

West Coast Archaeological Services

Generator Installation and Access Upgrade, Nerabus, Islay

Desk-based Assessment and Archaeological Watching Brief Data Structure Report

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| On Behalf of: | Scottish Water |
| Argyll and Bute Council Planning Reference: | 16/03217/PP |
| National Grid Reference (NGR) | NR 22560 55296 (centred) |
| WCAS Report No: | 72/NER/18 |
| OASIS No: | westcoas1-311199 |
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CONTENTS

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | INTRODUCTION | 2 |
| 2 | BACKGROUND | 2 |
| 3 | OBJECTIVES | 3 |
| 4 | DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT | 7 |
| 5 | WATCHING BRIEF | 8 |
| 6 | CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 9 |
| 7 | REFERENCES | 9 |
| APPENDIX 1: List of Photographs | | 12 |

List of Figures

Figure 1: Location of the proposed development
Figure 2: Proposed development (courtesy of Scottish Water)
Figure 3: Site plan showing stripped areas

List of Plates

Plate 1: Looking NW along S end of access track
Plate 2: Post-excavation photo of the site compound looking N
Plate 3: Looking over the existing field track in location of pipeline route

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Photographs

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 An archaeological watching brief and desk-based assessment were required by Scottish Water in respect to the installation of a generator and upgrade of the existing access on land south east of Ocean View, Nerabus, Port Charlotte on the Isle of Islay (Argyll and Bute Council Planning Reference 16/03217/PP).
- 1.2 The programme of archaeological works was specified by the West of Scotland Archaeology Service (WoSAS) in keeping with the policies outlined in *Scottish Planning Policy* (2014) and *PAN 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology* (2011). The desk-based assessment was requested in order to assess the archaeological potential of the area prior to fieldwork commencing. The watching brief was requested in order to identify the presence of any surviving archaeological features uncovered during development.
- 1.3 The watching brief was carried out on 18th - 19th February 2018 while c. 200m of the access track and the site compound were stripped. The topsoil to be removed was very shallow and in most of the trench was directly on top of a compact medium grey brown silty clay or bedrock. Several small fragments of 19th to 20th century ceramics was noted in the topsoil, but no other archaeological features were found.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The proposed development (**Figure 1; Figure 2**) is located at NGR NR 22560 55296 (centred) in Nerabus (also known as Nereabolls) (Scotland's Places 2018), a hamlet which lies along the A847 Portnahaven to Port Charlotte road on the west of the Isle of Islay on the west coast of Scotland.
- 2.2 The requirement for this watching brief came as a result of the site being in close proximity to a small number of known archaeological sites. One known archaeological site lies within the immediate area of the proposed development – a millstone quarry and the location of an in situ unfinished millstone that exploited an outcrop of meta-gabbro rock. In close proximity to the proposed development site are the remains of two early chapels with associated burial grounds, one to the northeast and one to the south with both designated as Scheduled Monuments. Early prehistoric activity within close proximity to the development site is evidenced by the discovery of Neolithic pits and occupation material at Low Nerabus (NRHE 2018).

3 OBJECTIVES

3.1 The aims of the archaeological works were:

- i) to monitor ground-breaking works associated with upgrade to the existing access and installation of a new generator
- ii) to establish the presence or absence of archaeological remains prior to their destruction
- iii) to remove by hand any overburden in order to expose the archaeological deposits
- iv) to excavate, sample and record any features or to propose arrangements for their safeguarding, where possible
- v) to sample deposits for post-excavation work, including environmental analysis and dating
- vi) to liaise with the client in the event of significant archaeological features and /or small finds being unearthed as to the most appropriate response for safeguarding these features either by preservation *in situ*, if at all feasible, or by archaeological recording
- vii) to make recommendations for further measures necessary to mitigate the impact of the development
- viii) to make recommendations for post-excavation work
- ix) to report on the results of the watching brief

