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Progress Report on site preparation (digging drainage ditches) in the site of a new Playing Field at Acharacle Primary School

as detailed in a brief by Highland Council Archaeology Unit dated 1/02/08
Planning Application LO-06-003

Aspire Project UDI HH 2009/03

for

The Highland Council
c/o Mr Sean Danaher, Landscape Architect,
Housing & Property Services
Council Offices, Dingwall, IV15 9QN

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Archaeological Watching Brief, Formation of Playing Field, Acharacle Primary School, Planning Application LO-06-003
Highland Council Archaeology Unit (HCAU) Brief 11th March 2009,
Aspire Project UID HH 2009/03
Dr Harry Robinson MIFA, Highland Heritage Archaeological Consultants, 13.4.2009

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Archaeological Watching Brief, Acharacle Primary School Playing Field

Summary and Recommendations

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken on preparation work for a new Playing Field at Acharacle Primary School. Three drainage ditches were dug in an area of peat cover where the finding of a logboat c.1900 suggests that there may be further subsurface remains on the site. During ditch excavation fragments of old wood and roots were found; most bore no signs of cutting or working but five short lengths of wood were found, thickly coated in peat, in close proximity in one trench. At least one these appeared to have a triangular cross section which may have been worked using an old technique of radial splitting. I deduced no specific relationship between the wood finds and saw no clear sign of a feature, trackway or settlement. However, in the main trench (D1) while the surface of the peat was roughly level, its depth varied considerably, with two substantial bumps (or mounds) in the buried gravel subsoil that are difficult to explain (by a none geologist) as natural features.

Work on the site was suspend to assess these findings and for the Council to re-evaluated their development strategy. While they may chose an alternative location, a considerable amount of recording, sampling and post-excavation work is required whether or not development proceeds on this site. It was agreed that specialist advice (which the Council funded) be sought on the implications for the project. Meanwhile no further work was to be done on the site. Historic Scotland Conservation Department recommended Dr Anne Crone of AOC, who considered that the wood was worked and was possibly significant. AOC visited and evaluated the site, uplifted the wood to a safe store and made recommendations for further recording and sampling.

The archaeological remains on this site may indication only limited wood working for a short time in the mediaeval period, on the other hand they may reveal more extensive settlement over a long time span. Part of the research design for continuing (and possibly further) work will be to assess and explain the potential of this landscape and its varied environment as factors influencing this location as a favourable settlement site - offering exploitation of a highly desirable location on or behind a raised beach by a freshwater loch (fishing), sheltered by high ground to the west and surrounded by mixed woodland (hunting and foraging).

The present drainage problems appear to be caused by water damming behind the barrier of the raised beach - the first result of this may have been a shallow lagoon or wetland which initially would have actually increased the attractiveness of the site for early man (wild fowling). However, the growth of peat would have destroyed the woodland habitat, so any tree remains or roots presumably predate the peat. The human response to this could include abandonment, possibly with some short-term adaptation - which could take the form of mounds built up above the wet ground, with wooden track ways between them.

It is recommended that the three proposals suggested by AOC (recording, sampling and probing) are implemented within the authority of the existing watching brief and that work should begin as soon as possible. This will ensure that the site is protected and provide the Council with well researched advice for their project strategy.

Archaeological Watching Brief, Acharacle Primary School Playing Field

Introduction

An archaeological watching brief (appendix IV) was undertaken on further preparation work on the site of a new Playing Field at Acharacle Primary School NGR 167479 768221 on rough pasture located between the village school to the west and the manse to the east for which this field was once the glebe (figure 1 page 3). The area is shown on a scale plan (figure 2 page 4) to be a rectangular plot 95 m N-S by 55 m E-W. The area is shown as three enclosed fields the 1st and 2nd edition OS maps. Access to the plot is from the minor school road to the south.

The developers are The Highland Council (contact: Mr Sean Danaher H&PS Landscape Architect, Dingwall 01349 868559) who are responsible for the work, including tendering and contractual arrangements. The Watching Brief covers the entire area of the plot that will be impacted by the proposed development including site clearance and excavation works for services, access road and any other ancillary works.

The watching brief was carried by Dr Harry Robinson (Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists) on 16th-17th March 2009. The site contractors were McGregor Construction of Fort William (Ian McLeod Contracts Manager 07880 745755) who provided one supervised back-action JCB equipped with a straight edged bucket for the drainage works (1:1 ratio) in accordance with the HCAU Development Guidance as laid out in the webpages at www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/conservation/archaeology/developmentguidance

The present work did not involve actual site stripping and construction of the playing field, but was to drain water from the boggy site. It was intended to dig one long drainage ditch with several feeder ditches as required. The exact ditch location and layout was decided on site after an inspection of conditions by Mr Danaher and the contractors on 16th March 2009.

Background

The brief was issued because the area is considered by the Highland Council Archaeological Unit (HCAU) to be archaeologically sensitive: a logboat (Gazetteer item 5 appendix I) was discovered during drainage works at the turn of the 19th/20th Century (appendix II). Boats of this type are rare, mostly originating in either the medieval or the prehistoric periods. It was therefore considered to be a potential for valuable buried features of historic and archaeological importance features to survive within the application site and to be impacted by the proposed development. The watching brief was to ensure that any artefacts or features uncovered would be adequately recorded while causing minimum delay to the development.

