

Scotia Archaeology

**REPORT
TO
SCOTTISH & SOUTHERN
ELECTRICITY NETWORKS**

**NEW UNDERGROUND POWER SUPPLY
AT
BALLINABY, ISLAY**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

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INTRODUCTION

This document describes the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken during ground works for the installation of a new underground power supply to a domestic residence at Ballinaby, Isle of Islay. The work was commissioned by Gavin Carswell, wayleave officer, Oban on behalf of Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN).

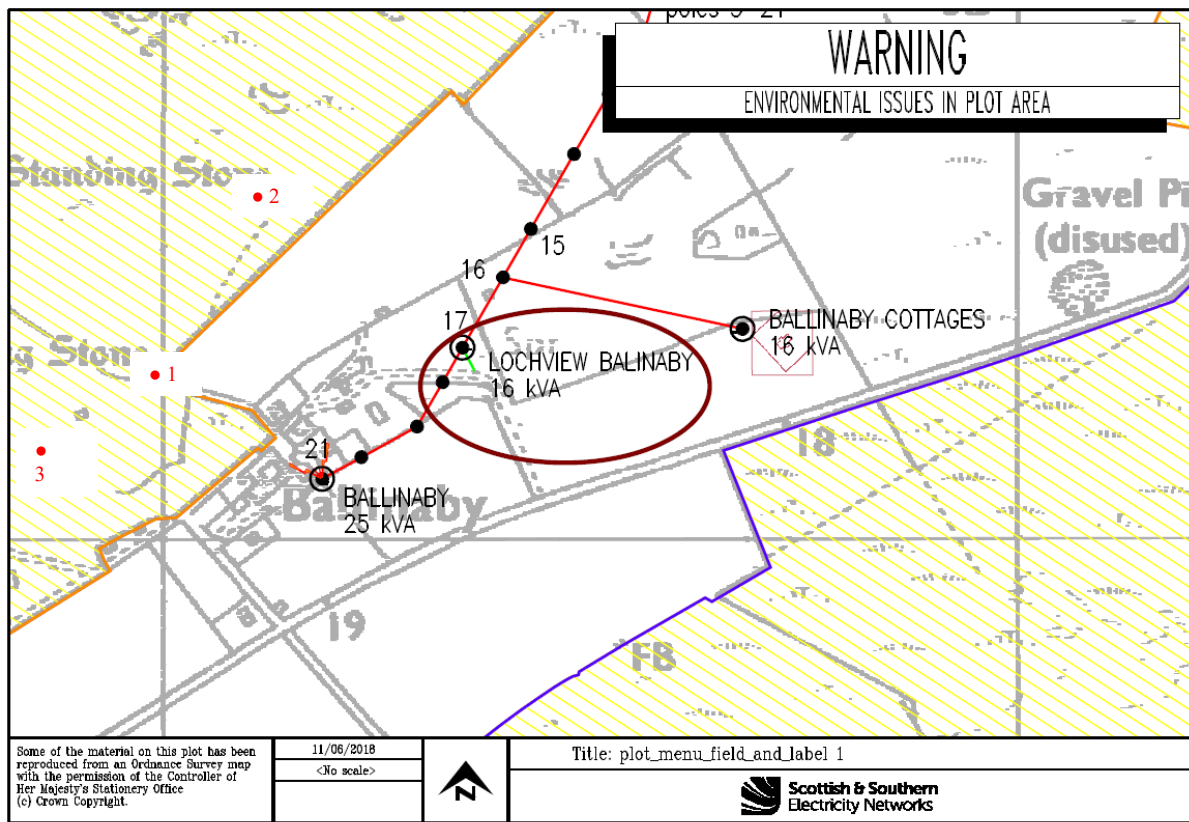
THE SITE

Ballinaby is a small hamlet located near the north shore of Loch Gorm and some 1.5km from the coast, towards the north-west corner of Islay. The underground line will run from Pole 17 on an existing overhead power line running roughly north-eastwards from Ballinaby to a domestic residence still under construction at the time of the watching brief.

Most of the trench for the new line was located within a well-drained pasture field, currently accommodating sheep, that rises gradually to the north towards a rocky ridge which has been quarried to provide stone for local buildings and field walls. This field is ploughed every few years to cultivate barley and to break up the pan resulting from large flocks of geese paddling over its surface during wintertime. The area was intensively farmed during World War II when some 5,000 troops were stationed on the island. Relics of this occupation litter the area. To the south of the field the land is poorly drained and leads into boggy ground on the north side of Loch Gorm.

22

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***Location of the site at Ballinaby.
The new power line is shown as a short green line within the circled area***

DESK STUDY

Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, a desk study of readily available sources was undertaken to determine what sites of archaeological and historical significance may lie in the vicinity of the trenching.

Several important archaeological discoveries have been made at and near Ballinaby. They comprise mainly prehistoric standing stones and Viking burials, those nearest to the site being listed below according to the numbers (eg NR26NW 13) allocated by the then Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), now the National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE). They are depicted on the map above, supplied by SSEN.

1 NR26NW 13

On the crest of a low ridge, 200m WNW of Ballinaby at NR 2199 6720, is a standing stone measuring 4.9m high. It is 1.1m wide and 0.3m thick at its base.

2 NR26NW 14

At NR 2210 6739, on gently sloping ground 200m NNE of NR26NW 13, is a standing stone, 2m high with a girth of 3m at its base. It is presumed that the stone has been damaged at some stage.