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Data Structure Report

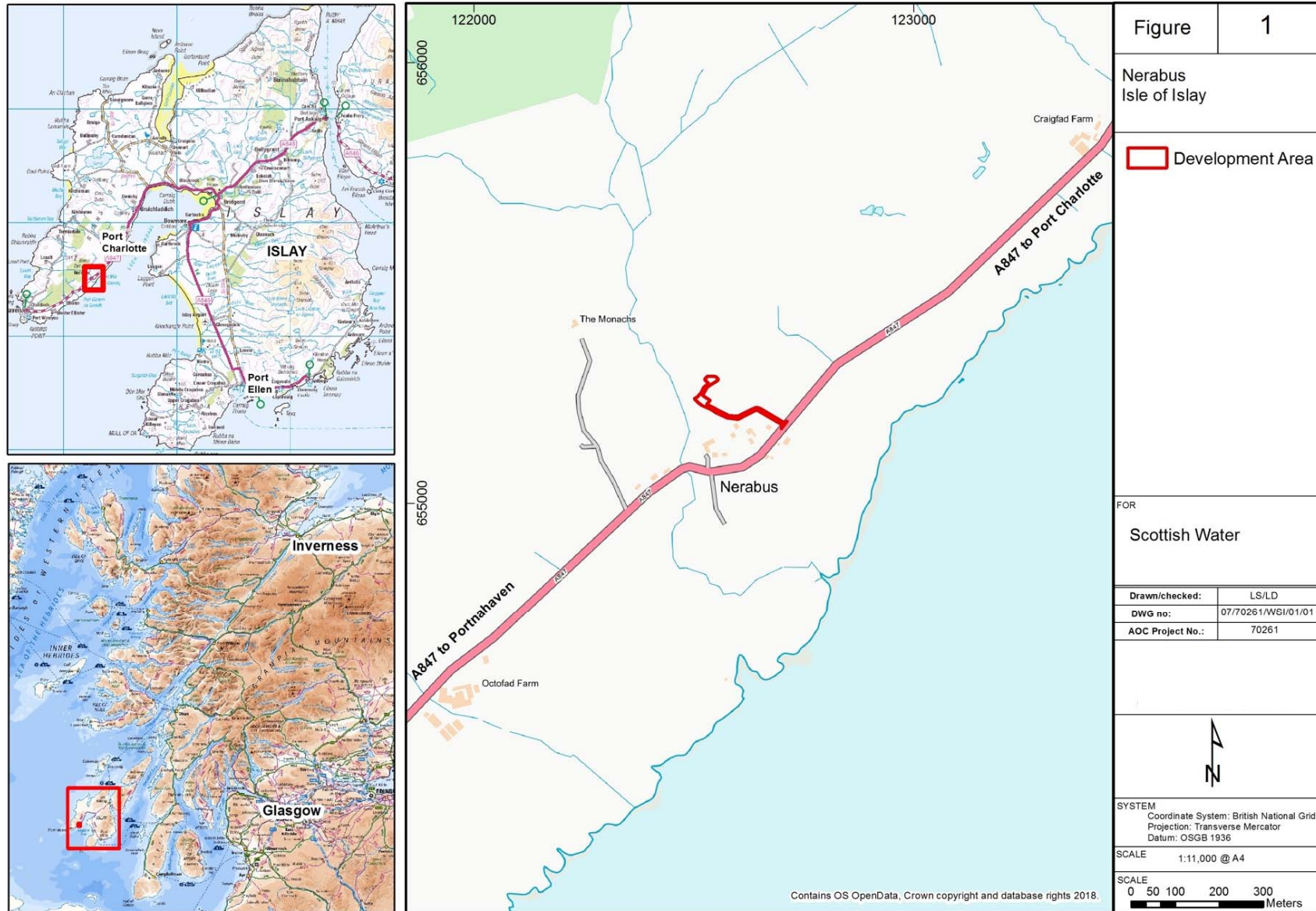


Figure 1: Location of the proposed development

