

Land 100m NE of 8 Coghill
St, Doocot View, Wick,
Caithness, Highland
(22/01426/FUL)

Archaeological Watching Brief Project

Data Structure Report

For
Graeme Sutherland

Andrew Young BA (Hons) MCIfA
April 2024
(AAH Project DVW24)



Avon Archaeology (Highland) Limited
Professional Archaeological Services



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Land 100m NE of No. 8 Coghill St, Doocot View, Wick, Caithness, Highland – Archaeology Watching Brief Data Structure Report

Report No.	DVW24 - 003
Site Code	DVW24
Client	Graeme Sutherland
Reference	22/01426/FUL
OS Grid Ref	ND 3763 5141
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Report Date	April 2024
Author	Andrew Young MCIfA

Executive Summary

An archaeological Watching Brief has been conducted, in accordance with the requirements of planning consent, to monitor the preliminary stage of topsoil stripping for the development of a new dwelling on land located at Doocot View, Wick, Caithness. The study site (House Plot No. 29) is located approximately 30m south of The Pap Broch (SM578), a scheduled prehistoric monument of National Importance and represented one of five plots (House Plots 29 to 31) with consent for a new dwelling on the site, the remaining four of which had already been constructed and completed. The project was undertaken on behalf of landowner Graeme Sutherland and in accordance with a WSI document approved by Highland Council.

The project was designed to ensure that all significant buried archaeological deposits, features and finds revealed during the course of preliminary topsoil stripping for the development were identified, fully recorded and reported.

No significant archaeological deposits, features or finds of any kind were revealed by topsoil stripping of the footprint of House Plot 29, which was archaeologically sterile. In view of the entirely negative results of the watching brief project no further archaeological mitigation is recommended.

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Legislation and Policy

The common principles underlying international conventions, national legislation and local authority planning policies are that cultural heritage assets should be identified in advance of development and safeguarded where practicable; if disturbance is unavoidable appropriate recording of features and recovery of portable artefacts should take place. These have been set out in international and European Union agreements, and UK and Scottish legislation, as well as national and local planning policies¹.

¹ A summary of relevant international, EU, UK and Scottish legislation and policies is available from the AAH office on request.



Professional standards maintained throughout the present project adhered to the Codes of Conduct and Approved Practice and Standards of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists².

Acknowledgements

This document was written by Andrew Young MCIfA. The project was commissioned and funded by the landowner and developer, Graeme Sutherland, who arranged the machine and operator for the topsoil stripping work. Special thanks are due to machine operator Richard Henderson of AD Henderson Groundworks for his skill, goodwill and assistance throughout.

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Copyright

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No omissions are intended. All errors are unintentional and the responsibility of the writer.

² Chartered Institute for Archaeology (CIfA) Standards and Guidelines. <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>



Introduction, Location & Background

A proposed development by landowner Graeme Sutherland of new dwellings and associated infrastructure at a site off Doocot View, Wick, has received planning consent (22/01426/FUL) from Highland Council. The consent includes a Condition that requires preliminary ground works including topsoil stripping to be monitored by means of an archaeological watching brief in order to identify and record all heritage assets revealed during the course of that work. The principal reason for the archaeology Condition is the presence of a scheduled prehistoric monument, The Pap Broch (SM578), which is located just to the north of the development area.

The study site is located off Doocot View, Wick, approximately 350m east of Hillhead Farm and c 400m northwest of Broad Haven Bay (Figures 1 to 4 below) in the civil parish of Wick, approximately 1.5km to the NE of the town centre. The development area centred at NGR ND 3763 5133. The area with planning consent (Figure 3 below) has an overall footprint of approximately 0.2 hectares and consists of relatively level former grassland at an elevation of c 29 m above Ordnance datum.

The British Geological Survey indicates that the site is underlain by a bedrock basement of Lybster Flagstone Formation of Mid-Devonian date comprising mudstones, siltstones and sandstones. This is in turn overlain by mixed fluvioglacial till deposits of Late Pleistocene Devensian date³.