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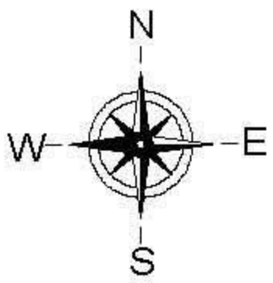
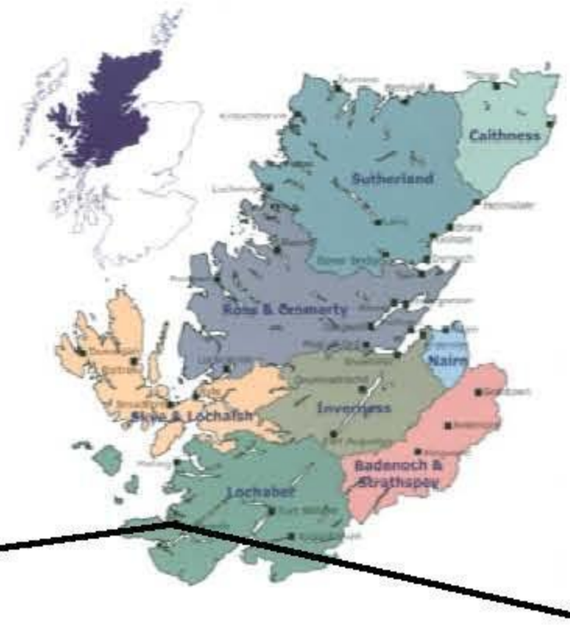
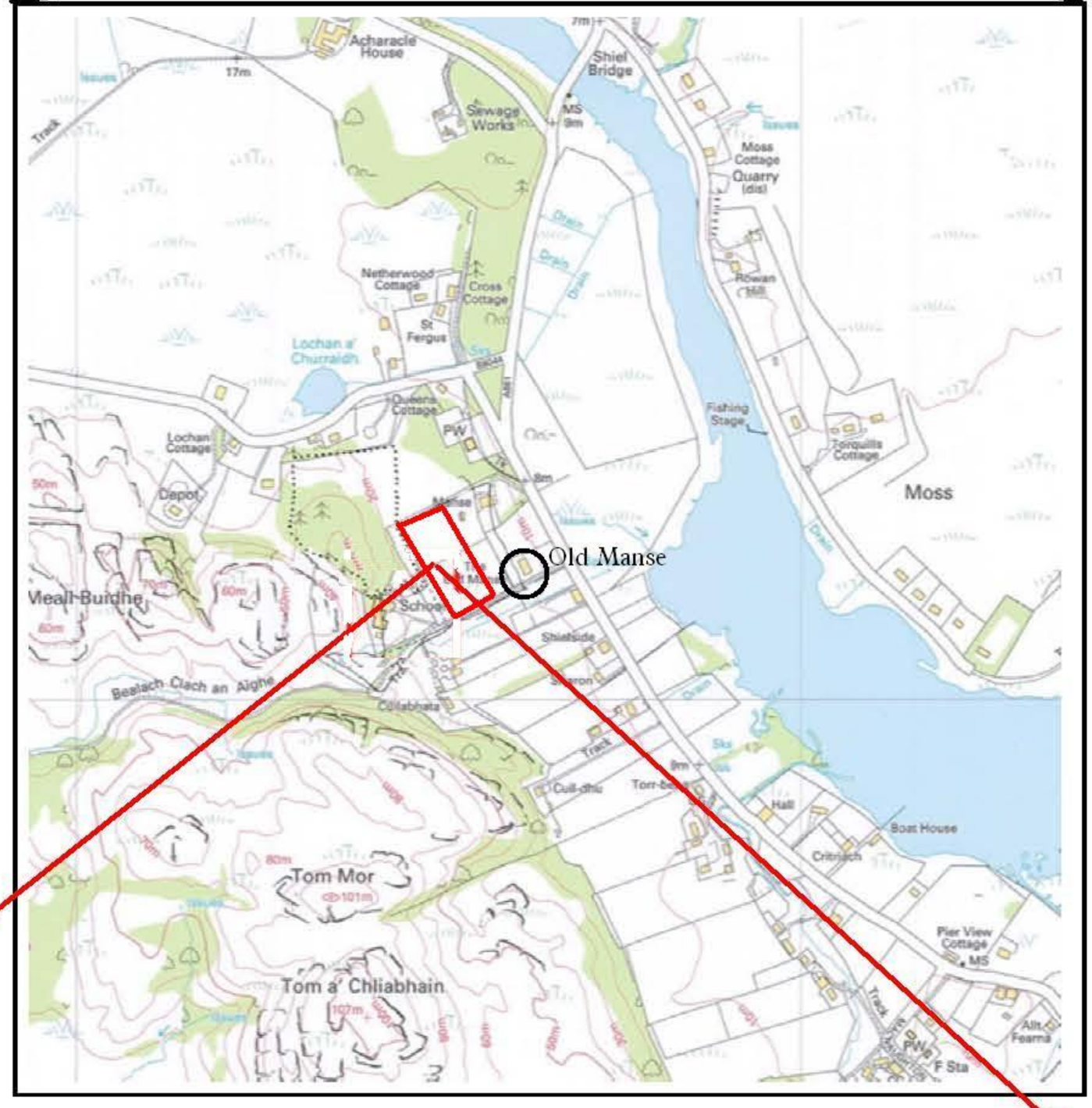
Location of development site