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Data Structure Report

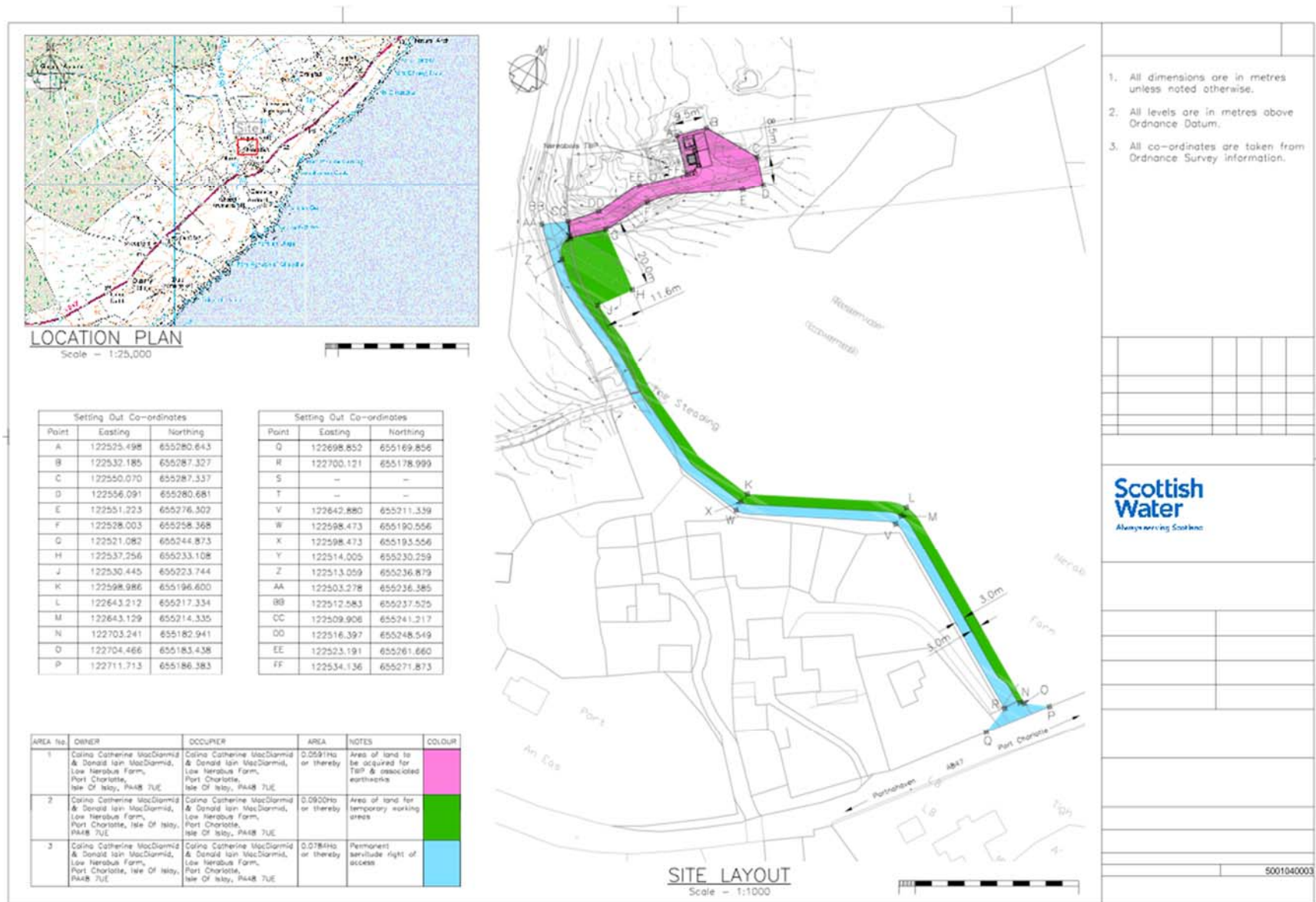


Figure 2: Proposed development (courtesy of Scottish Water)