Figure 1 - General Site Location

³ BGS online viewer accessed 28/2/24





Figure 2 - Site Location. Grid squares in kms

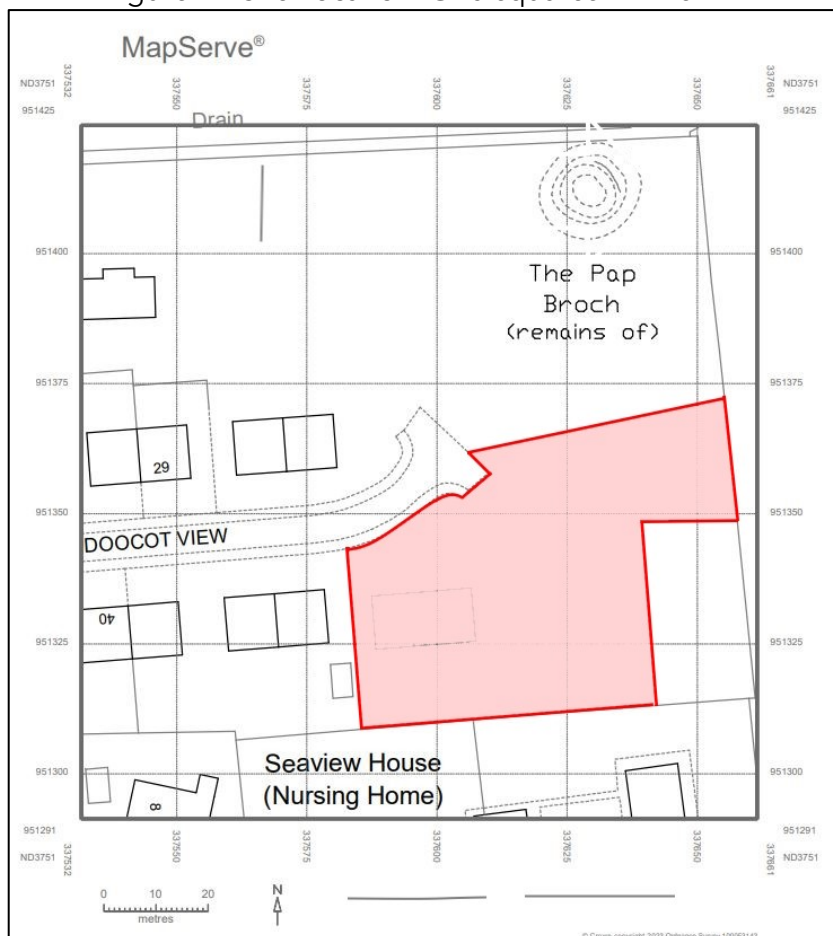


Figure 3 - Plan showing the footprint of the development consent area. Scale shown





Figure 4 - Plan showing the development area (in green) and the layout of house plots 29 to 31a. Reproduced courtesy of Graeme Sutherland

