



**22/00152/PPD – ALTERATIONS TO AND EXTENSION OF CALANAIS VISITOR CENTRE,
CALLANISH, ISLE OF LEWIS**

Report by Depute Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 Since the planning application is considered to be sensitive by the Appointed Officer, the application is, in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation, referred to the Planning Applications Board for decision.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This Report relates to a planning application for alterations to and extension of the Calanais Visitor Centre (the Centre) associated with the Calanais Standing Stones (Scheduled Monument 90054) at Callanish, Isle of Lewis. It is proposed that the Centre and associated buildings would be developed to provide an upgraded café, shop and exhibition areas, a new function suite; a detached plant room; a detached public convenience building and covered bin storage. In addition, the existing car park, bus drop-off and lay-over bays and the access road would be remodelled.
- 2.2 The proposed development relates to buildings and land already in the occupation of Urras nan Tursachan who operate the Centre.
- 2.3 The Comhairle is required to determine planning applications in accordance with the provisions of the statutory Development Plan, comprising the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan 2018 (OHLDP) and National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise.
- 2.4 During the course of the planning assessment a number of revisions were made to address concerns raised in relation, primarily, to parking provision and layout, bus parking drop off and lay-over provision, bus manoeuvring and impacts upon the historic environment.
- 2.5 The key planning issues in the determination of the application are impact on historic environment, specifically the setting of the scheduled monuments of Calanais; the impact of extended facilities on the capacity and operation of the existing car park and bus park and circulation provision; and the overall visual and amenity impacts from the built elements and engineering works for the development.
- 2.6 Consultation advice was sought from Historic Environment Scotland (HES), Scottish Water, Comhairle Roads, Archaeology, Environmental Health and Building Standards. While there are no extant objections from consultees or representations from third parties, some concerns raised by consultees remain, that the applicant advises cannot be addressed or mitigated further. These are in relation to pedestrian paths and circulation routes to and through the carpark, and the expansion of built structures into the undeveloped land to the south of the existing building grouping and the risk that this may set a precedent that would impact upon the setting of the Calanais monuments.
- 2.7 The principle of development at this location is established and the development proposals assessed as acceptable in terms of the quality of design, and role in placemaking. The assessment concludes that the development would not have an undue impact on the character of the site, wider area or

landscape character, and as designed would not unduly impact on the setting of the historic Scheduled Monuments of Calanais, including Standing Stones and markers that are part of the Calanais complex. The tourism benefits are a significant material consideration given the global interest in and national importance of the Calanais Standing Stones site. A suite of conditions is recommended to manage a number of planning issues identified by the planning policy assessment.

- 2.8 However, it is acknowledged that the expansion of buildings into the southern part of the site and the precedent this may set remains a concern expressed by HES. This relates to a detached plant room which was a late addition to the proposed works but which is essential, and it is understood cannot readily be accommodated on any other part of the site that would not raise similar concerns.
- 2.9 The carparking and bus provision has been revised a number of times. The final layout submitted for determination, while still the subject of concerns around pedestrian routing within the carparking areas and resultant risks to pedestrian safety, is assessed to be broadly satisfactory in terms of capacity and space for vehicles to manoeuvre. The applicant has been pressed to address the pedestrian routing issues but has intimated that the layout is the best that can be achieved working within the constraints on the site. Therefore the parking layout does not wholly address the safety of pedestrians over vehicular traffic and is not wholly in line with the intentions of Policy PD2: Car Parking and Roads Layout; however it is acknowledged that this is a 'private' carpark with the responsibility for its safe management falling to the operator of the Centre.
- 2.10 A suite of conditions set out in Appendix 1 is recommended to manage a number of planning issues identified by the planning assessment. It is further acknowledged that the issue of siting of the plant room outwith the existing building group and the routing of pedestrians through what will be a private carpark cannot be mitigated further.
- 2.11 Weighing up all planning matters in the context of the Development Plan taken as a whole, it is determined that the extant matters of concern do not merit refusal of the application.
- 2.12 Having taken all relevant matters into account it is therefore recommended that, subject to conditions set out in Appendix 1 to this Report, that the planning application be approved.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 It is recommended that the planning application be **APPROVED** subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1 to this Report.