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Data Structure Report

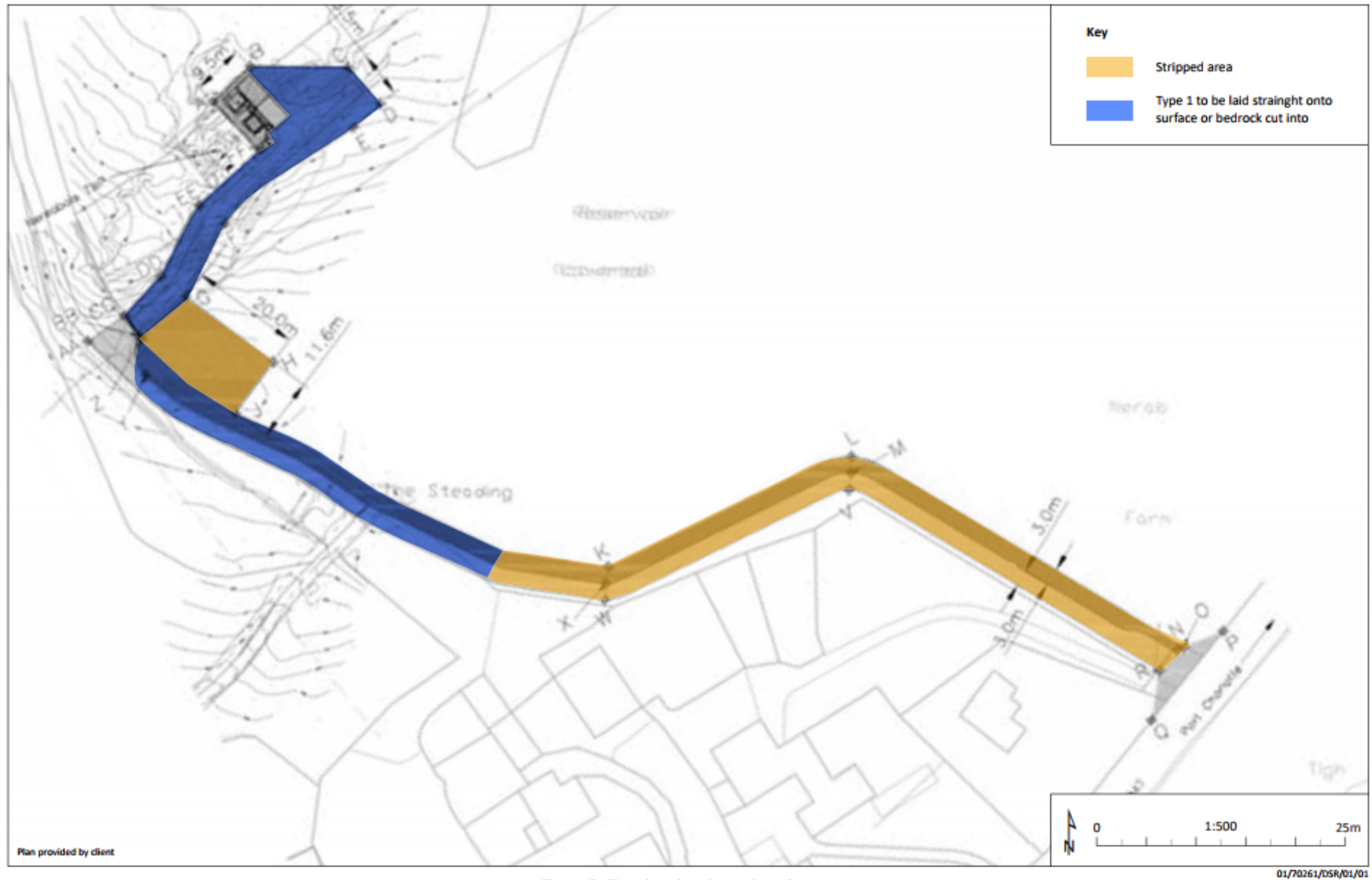


Figure 3: Site plan showing stripped areas (background mapping provided by Scottish Water)

