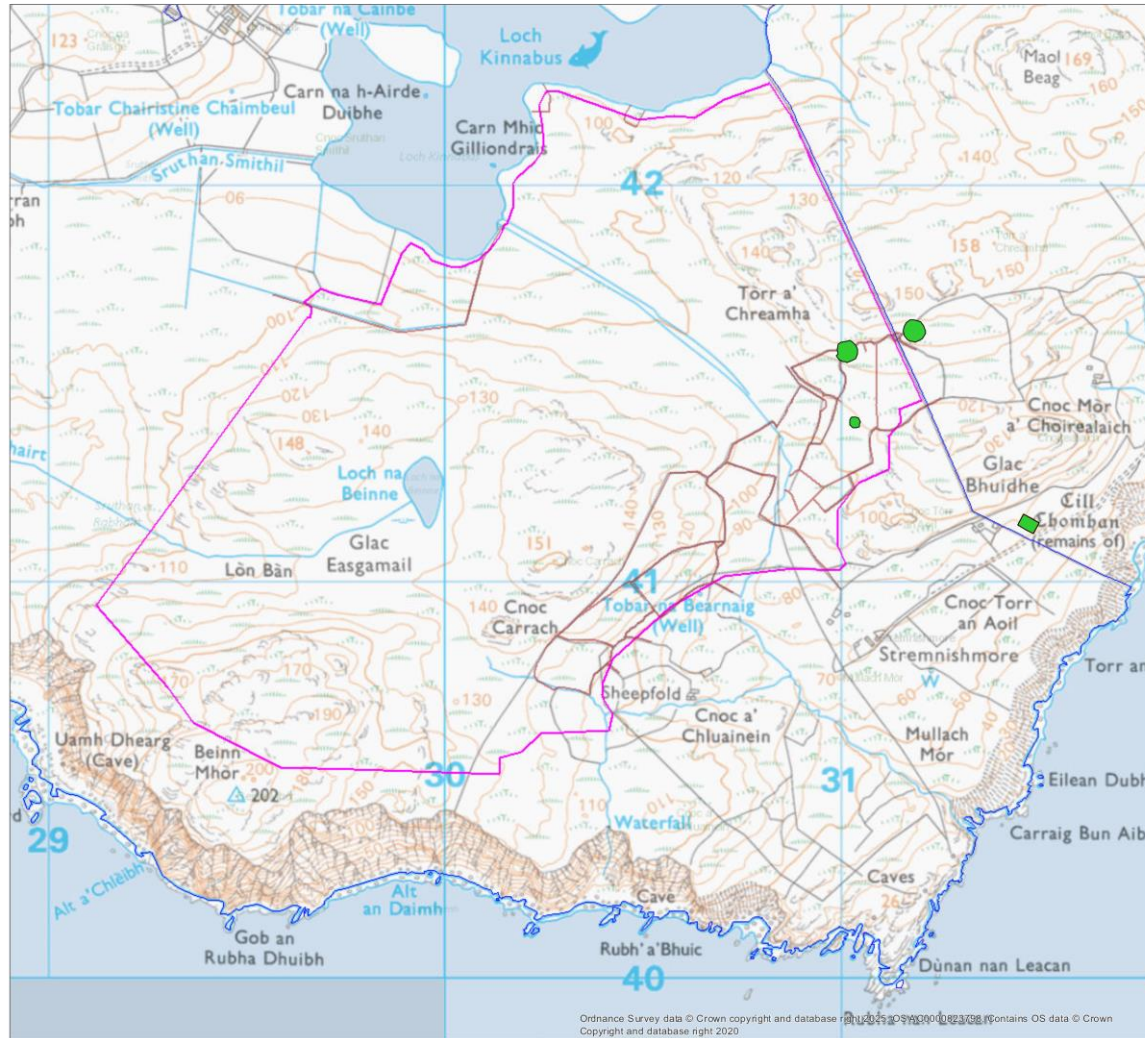
Mitigation

Buffered areas have been created around all upstanding archaeological / historic features within the Site boundary (Figure 8 below).