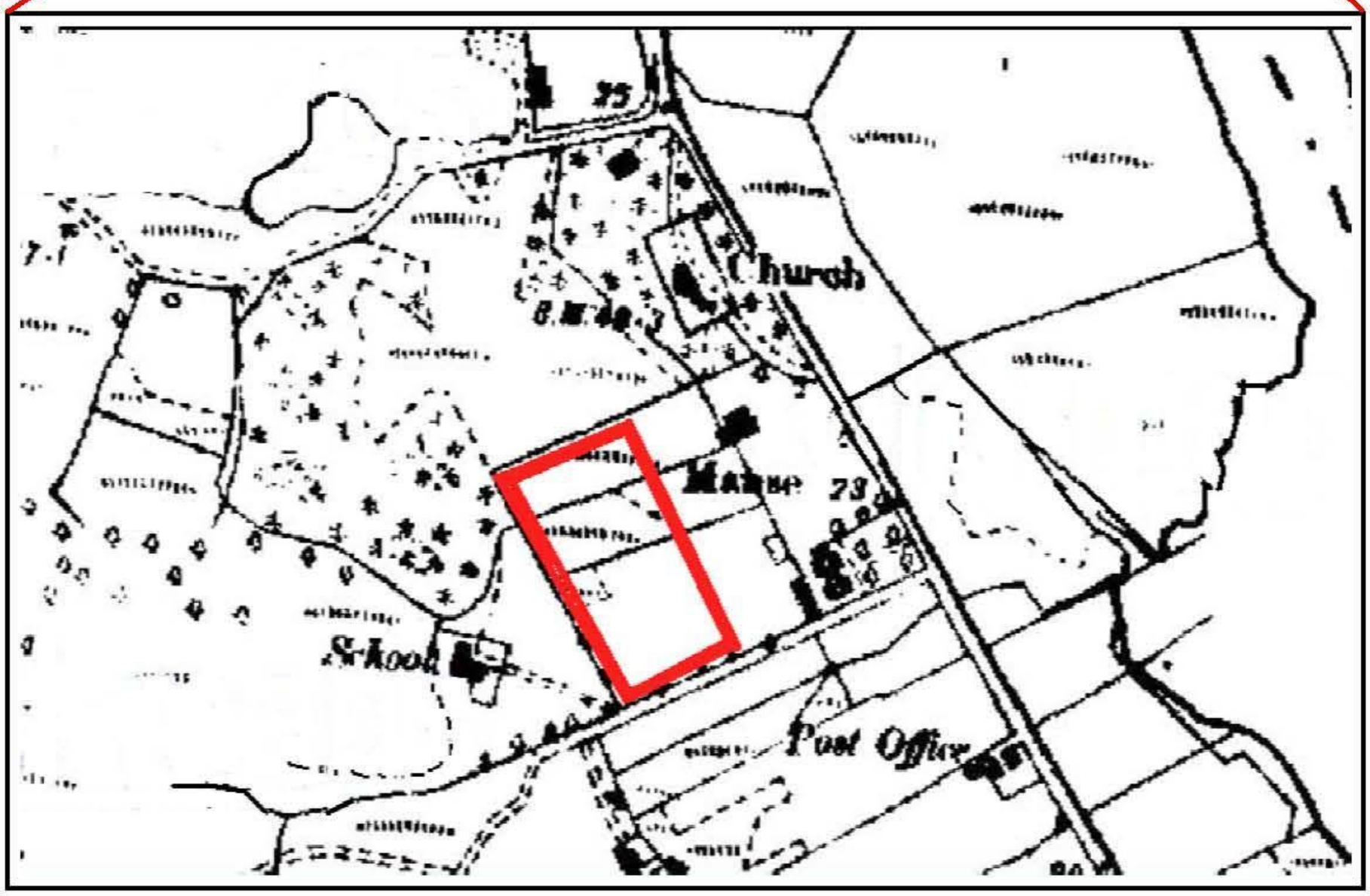




Map 1
OS 1:10,000 digital map

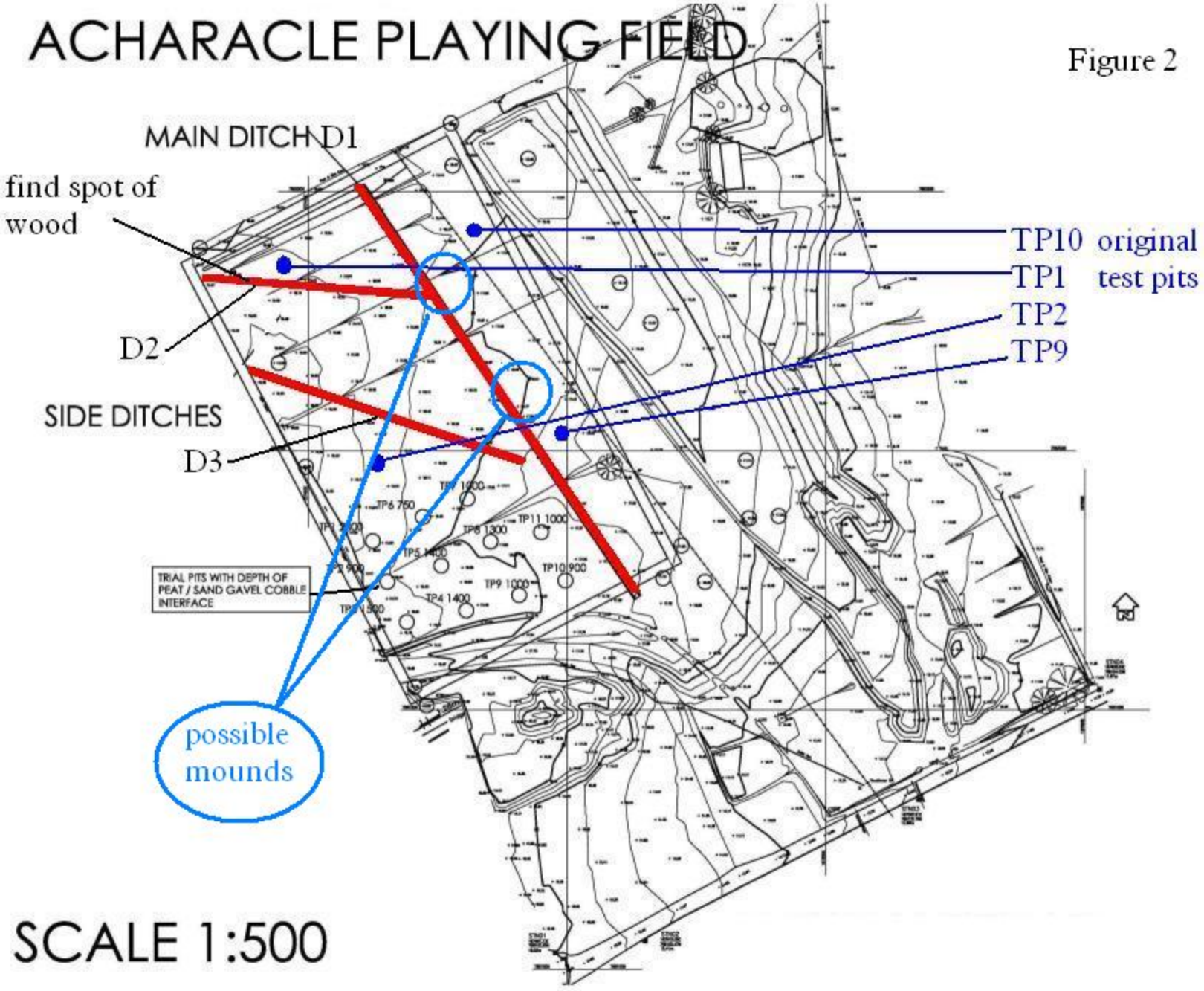


Map 2: Site location OS
1:10,560 map 1900



ACHARACLE PLAYING FIELD

Figure 2



SCALE 1:500

The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gaidhealtachd

HOUSING AND PROPERTY SERVICE
Steve Barron
Director of Housing and Property

ECS

S.DANAHER

ACHARACLE PLAYING FIELD

DE-WATERING DITCHES

RECORD

A2

03/09

ECSB 0029

DW2

Site Description

The playing field is situated on a sloping area (between 17-19 m OD) with an eastern aspect overlooking Loch Shiel, immediately north of the school building. There is a steep sloping tree covered outcrop (Meall-Buidhe) just to the west of the area (figure 3 page 6).

The average annual rainfall in this area is in the order of 1,700 mm and the trend over recent years is for the occurrence of more intense periods of rain. The ground conditions on the site are poor with a layer of peat over most of the area without topsoil. Old shallow drainage channels or grips excavated down the main fall of the site still carry some water. These conditions, combined with the high rainfall, provide problems for supporting an effective playing surface. A topographical and soil survey (including trial pits to a depth of one metre) was undertaken approximately ten years ago (appendix III).

Vegetation

The vegetation consists generally of rush infested and mossy poor grazing. In the last ten years it has been colonised by small trees and rhododendron shrubs. Photographs taken in the first study show that there was some grass cover in the southern part of the field. The vegetation is now much longer and coarser. This may be due to the absence of grazing by sheep that would prevent the shrubs from becoming established and would also encourage the development of a short grassy sward.

Topography