4 DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT

4.1 A desk-based assessment was conducted in order to assess the archaeological potential of the area based on previously recorded sites and any historical documentation. A full check of all available historical and archaeological records, aerial photographs and historical maps was conducted using the WoSAS Sites and Monuments Record, the National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE), Ordnance Survey Name Books, Historic Environment Scotland's databases, the National Library of Scotland, statistical accounts and other available records, literary sources or online resources about the site. This work was conducted in accordance with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessment* (CIfA 2014).

4.2 The WoSAS Sites and Monuments Record (2018) describes several previously recorded sites in the area:

WoSAS Pin: 46056 Millstone Quarry, Millstone

Located at NR 226 553, on an outcrop of meta-gabbro rock to the SW of the early chapel site of Nerabus, is an unfinished millstone about 1.2m in diameter.

WoSAS Pin: 1952 Cladh Cill Iain, Chapel & Burial Ground
Scheduled Monument SM2364

At NR 22732 55402 and situated 270m NE of Nerabus Farm are the remains of a medieval chapel and burial ground c.12th to 16th century with possible earlier origins.

WoSAS Pin: 1970 Chapel and Associated Burial Grounds
Scheduled Monument SM272

At NR 2249 5490, are the remains of a pre-reformation chapel of unknown history and dedication. There are three associated burial grounds.

WoSAS Pin: 14382 Stone, Low Nerabus Farm

At NR 226 551, is an outcrop of rock at the gate of Low Nerabus Farm. It was indicated as a coffin-rest on the ancient road from Portnahaven to Kilchoman Parish Church and was known as 'Carraigean Sgiosa'.

WoSAS Event ID: 5031 Watching Brief, Low Nerabus

An archaeological watching brief on a single house development site revealed a small suite of probable Neolithic features, including hearth pits and stakeholes. A spread of occupation material included flint flakes and pebble polishers.

4.3 The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1878, shows the hamlet of *Nereabolls*. A group of assorted buildings are depicted, with the proposed development area shown as open, unenclosed land. The later 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map

revised in 1897 shows the area of the proposed development as enclosed field systems (NLS 2018).

5 WATCHING BRIEF

5.1 Methodology

- 5.1.1 Prior to the commencement of the ground works, a rapid walkover of the route was carried out in order to identify any potential upstanding archaeology that would be impacted upon.
- 5.1.2 The watching brief was carried out along all sections of the access track that required groundbreaking works as well as the compound area. It comprised archaeological monitoring of topsoil stripping along the south of the route from main road (A847), to the existing field track (c. 200 m of access track). The watching brief included the excavation of any potential archaeological features encountered, in order to establish the extent, condition, character, quality and date of archaeological features impacted by these works.
- 5.1.3 The ground breaking works were by means of a mechanical excavator equipped with a **smooth-bladed** ditching bucket. Excavation was in shallow units/spits. All machine excavation was guided by an experienced field archaeologist. Fieldwork was recorded by written and photographic means and all features were recorded in accordance with standard practice.