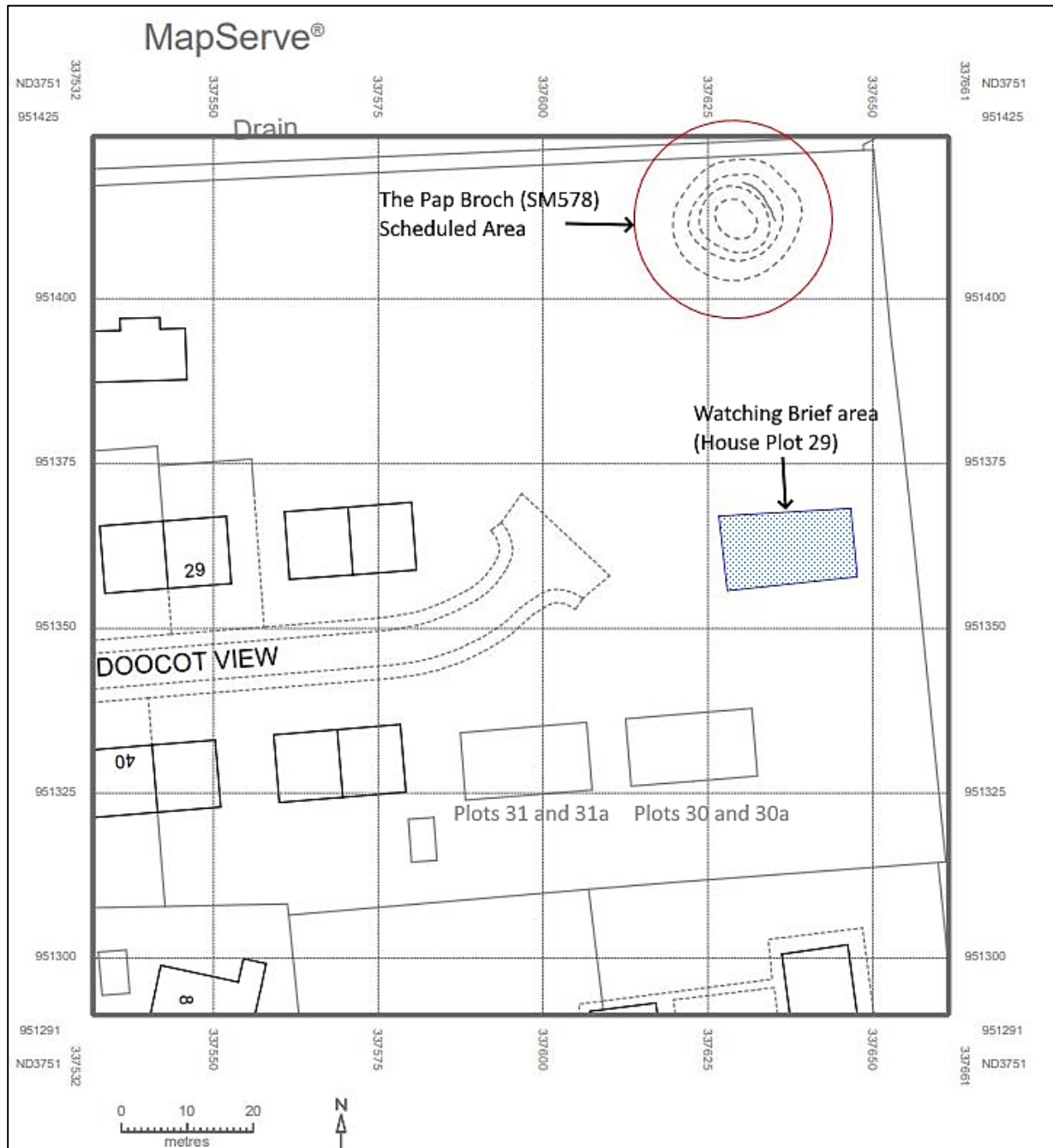


Figure 5 - Ordnance Survey plan showing the location of topsoil stripping for House Plot 29 monitored by watching brief and the extent of The Pap Broch (SM578) scheduled area. Scale shown



Figure 6 - House Plot 29 marked out with ranging poles prior to topsoil stripping. Scales 2m. Looking NW with The Pap scheduled monument centre right.

Archaeological & Historical Background (Desk-based Assessment)

Readily available cartographic, heritage-related, aerial photographic, LiDAR and other published records for the study site, including evidence pertaining to the adjacent Pap Broch, were reviewed for the preparation of the project Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) (AAH 2024) approved by Highland Council. The results of that research are not reproduced here but can be reviewed in full in the WSI document.

Watching Brief Aims

The aims of the Watching Brief exercise were to:

- Monitor topsoil stripping and reduced level excavations required for the development.
- Identify, characterise and record to professional standards all significant heritage assets revealed during the course of the soil clearance mitigation work.
- Minimise any possible delay or cost to the development by anticipating archaeological requirements as far as possible, timetabling and integrating



archaeological recording work with the project, and dealing with any issues arising quickly and efficiently.

No archaeological excavation was to be undertaken as part of this work beyond that necessary to achieve these objectives.

Methodology

The methodology for the watching brief project, as set out in the project WSI (AAH 2023), was as follows:

1. Topsoil stripping of the house plot areas will be undertaken using an appropriately sized slew-tracked machine operated by an experienced driver and equipped with a toothless grading bucket.
2. Watching Brief work will be carried out under controlled conditions and direct archaeological supervision. The archaeologist will closely monitor the movement of soil and have the authority to temporarily halt machine work in order to check the progress of the work and for the possible presence of archaeological remains.
3. All significant archaeological deposits and soil features or artefacts revealed during the course of soil removal will be evaluated and recorded archaeologically according to the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' published standards.
4. Where archaeology is confirmed a drawn and photographic record will be made. The camera locations and direction of all photographs taken will be plotted on a site plan. Where necessary, plans and scaled drawings of archaeological features will be made at 1:10 or 1:20 scale. Depths of excavations will be taken from the adjoining ground surface.
5. Palaeo-environmental recording and sampling will be undertaken if the nature of deposits indicate that they have archaeological potential. Sequences of natural blown sands will be described and recorded in relation to OS Datum.
6. Portable artefacts will be retained, conserved and recorded and declared as necessary for Scottish Treasure Trove (TTS). Where material is unclaimed by TTS, the client's consent will be sought to offer it to a suitable local museum for safe keeping.
7. Any human remains found will be immediately reported to the local Procurator Fiscal and will not be excavated as part of this work. They will then be dealt with in accordance with Historic Scotland's published guidance.
8. Where archaeology of local importance is identified it will be recorded to professional standards. The archaeologist will also monitor excavated spoil for



historic artefacts. Photographs of the site, all excavations, and any features found will be taken using a professional quality digital camera. The location of the watching brief area and all significant archaeological features or finds will be recorded using a survey grade GPS unit (Topcon Hiper) capable of cm accuracy.