Gradients vary across the site and the surface is generally uneven and range from a maximum of 6.7% (1 in 15) down to a minimum of 1.7% (1 in 60) but the overall gradient is generally in the order 2% (1 in 50) with a general fall from the north west to the south east corner of the area for the playing field. The highest point shown on the survey is 19.60 m on the upper fence boundary approximately 15 m from the north west corner of the site. The lowest point of the area for the pitch is approximately 17.0 m adjacent to the mound. From the south east corner of the playing field area the ground slopes more steeply towards the ditch adjacent to the school access road.

A mound (or berm) approximately 2.0m high has been formed along the lower eastern edge to provide a screen for the houses below the site (photograph 3.17 appendix III. It has been formed with glacial material excavated from the site for the new school building. The material consists of firm and stable mixed glacial till containing soil sand, gravel and large rounded cobbles. This mound is impeding the natural flow of water on the surface and in some old shallow drainage channels. Beyond this mound the ground slopes more steeply towards the Manse and the main road. A track has been excavated in a curve in the south west corner of the site to provide an access to the old school building.

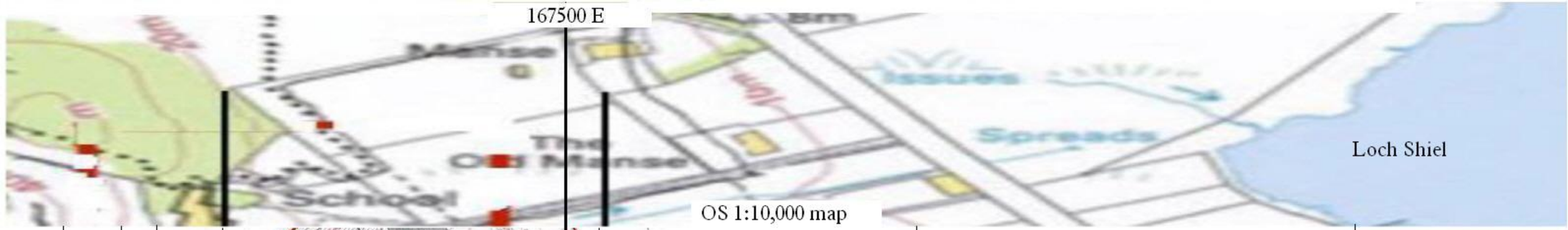


Figure 3 : Topographic section from lower lopes of Meal-Buidhe in the west to the shore of Loch Shiel in the east

Ground conditions

The site appears to consist of a deposit of glacial drift consisting of a mixture of sand, clay, gravel and large cobbles with a covering of peat soil varying in depth from 200 mm to over 1,000 mm. This soil was exposed on the southern boundary of the site by the excavation for the access track showing a relatively shallow layer of peat soil over the glacial till material (photograph 3.15 appendix III).