5.2 Results

- 5.2.1 Fieldwork was carried out on 19th - 20th February 2018. The 3m-wide access track route ran NW from the A847 along a fence-line and up a gradual slope to join with the existing field track (**Figure 3; Plate 1**). The depth excavated was very shallow (0.15-0.2m deep). This was simply to remove topsoil which overlay a compact medium grey brown silty clay with gravel inclusions or bedrock. In places visibility was poor due to the fragmentary nature of the bedrock. The compound area measured no more than 10m x 20m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.4m (**Plate 2**). This was a particularly boggy area where topsoil again overlay a compact medium grey brown silty clay with gravel inclusions as well as a natural medium orange brown sandy clay subsoil in patches. Two spoil heaps from the construction of the road and existing field track were removed (**Plates 3, 4**).
- 5.2.2 No archaeological features were observed during the groundbreaking works. At the top of the hill where the compound area is located, topsoil was slightly deeper overlying the compact medium grey brown silty clay and natural subsoil. (**Plate 2**). Several small fragments of 19th or 20th century ceramics were scattered within the topsoil. No features

were identified in association with these artefacts suggesting that they have been deposited on the surface and have become buried over the years.

- 5.2.3 All other areas to be developed will simply be built upon existing tracks requiring no stripping or will cut into bedrock.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 Despite the potential for significant archaeology in the development area highlighted in the desk-based assessment, the ground conditions on site were on the whole very rocky and the archaeological potential was limited by the shallow depths required for the access track and compound area.

7 REFERENCES

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Plate 1: Looking NW along S end of access track



Plate 2: Post-excavation photo of the site compound looking N



Plate 3: Looking over the existing field track in location of pipeline route

APPENDIX 1: List of Photographs

| Photo No. | Description | Direction Facing | Date Taken |
|-----------|---|------------------|------------|
| 1-2 | Pre-excavation photos of development area | NW/SE | 19/02/2018 |
| 3 | Outcrop of bedrock to west of access track | SE | 19/02/2018 |
| 4-10 | Pre-excavation photos of access track route | SE | 19/02/2018 |
| 11-13 | Pre-excavation photos of existing field track | VAR | 19/02/2018 |
| 14-16 | Photos over the surrounding landscape | VAR | 19/02/2018 |
| 17-20 | Pre-excavation photos of compound area | VAR | 19/02/2018 |
| 21-22 | Pre-excavation photos of access track | NW/W | 19/02/2018 |
| 23 | Outcrop of bedrock covered in track clearance to west of access track | W | 19/02/2018 |
| 24-27 | Pre-excavation photos of where existing track cut through landscape | VAR | 19/02/2018 |
| 28-38 | General pre-excavation shots of surrounding area | VAR | 19/02/2018 |
| 39-40 | Vegetation covering spoil heap from road and clearance at southeast end of new access track | NW/E | 20/02/2018 |
| 41-43 | General pre-excavation photos of development area | VAR | 20/02/2018 |
| 44 | Post-excavation shot of SE end of access track | SW | 20/02/2018 |
| 45-46 | Working shots of stripping of access track | NE | 20/02/2018 |
| 47 | Stripping of access track exposing bedrock | NE | 20/02/2018 |
| 48 | Post-excavation shot of access track stripped to first bend | NE | 20/02/2018 |
| 49 | Post-excavation shot of first bend in access track | W | 20/02/2018 |
| 50 | Post-excavation shot of access track | SW | 20/02/2018 |
| 51 | Stones covering sewer manhole cover | N | 20/02/2018 |
| 52 | Post-excavation shot of hand dug areas to find water main | NW | 20/02/2018 |
| 53-54 | Post-excavation shots of access track | S | 20/02/2018 |
| 55-56 | Pre-development shots of access track to be built upon bedrock | NE/SW | 20/02/2018 |
| 57 | Removal of spoil heap for access track | SE | 20/02/2018 |
| 58-59 | Landscape images | NW | 20/02/2018 |
| 60-61 | Stripping of compound area | SE | 20/02/2018 |
| 62 | Part of existing field track which will be built up with Type 1 | NW | 20/02/2018 |
| 63-64 | Compound post-excavation | SE | 20/02/2018 |
| 65 | Compound post-excavation | N | 20/02/2018 |
| 66 | North end of access track to be stripped | NW | 20/02/2018 |