9. In circumstances where more important archaeology is identified, which cannot be adequately recorded or adequately conserved or reported within the scope of the work as set out here, further fieldwork or post-fieldwork analysis may be required, which will be the subject of separate negotiation.
10. All archaeological work undertaken will meet or exceed ClfA Standards and Guidance⁴.

Watching Brief Fieldwork - Results

The footprint of house plot 29 (Figures 5 and 6 above), an area measuring 20m by 15m, was located and defined by the developer and stripped of topsoil under archaeological supervision using a 13-ton slew tracked machine equipped with a toothless bucket (Figure 7 below).

Machine clearance removed between 250mm and 500mm of mixed silt clay topsoil (101), which contained common stones and sparse smaller cobbles along with sparse inclusions of modern construction debris including fragments of machine-cut timber and plastic.

The topsoil directly overlay horizontally bedded flagstone bedrock (102) throughout the area stripped of topsoil (Figure 8) at a depth of between 250mm and 500mm (28.2m – 28.8mOD).

No archaeologically significant deposits, features or finds of any kind were revealed by the topsoil stripping.

⁴ <http://www.archaeologists.net/codes/ifa>





Figure 7 - House Plot 29 area showing topsoil stripping in progress. Facing WNW. Scales 2m



Figure 8 - House Plot 29 area with topsoil stripping nearing completion. Facing NW. Scales 2m and 1m.



Finds

No significant finds of any kind were recovered during the course of the watching brief work.

Conclusions & Recommendations

A programme of archaeological watching brief has been undertaken at the Doocot View site to monitor preliminary topsoil stripping and earthmoving for House Plot 29, in accordance with the requirements of Highland Council. At the time of the watching brief House Plots 30, 30a, 31 and 31a had already been built and completed.

No significant archaeological deposits, features or finds of any kind were revealed by topsoil stripping of the footprint of House Plot 29, which was archaeologically sterile.

In view of the entirely negative results of the watching brief project no further archaeological mitigation is recommended.

References

Avon Archaeology (Highland) Ltd 2023. Land 100m NE of 8 Coghill St, Wick, Caithness WSI for Archaeology Watching Brief: Desk-based Assessment, Project Design, Methods Statement & Risks Assessment. Unpublished client report. December 2023

Highland Council Historic Environment Record – passim

Managing Change in the Historic Environment (MCHE): Documents including guidance on the treatment and management of heritage assets including Scheduled Monuments

Scotland's Archaeology Strategy 2016

Document laying out the importance of archaeology in Scotland

The Historic Environment Policy for Scotland 2019 (HES 2019): Historic Environment Scotland's published revised principles and policies for the management of heritage in Scotland including managing change and sources of further information.



Appendices

Appendix 1 – Photographic Register

Fuji SLR auto

<i>Photograph</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Facing</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Scales</i>
0599-0607	Plot 29	N to NW	Views of WB area prior to topsoil strip	2m
0608-0611	site	S to SW	Plots 30 and 31 houses built	-
0612-0614	site	S to SE	View of WB area from The Pap SM	1m
0630-0639	Plot 29	W	Topsoil stripping in progress	2m
0640-0642	Plot 29	W	Topsoil stripping near completion	2m and 1m



Appendix 2 – Context Register

Context No.	Area	Length (m)	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Type (Cut, Fill, Deposit, surface)	Description	Interpretation	Find No.	Plans (Drwg #)	Sections (Drwg #)	Photos (Y/N)	Samples
101	Plot 29	>20	>12	0.22 up to 0.50	Deposit	Layer of near waterlogged dark brown silt clay loam containing common small stones, gravels and smaller cobbles with sparse inclusions of modern wood, plastic and modern construction debris	Topsoil containing sparse modern dumped earth		Y	N	Y	N
102	Plot 29	>20	>12	unknown	Deposit	Horizon of horizontal grey flagstone	Caithness flagstone bedrock		Y	N	Y	N

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