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 Appendix 1: Schedule of Proposed Conditions
 Appendix 2: Plans
 Appendix 3: Consultation Responses
 Background Papers: None

IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None

Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	None
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

Application summary

- 5.1 The planning application was registered as valid on 31 March 2022. The planning application is for the alterations to and extension of the existing Calanais Standing Stones Visitor Centre (the Centre) and its associated buildings, situated at Callanish, on the west side of the Isle of Lewis.
- 5.2 The buildings and land subject of the proposed development are already in the occupation of the Urras nan Tursachan, the operator of the Centre. The application site sits within the existing developed area for the visitor centre, with a new extension and plant room building extending the current footprint of built development to the south.
- 5.3 The proposed development is to provide an upgraded café, shop and exhibition areas; a new function suite; a detached plant room; a detached public convenience building and an enclosed bin store. In addition, the existing car park, bus lay down areas and access road are to be remodelled. The centre, as proposed, would have an increased capacity for visitors providing a 60-cover café; 60-cover function room; exhibition space with 114-person capacity; and a shop with a retail area of approximately 70sqm.
- 5.4 Approximately 550sqm of additional building footprint is proposed. The height of the development does not exceed that of the existing buildings on-site. The development will connect a number of existing buildings of varying age, form, massing and materials with the finished design resulting in a complex of contemporary form with natural, traditional, and recessively coloured materials proposed to treat the building envelope.
- 5.5 Parking provision, as proposed, to serve the centre would include 24 standard car parking bays within the existing carpark, 10no. parking bays in a secondary park (constructed in 2023); 6no. electric car charging bays; and 4no. accessible spaces; resulting in a total of 44 car parking bays. 4no. bus bays are proposed to allow for drop off and pick up of visitors on coaches. Additional motorcycle and bicycle parking provision is also proposed.

SITE CONTEXT AND PROPOSAL

Description of site and its context

Site Context

- 6.1 The need to protect the setting of the world renowned 'Calanais Standing Stones' to which the Centre is related, has been a central consideration in the design of the proposed development.
- 6.2 By way of context, the Calanais Standing Stones complex is generally considered to be made up of twelve different sites comprising a variety of stone settings. There are three sites within the complex that merit particular reference, SM90054 (otherwise Calanais I) being the most extensive and two sites on a raised peninsula to its east: Ceann a' Gharaodh stone circle and cairn (SM5433) and Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag, stone circle and stone settings (SM5437). Otherwise known as Calanais I, II and III, these all have intervisibility with the Centre. A description of each and their setting is addressed in detail in the 'Calanais Standing Stones: Setting Document' prepared in 2015 by Historic Scotland in consultation with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The document was prepared to provide a description of the setting of

the Calanais Standing Stones complex and provides guidance on how to assess potential impacts from development proposals on the setting of the complex.

- 6.3 The application site sits immediately south of the Scheduled Monument, Calanais Standing Stones (SM90054) (Calanais I) with a raised knoll 'Cnoc An Tursa' limiting intervisibility between Calanais I and the Centre. The land to the west of the development site is largely open grassed ground with an undulating topography, which previously formed part of the historic Callanish Farm. To the east is an area of croftland with no built development. To the south is the public road, and the shoreline of Loch Ceann Hulabhaig beyond.
- 6.4 The application site has a Landscape Character Classification (Scottish Natural Heritage (NatureScot) National Landscape Character Assessment) of Linear Crofting Landscape. Some of the key characteristics of this are strong linear rectangular field patterns on irregular landform of sweeping slightly concave slopes with rocky knolls, rising to rocky or boggy moor inland and sloping down to rocky shores or broad shallow glens; landcover dominated by improved and semi-improved grassland fields; and strong, simple relationship between croft houses and land holdings, with occasional views outwards to open moorlands, giving townships a feeling of rural remoteness.
- 6.5 The site is not subject to any environmental, species, habitat, or landscape designations.