Change in ground conditions in last ten years

The higher ground towards the north west corner was firmer but in the lower areas the material was very wet and soft in January 2009. During previous site investigations the ground was clearly firmer (photographs 3.1 - 3.3), and water appears to be entering the trial pits at a depth ranging from approximately 0.5 m to 1.0 m (photographs 3.5-3.6) whereas in 2009 the water was standing on the surface in the wetter areas and the ground was much softer (photograph 3.12).

Peat

Probing with a Dutch auger (appendix III) suggests that the peat may be deeper in the south west corner of the playing field area. The peat consists of undecayed, wet organic material. Analyses of two samples confirm the nature of this material with a very high organic matter content, 40% and 65% with the remaining mineral material consisting of a mixture of sand, silt, clay and some small stones.

Test pits/Trial holes on site 1999 (appendix III)

Trial hole numbers 1, 2, 9 and 10 are located within the area of the playing field (photographs 3.5-3.10 Appendix III). The depth of peat in these pits ranges from 800 mm to 1000 mm and this overlies a mixture of sand, gravel and cobbles.

Test Pit 1 Profile

Dark brown peat 0 – 900 mm
Coarse sandy gravel 900 – 1500 mm
With occasional stones 200 – 300 mm
Hard and stony at 1500 mm
Very slow ingress of water after 2 hours

Test Pit 2 Profile

Dark brown peat 0 – 900 mm
Coarse sandy gravel 900 – 1500 mm
With occasional stones 200 – 300 mm
Hard and stony at 1500 mm
Very slow ingress of water after 2 hours

Test Pit 9 Profile

Dark Peat 0 – 800 mm
Coarse sand and gravel with 200 – 300 stones 800 – 1100 mm
Little water ingress evident

Test Pit 10 Profile

Peaty, clay sand 0 – 1000 mm
Coarse sand 100 – 1400 mm
200 – 300 stones in sand 1400 – 1600 mm
Little water ingress evident

Drainage

There is an existing cut off ditch which has become very overgrown on the upper side of the site just inside the adjacent woodland. The original field was drained by means of shallow surface drainage channels to remove some of the surface water. The channels flowed directly down the main fall towards the Manse but the mound has blocked these channels and water is now accumulating against the mound although some water is flowing to the low point in the south east corner.

The ground conditions on the site itself were generally very wet over the whole area but particularly in the old drainage channels and adjacent to the mound where water is being held back. The wet conditions are partially a result of the high rainfall but the accumulation of peat suggests that there is some deep seepage entering the site from the higher ground.

Services

An electricity cable on telegraph poles crosses the lower part of the site from the north west to the south east. This cable will have to be diverted around the playing field either by laying underground or relocating the telegraph poles.

Desk-based Assessment

A Desk-based Assessment of the relevant archaeological/ historical records, maps and aerial photographs as specified in the brief was undertaken on 7th February 2008, including:

- The Highland Council Sites and Monuments Record (HSMR) in Inverness
- The National Monuments Record for Scotland (NMRS)
- Historic Scotland: List of Scheduled Monuments; Listed Buildings;
- Highland Council Archives and early cartographic collection in Inverness
- Aerial photographic coverage held by RCAHMS and the HCSMR
- Maps, including Ordnance Survey coverage
- Bibliographic references and early parish accounts.

Summary of relevant Sites as revealed by the Desktop research (full details presented as an Appendix Gazetteer & Bibliography to the report) :

Scheduled Monuments and **Listed building** - there are no scheduled monuments or listed buildings on or near this site: there are four Listed buildings close by which will not be effected:

1 - Acharacle, Church Of Scotland, Parish Church
HCSMR no. NM66NE0002 - NMRS no. NM66NE 2 - NGR NM 67543 68355
Acharacle Parish Church (Church of Scotland), graveyard
SMR no. NM66NE0025 - NGR 67442 68376
HB Number 519 Item no.1 - **Category: B** - Date of Listing 20-JUL-1971.

2 - Acharacle Manse
HCSMR no. NM66NE0003 - NMRS no. NM66NE 3 - NGR NM 67616 68185
HB Number 520 Item no.2 - **Category: B** - Date of Listing 20-JUL-1971

3 - Acharacle, Old Shiel Bridge: Road Bridge
HCSMR no. NM66NE0004 - NMRS no. NM66NE 4 - NGR NM 67396 69181
HB Number 300 Item no.44 - **Category: B** - Date of Listing 05-OCT-1971.

4 - New Shiel Bridge - Road Bridge
HCSMR no. NM66NE0008 - NMRS no. NM66NE 10 - NGR NM 67694 68883
HB Number 299 Item no.43 - **Category: B** - Date of Listing 05-OCT-1971

The Desktop research suggested one line of inquiry: that there may be subsurface remains associated with the recorded finding of a logboat c.1900.