3 NR26NW 4

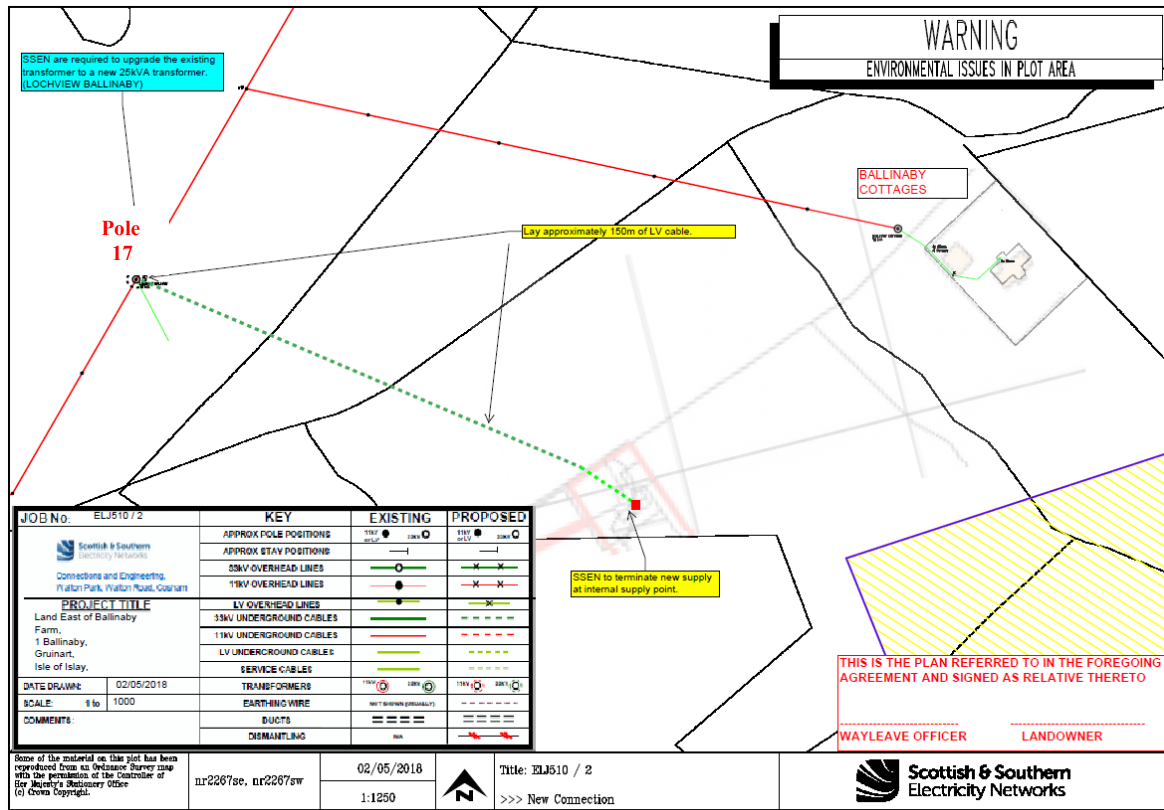
Two Viking burials were discovered around NR 2181 6717 when sand dunes were eroded at Ballinaby in 1877. They are grouped together as NR26NW 4, this entry being sub-divided into Ballinaby 1 (NR26NW 4.02) and Ballinaby 2 (NR26NW 4.01).

They comprise two adjacent 10th-century graves, one containing the remains of a man, the other of a woman. The man's grave contained tools and weapons; the woman's contained domestic implements and ornaments, including two tortoiseshell brooches.

THE WATCHING BRIEF

The watching brief was undertaken because of the proximity of the prehistoric standing stones which suggest that there may have been Neolithic or Bronze Age occupation in the vicinity of what is now Ballinaby. In addition, the two Viking burials indicate that there may have been an early medieval presence in this area.

Trenching was undertaken by Graham Logan of Colin Logan Building Contractors Ltd of Bowmore, Islay, operating a 13-tonne mechanical excavator with a toothless back-actor. This work was monitored by John Lewis of Scotia Archaeology on 1 October 2018, a cold, cloudy but mostly dry day. The new line will run from NR 22561 67191, a short distance from the new house, north-westwards to Pole 17 at NR 22362 67216 as shown on the plan below, also supplied by SSEN. It will run up a gentle slope, most of it crossing the pasture field with short stretches through rougher ground near the new house and approaching Pole 17. The overall length of the trench was some 230m.



Plan showing the approximate route of the new power line



*View of the trench from the north.
The new house is on the left and Loch Gorm in the distance*

The trench for the new power line was 0.7m wide and 0.8-0.9m deep. It cut through topsoil of mid-brown sandy loam, almost stone-free and 0.2m deep over most of the route but up to 0.5m deep as the trench neared the house, presumably resulting from hill wash down the gentle slope. Topsoil sat directly on glacial materials comprising predominantly coarse orange sand and gravel but becoming stonier as the ground rose slightly towards Pole 17. This was particularly evident as the trench skirted around an outcrop of bedrock a short distance from the pole, some of the boulders being very large. At one point bedrock was encountered 0.5m below the ground surface.



View of the trench from the south-east looking towards Pole 17

No features or deposits of archaeological significance were uncovered and the only artefacts retrieved from the trench were two sherds of white-glazed ceramics of probable 19th-century date. They were not retained.

CONCLUSIONS

Although nothing of archaeological interest was found in the trench, records do show that there are several important sites at Ballinaby and it may simply be a matter of chance if and when further discoveries are made in this area.