Application site

- 6.6 The site area extends just over one hectare in size – which equates to just over 2.5 acres – with only a small portion of that area to be subject to new built development. The majority of the site area is already the buildings which are to be altered and extended, and the existing access and parking provision. The site varies in level, with the centre sitting raised above the parking areas to the east and the public road to the south.

Description of development

- 6.7 The proposal is for alterations and extension to the centre and associated buildings to provide upgraded café, shop and exhibition areas; to construct a new function suite to the south of the existing buildings together with a new plant room, bin store and detached public convenience building.
- 6.8 The visitor centre as proposed would essentially double the existing gross floor area across the site from approximately 480sqm to 970sqm. The footprint of the old farmhouse will be increased by approximately 200sqm, and the visitor centre by 200sqm. The proposed works will join these two distinct buildings to form the new redeveloped Centre. The building works will create both single and two storey levels, but no resulting part of the building will project above the existing ridge heights of the buildings on site. The accommodation is primarily on a ground floor level, with a 50sqm basement area for services. The function suite extension, on the main level will incorporate storage below while staff room and offices will be accommodated in the upper floor of the former farmhouse.
- 6.9 The existing access and carpark are proposed to serve the extended centre. This will be remodelled and reconfigured, with revised levels, to have accessible bays at the upper level where the bus parking is currently located, and bus drop-off and pick-up redistributed throughout the wider parking area. A recently developed parking area, with its own independent access, will also be available for users of the Centre and will be extended to include a parking area for motor cycles. Cycle parking will be provided close to the centre entrance. An access/layby is proposed on the edge of the public road at the southern boundary to accommodate service vehicles for the proposed plant room building.
- 6.10 The visitor centre, as altered, would have increased capacity for visitors – with a 60-cover café; 60-cover function room; 114-person capacity exhibition space; and a shop with a retail area of approximately 70sqm. Parking provision as shown would include 24 standard car parking bays within the existing carpark, and an additional 10no. bays in the secondary parking area; 6no. e-car charging bays; and 4no. accessible spaces, resulting in a total of 44 car parking bays. 4no. bus bays to allow for

a bus to wait on arrival at the centre, to drop-off at the upper level and two collection bays, with a muster point, on egress from the site.

- 6.11 The design and form of the Centre as proposed is contemporary, with the material palette for the proposed extensions and outbuildings using natural and recessive-coloured materials. It includes natural dry-stone wall, wet dash, black stained and charred timber to walls; zinc to dormers and roof elements; and precast concrete elements at the entrance-way. The use of powder-coated metal windows and doors is proposed, but no colour is detailed at this time, though image-renders show these in a grey colour.
- 6.12 A separate plant room building, roofed bin store, and public WC building are also proposed across the site. These are all single storey buildings, finished in stone, with flat roof design, largely built into the surrounding sloped landscape.
- 6.13 Foul drainage is to be connected to the existing mains system. Surface water drainage is to be directed into existing and proposed surface water drains and soakaways located within the site boundaries.

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

- 7.1 The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (the Act) is the principal legislation. Sections 25 and 37(2) of the Act require that planning decisions be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The weight to be attached to any relevant material consideration is for the judgment of the decision-maker. Two main tests are used when deciding whether a consideration is material and relevant:
- It should serve or be related to the purpose of planning. This means it should relate to the development and use of land.
 - It should fairly and reasonably relate to the particular application being determined.
- 7.2 This Report sets out an assessment against the policies and provisions of the Development Plan and has regard to all relevant material planning considerations, to inform a conclusion and recommendation as to the determination.
- 7.3 In terms of the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009, the class and scale of development is such that it falls within the classification of a 'Local Development'

PLANNING HISTORY

- 8.1 The site which is the subject of this current planning application was, in 1993, granted consent adjacent to the Callanish Farmhouse, to create a new visitor centre. It is this centre and farmhouse and associated grounds that are proposed for extension and redevelopment.