5 - Acharacle: Logboat
HCSMR no. NM66NE0001 - NMRS no. NM66NE 1 - NGR NM 6745 6822 .
A dug-out canoe was uncovered sometime between 1895 and 1905, by two workmen digging drains at the top end of the glebe, near the school, at Acharacle. The canoe was described as 'narrow, about 12 to 14 feet in length and carved from a single piece of wood'. (Information from Rev Neil MacKinnon, Minister, Church of Scotland, at Acharacle, 1888-1927). It was said in the locality that the minister, the Rev Neil MacKinnon, 'sent it away to a museum'. (letter from J Dye, Toad Hall, Acharacle, Argyll, to OS, 27 October 1976).
The area indicated is on the W side of Acharacle village at an altitude of about 15m OD and is about 300m from the W end of Loch Shiel (at its present level). No contemporary record of this discovery exists but a later account describes the boat as being 'narrow' and measuring between 12' (3.7m) and 14' (4.3m) in length. It was apparently sent to 'a Museum', but is now lost (Mowat 1996, 11, 110, 120, no. 1). NMRS, MS/47/1

It is noted that the present manse at the north end of the site (as shown on maps 1900-present) is not the original manse: the original manse is shown on the 1st edition map of 1975 (below) as lying to the south end of the site, and is marked as Old Manse on later maps (map 1 figure 1). This suggests the find spot given in the HER should be relocated further south closer to the modern and Victorian school site and its access road.

Other Sites

6 - Lochan A' Churraidh: Farmstead, Field System
HCSMR no. NM66NE0029 - NMRS no. NM66NE 13 - NGR NM 6721 6830
7 - Shielbridge House
HCSMR no. NM66NE0035 - NMRS no. NM66NE 21 - NGR NM 6733 6909
8 - Shiel Bridge, Hydro House/ Acharacle House
HCSMR no. NM66NE000 ? - NMRS no. NM66NE 26 - NGR NM 67350 68921

Previous archaeological work in the area:

February 2008 - Highland Heritage - Aspire Project UDI HH 2008/02

An archaeological inspection was conducted 4th February 2008 on a recently completed temporary access road for a new school buildings project but within the area of an adjacent playing field project with a planning constraint requiring an Archaeological Watching Brief. The programme of work included documentary research, walk-over survey, site inspection and evaluation of the work completed during the formation of the access road. No archaeological or historical features or artefacts were observed and it was considered probable that none were encountered or damaged in the small area of the road construction. It was considered that the lack of remains found during the site inspection did not diminish the possibility of surviving archaeological or historical features being uncovered when the full Watching Brief was conducted.

The Watching Brief

Of the originally envisaged ten drainage trenches only three were dug (D1-D3 figure 2 page 4, photographs 1-6). For drainage and de-watering the trenches were not successful as only surface water ran off, the peat held the rest like a great dense sponge. Previous work (test pits, access roads Appendix III) had suggested that there would be an uneven peat cover between 0.25-1.25 m deep, however this was quickly found to be an underestimate. In the NE corner at the start of trench D1 the peat was at least 2.5 m deep and this section was immediately filled for safety reasons.

The peat was very easy to extract, however it was thick and water-logged and the straight edged JCB bucket smeared the trench sides into featureless surfaces (the gravel subsurface was very compacted and required a change over to a toothed bucket). Several fragments of old wood and roots were found, but most bore no signs of cutting or working and were set aside on site. However on the second day five short narrow lengths of wood were found in close proximity within the peat in trench D2 (photograph 8) which did not look naturally shaped (photographs 7-14). I deduced no specific relationship between them and saw no sign of a feature, trackway or settlement.

I pointed them out to Mr Danaher and explained that at least one of them appeared to have a triangular cross section and may have been worked using an old technique of radial splitting. I marked the area of the find spot and set the wood safely to one side for later attention. The five lengths of wood were thickly coated in clinging peat and except for their general plank-like shape and triangular cross section no other worked features were observed.

Possible mounds in the subsoil gravel

In trench D1 the while the surface of the peat was roughly level, its depth varied considerably, with two substantial upstanding undulations (bumps or mounds) in the buried gravel subsoil (photographs 3-4) that are difficult to explain (by a none geologist) as natural features.

Loch Shiel appears to be glacial in origin and I would expect to find remains of lateral moraines but I do not see why they would be of this shape, size or height. Also the northern one may have a pit dug into (as Dr Barber pointed out when the peat face had dried out) which may have soil in it sealed by later peat cover. The trench D1 cuts through the two bumps revealing their width but not their shape or any relationship between them, However the northern bump can be traced in side ditch D2, and may possibly be traced as a low circular shape on the surface (figure 2). These clues suggest that they may not be natural - one possibility is that they were raised settlement platforms in response to wet ground conditions. This remains speculation, and will be investigated further during the recording process.

At the end of the second day, in view of the unexpected depth and volume of peat together with finds of possibly worked wood, it was agreed with Mr Danaher to suspend work to assess findings and re-evaluated the development strategy.

From a Council operational/management view a decision could be taken to end the work on the site at this point in favour of an alternative location. This would involve back filling the trenches and restoring the surface. However archaeologically the work has only been suspended and a considerable amount of recording, sampling and post-excavation work is required whether or not development proceeds. This is discussed in greater detail below and will be confirmed when further expert advice is received.

Mr Danaher saw the wood being recovered and appreciates the responsibility for post excavation work on artefacts and ecofacts stipulated in the WSI : i.e.

- **Post-excavation and sampling** - The post-excavation process is part of the planning condition and is required to bring a piece of archaeological work to completion. All necessary post-excavation work will be arranged in line with the Highland Council Archaeology Unit requirements for post excavation analysis as specified in the online Development Guidance (section 8) www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/conservation/archaeology/developmentguidance

- **Artefacts -** All recovered artefacts and ecofacts will be subject to a programme of post-excavation analysis and the results incorporated into a final report. Advice and facilities for emergency conservation and temporary storage (should be sought). All finds with supporting documentation will be notified to the Secretariat of the Treasure Trove Panel for disposal to the appropriate museum before the report is submitted.