Type	Mitigation
Archaeological features	All known upstanding archaeological features will be excluded from the restoration works. The GIS mapping provided to the machine operators locates such features within a buffer that extends at least 10m beyond the visible structure (see Figure 8 below).
Boundary banks	Crossings will ideally be restricted to two points along any one boundary – one for entry and one for exit from each bounded area – and should only be used once. Whenever possible the crossings will be at places where the bank has already broken down. At certain places it may be that protective matting will have to be used.
Boundary banks with active drains	Where there are active drains along the side of banks they will be mini-dammed every 7-10m, ensuring that the line of a boundary bank is not destroyed.
All areas	Unknown archaeological features below/within the peat: Ensure that all operatives receive information about the possibility of discovering archaeological features or objects before they start peatland restoration work Only use agreed access routes and minimise tracking across the areas Minimise the instances of disturbing the underlying mineral deposits when creating dams If features or finds are made during the works it is imperative that work in the immediate vicinity stops and the RSPB Archaeologist is contacted so that advice can be sought from the local authority archaeology service.

Next page:

Figure 8 Historic environment sites to be excluded / taken into account



The Oa Phase 4 Peatland Restoration Project

Legend:

- Archaeological exclusion areas
- pre 1878 turf-boulder dykes
- Scheduled Monuments (UK)
- Peatland Restoration Site Boundary
- RSPB Reserve boundary

Acknowledgements & Notes:

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 Using data from NLS, NHER and W&AS

Map scale = 1:9,257

Date printed: 22/03/2025

0 0.15 0.3 0.6 km



Site work plan

Site contractors will be made aware of heritage constraints prior to commencing on Site via a 'toolbox talk' by a trained member of RSPB staff.

Contingencies

Should unexpected archaeological remains be encountered during the works, work in the affected area will stop and the RSPB Archaeologist will be contacted immediately so that mitigation plans can be agreed, having sought the advice of the local authority archaeology service.

Contact details are:

Jill Harden

Mobile: 07825 939678

Email: jill.harden@rspb.org.uk

Archiving and data dissemination

A GIS shapefile has been generated for archiving and dissemination to the local authority archaeology service. It will be updated if necessary once the works have been completed.



Figure 9a General view of the eastern part of the peatland restoration site, looking ESE



Figure 9b General view of the northern part of the peatland restoration Site, looking NE



Figure 9c General view of the western part of the peatland restoration Site, looking W



Figure 9d General view of the southwestern part of the peatland restoration Site, looking SW

References

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- National Library of Scotland - historic mapping <https://geo.nls.uk/maps/>
- Storrie, M. (1997) Islay: biography of an island

Appendix

Correspondence from HES relating to the two SMs beyond the Site Boundary for The Oa Phas4 peatland work:



Outlook

Tom Davis <tom.davis@hes.scot>
Tue 2026-02-03 14:44
Jill Harden <Jill.Harden@rspb.org.uk>

Good Afternoon Jill

Thank you for your consultation.

Historic Environment Scotland comments where proposals might impact the following designated historic environment assets:

- Category A listed buildings and their setting
- Scheduled monuments and their setting
- Inventory Battlefields
- Inventory gardens and designed landscapes
- World Heritage Sites
- Historic Marine Protected Areas

We have considered the information received, and it would appear that no such asset would be affected by the proposals. Therefore, we have no comments to make on this occasion.

We do advise you consult the local authority's archaeological advisors if you have not done so already: enquiries@wosas.glasgow.gov.uk

Kind regards

Tom

Tom Davis | Ancient Monument Officer | Planning, Consents and Advice Service | Heritage Directorate

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Please note I am currently working from home. My working hours are 9am-5pm Monday, 7am-3pm Tues- Thursday, and 9am-5pm Fridays.



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