Evaluation of the worked wood

I advised Mr Danaher that the possibly worked wood was “interesting” and may be found to be significant - and that the archaeological project was now possibly larger than first envisaged - i.e. no longer a one man watching brief for up to one week, and possibly requiring a new Project Design and modified brief.

I suggested to Mr Danaher that my solution would be for a specialist to meet me on site so I could explain the site and possibly hand over the wood samples - and we would take it from there. He agreed that I should seek specialist advice (which the Council funded) on the implications for the project.

I considered the possibly fragile nature of the wood prevented leaving them in situ, so I covered them, took them home and stored them in a cool shed until arrangements were agreed for safeguarding or recording them.

To ensure that the wood was protected I phoned Historic Scotland Conservation Department for advice and they recommended I contact Dr Anne Crone of AOC. I phoned AOC and spoke to Coralie Mills and Ciara Clark who advised me to clean the peat from the wood and to check for signs of wood working. This I did and found cut marks on the end of one piece. I photographed the wood and emailed copies and a situation report to AOC with a request on behalf of the Council to assist me.

As I now considered that the worked wood was possibly significant I reported my revised assessment and recommendations to the Mr Danaher and I phoned the HCAU and reported the situation to Mr Andrew Puls the archaeologist on duty who agreed that this was the best course of action. Meanwhile no further work was to be done on the site until both the archaeological and peat handling problems have been reassessed.

Dr Anne Crone of AOC responded by email :

The wood certainly looks very interesting - plank 3 appears to have aze/adze marks at one end - is that correct? I'm not clear about the context - were they simply found lying within the peat or are they in a feature, such as a palaeochannel? Were they lying alongside each other, as in a trackway? If there are no other features around with which the planks could be associated I wonder whether they might represent a cargo from the logboat mentioned in the WSI - I think that some logboats have been found with cargoes of planks.

I take it that the Council is aware that the dewatering of the site will destroy any other wooden objects within the peat? If you have found 3 planks within a relatively narrow ditch it seems reasonable to assume that there will be more in the area - so I wholeheartedly agree with your conclusion that it is turning into a larger job and is likely to need specialist support. AOC has a conservation department (we have the Historic Scotland call-off conservation contract) so we could provide you with the necessary expertise in the handling, storage and conservation of waterlogged objects, if you should need it.

In the meantime, I could certainly come over to Acharacle to see the site and planks, and bring them back to our lab in Loanhead if that is appropriate. I could then assess them and give you a cost for their analysis - if they are oak and with a sufficiently long ring-pattern, then they would be good candidates for dendrochronological analysis - at the very least I would report on the carpentry techniques they display.

Site visit by AOC, 2.3.2009, Dr Anne Crone and Dr John Barber

AOC inspected the site and the worked wood : their report is below.

Acharacle Primary School playing field; assessment of the wooden finds
Report by Dr Anne Crone, Post Excavation Manager, AOC

During a watching brief on the digging of drainage ditches across the proposed playing field at Acharacle Primary School a group of five wooden planks were retrieved from one of the newly-cut ditches. At the request of Highland Council, a site visit was made to assess the find spot and to uplift the planks for examination in the laboratory at AOC Archaeology premises in Loanhead.

The planks

All of the planks were oak (*Quercus* sp.). Plank 5 is a chord cleft from the outside of a tree and shows no signs of having been deliberately worked. The other four planks have been deliberately fashioned. They had been radially split from the tree and at least one end on each plank had been roughly squared; the other end was too decayed to determine whether it had been shaped. However, both ends on Plank 3 had been squared so it was complete; it was 0.94 m in length. The longest example was Plank 4 which measured 1.42 m in length but this was incomplete. On Plank 1, the thickest of the planks, the squared end bore a series of toolmarks, of either an axe or an adze. Toolmarks were not visible on the ends of the other planks, nor were they visible on the faces of the planks. This may be due to decay but the elongated triangular cross-section of the planks suggests that their faces had not been dressed after splitting. The sapwood, the outermost growth rings of oak, and the bark edge were present on three of the four radially split planks.

This type of woodworking, the conversion of logs into planks by radial splitting and the use of an axe or adze is an archaic form; planking was made in this fashion from the Neolithic until at least the 16th century AD, after which planking was increasingly manufactured by plainsawing across the log. Although the planks bear no other visual evidence which allows us to be more specific about their actual date, they are clearly of some antiquity and this makes the nature of their find spot all the more significant.

The find spot

A scatter of unworked oak trunks and branches was visible in some of the other drainage ditches and at the base of the peat profile in one of the ditch sections there appears to be a distinctive band of brushwood in association with some of the oakwood. One possibility is that this is the remains of a trackway or platform built out into this small peat bog, the unworked trunks forming a basal layer over which the planks were laid to create a flat surface. Alternatively, the planks may represent a small cache prepared in woodland on the edge of the bog and left in a bog pool so that they did not dry out before they were finished; unfinished bowls, troughs and even logboats have been found in peat bogs indicating that this was not an uncommon procedure.

AOC Recommendations

More work is needed to determine the nature of the find spot, the extent of the worked and unworked wood scatter and the environment in which the planks were deposited. However, such work must be undertaken within the scope of the existing watching brief condition and therefore the following works are proposed;

1. The area immediately around the find spot of the planks should be probed using bamboo poles over a 1 m grid. The peat is not fibrous and is relatively homogenous so any large wooden objects should be detectable. This is a cheap, fast and effective means of mapping sub-peat features and should provide us with an indication of the shape and spread of the wood, if it is coherent in nature. The information gathered in this manner will be useful in managing the JCB strip, should this be the way in which work on the site proceeds

2. An archaeologist should survey the sides of the existing drainage ditches noting the peat/mineral soil interface and all non-peat inclusions within the peat mass

3. A palaeobotanist should carry out a rapid survey of the peat stratigraphy as it has been revealed in the sides of the existing drainage ditches

If further drainage ditches are planned then these works need to be carried out in all the ditches. If the peat is to be stripped by JCB then these works could be carried out in tandem with machine-watching.

The planks have been wrapped and labelled and are now in the coldstore at AOC Archaeology premises at Loanhead.

Meeting with Education, Culture And Sport Service to discuss the situation and AOC's report, 8.3.2009, those present :

Brian Hemming - Estate Strategy Manager, Education, Culture And Sport Service (ECS)
Sean Danaher, H&PS
Robert Campbell, H&PS
Harry Robinson

Mr Hemming acknowledged that the Council understood the nature of the wood working on site and a potential that 'settlement' mounds may be in evidence, noted that the finds were reported as 'significant' to Planning - and they needed to find a way forward. He suggested we proceed in stages :

Stage 1

- (this) Archaeologist interim report to HC Archaeologist and above addressees.
- AOC to be advised that HC will potentially be looking to investigate, at a minimum, the works and finds to date which includes dating of finds
- ECS to Review the report to consider next actions
- We need a project plan (including number of JCBs) and timetable so that an archaeological team can be assessed and assembled.

Stage 2

AOC write up the scheme for approval by ECS and Planners, including a programme and cost for the works.
Should the HC wish to take investigation further based upon the initial scheme provided by AOC then this decision would need to be based upon proposals that would form an addendum to the initial scheme again with time scales, costs and clear identification of areas of excavation/research. The scheme should also include the heads of terms for the future report.

HCAU to advised at all stages and to review (or revise) Brief and agree a new Written Scheme of Investigation covering all relevant points to HCAU's satisfaction.

Stage 3.

The decision stage, to either:-

Option 1.
Close down the site and back fill the three trenches with the report being lodged with the appropriate authorities. The trenches and their features will be surveyed, samples taken and post excavation work carried out to enable a site history to be deduced with a dated sequence of development. This will include :
- recording the peat-soil-subsoil profiles of both faces of the three trenches, taking peat and soil samples for identification and analysis - as AOC's recommendation 2
- recording and sampling all wood and any other organic material seen in both faces of the three trenches, identify the species, and date suitable samples (extent of which to be agreed) - as AOC's recommendation 3.

The work described above (required by the watching brief's provisions) may provide most of the advice required, but I think that we should also consider AOC's recommendation 1 - to probe the area around the findspot of the planks using bamboo poles over a 1 m grid, and to extend it over the area of the two possible mounds. AOC describe it is a cheap, fast and effective means of mapping sub-peat features. I consider this to extend the work required by the brief - but if properly designed it should answer all foreseeable risk concerns

Option 2.
Continue to develop the site with a Archaeological watching brief for site strip. Due to the risks involved due to possible future finds, costs and contractual issues need to be clearly established and costed.

Time scales

The exposed trenches cannot remain that way for more than 2 months as the peat will deteriorate and impact upon any future condition of finds etc. Given that circumstance it is essential that the engagement of AOC is made as soon as practicable.

ECS Conclusion

Whilst this is a setback to the development of the Pitch, ECS will continue with the design as it will be up to two months before these matters can be resolved and way forward fully adjudged. Should there be any additional delay then ECS would need to consider delaying the works until 2010 in order to catch the next growing season.

Highland Heritage Summary and Recommendations

The archaeological remains on this site may indication only limited wood working for a short time in the mediaeval period, on the other hand they may reveal more extensive settlement over a long time span. Part of the research design for continuing (and possibly further) will be to assess and explain the potential of the landscape and its varied environment as factors influencing this location as a favourable settlement site - offering exploitation of a highly desirable location on or behind a raised beach by a freshwater loch (fishing), sheltered by high ground to the west and surrounded by mixed woodland (hunting and foraging).

The present drainage problems appear to be caused by water damming behind the barrier of the raised beach - the first result of this may have been a shallow lagoon or wetland which initially would have actually increased the attractiveness of the site for early man (wild fowling). However, the growth of peat would have destroyed the woodland habitat, so any tree remains or roots presumably predate the peat. The human response to this could include abandonment, possibly with some short-term adaptation - which could take the form of mounds built up above the wet ground, with wooden track ways between them.

It is recommended that the three proposals suggested by AOC in Option 1 above are implemented within the authority of the existing watching brief and that work should begin as soon as possible. ECS and HCAU should be advised immediately of any developments.

Photographs 1-6

1 - Trench D1 and berm looking south

2 - Trench D1

3 - shallow peat over raised gravel in trench D2 - 4

5 - Trench D2

6 - Trench D3

7 - ditch D looking SE

8 - ditch D2 - first "plank" found

9 - plank 1 - 0.93 x 0.30 x 0.12 - showing sawn edge

10 - plank 1 - resting on straight edge showing wedge profile

11 - plank 2 - 0.9 x 0.20 x 0.04

12- plank 2 resting on straight edge showing profile

13 - plank 3 - 1.10 x 0.24 x 0.10 - showing wedge profile and saw cuts

14- plank 3 - thick edge