CONSULTATION ADVICE

- 9.1 Statutory consultation was undertaken as required by Regulations. The detailed response of statutory and other consultation bodies can be viewed at Appendix 3 to this Report but is summarised as follows.
- **Comhairle Building Standards:**
Number of toilets provided within the building should be in accordance with required standards.
 - **Comhairle Roads, Bridges and Streetlighting (Comhairle Roads section):**
 - 44 spaces proposed (which includes recently developed 10 space parking area).
 - 46 spaces is the number required per the Development Plan.
 - The amended layout provides space on site for coaches to wait, drop off passengers and park allowing vehicle and passenger turnaround.

- There is a footpath proposed from the main entrance towards a muster point at the coach parking area, located to the rear of parking bays where vehicles will be exiting the bays. There are some concerns with a section of this footpath being located adjacent to parked cars.
 - The access to the relocated Plant Room should be constructed in accordance with Drawing 22/00152. This should include a suitably sized spur to allow a vehicle to turn “off road” and enter the village road in a forward manoeuvre. An option to the access could be a roadside layby with turning available at the road end.
 - The Plant Room must be a minimum 3.5m from the edge of the village road to prevent the visibility splay at the access being restricted.
- **Comhairle Environmental Health:**
 - Potential for noise and dust nuisance during construction. Conditions recommended to protect amenity.
- **Comhairle Archaeologist:**
 - Given the importance of the site from both an archaeological and an architectural perspective, the Comhairle Archaeology Service recommends that a program of archaeological works should be carried out, secured by conditions.
- **Scottish Water:**
 - No objections. There may be infrastructure on site.
- **Historic Environment Scotland (HES):**
 - Whilst we do not object to this application, HES do have concerns about the proposals and the wider approach to development here.
 - The form and massing of the new extensions is similar to the existing infrastructure, with similar ridge heights, etc, although the visual prominence of the historic farmhouse would be obscured and there would be a diminution of key views towards Calanais.
 - Changes to car-parking would result in a further deterioration of the rural character of the peninsula and an increase in modern development in key views.
 - Have concerns about developing the underdeveloped area to the south of the Visitor Centre, where plant room is located.
 - The plant room would be low enough not to represent a significant change. The impacts are therefore unlikely to have a significant adverse impact on Calanais’ setting.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- 10.1 The planning application was advertised twice for public comment in the public notices section of the Stornoway Gazette – firstly in the publication dated 07 April 2022 and secondly 28 March 2024 – seeking comments before the expiry of 14 days as required by regulations. The date of expiry of the period advertised was 11 April 2024.
- 10.2 No representations had been received at the time of writing this Report.

POLICY CONTEXT

The ‘Development Plan’

- 11.1 In Scotland, the planning system is ‘plan-led’ and sections 25 and 37(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (the Act) require that planning decisions be made in accordance with the ‘Development Plan’ unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 11.2 Following the enactment of a provision of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 on 13 February 2023, the statutory ‘Development Plan’ for the administrative area of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is comprised of

[National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF4\) \(2023\)](#) and the [Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan \(OHLDP\) 2018](#) and its Supplementary Guidance.

11.3 NPF4 comprises the 'National Spatial Strategy for Scotland' up to 2045 and also provides the Scottish Government's updated statement of National Planning Policy. The OHLDP sets out the strategic land use policy and provides the local framework to develop and sustain the communities of the Outer Hebrides. Section 24(3) of the Act provides that in the event of any incompatibility between a provision of NPF4 and a provision of the LDP that whichever of them is the later in date, is to prevail.

11.4 The Development Plan policies with particular relevance to the application are:

NPF4:

- Policy 1 - Tackling the climate and nature crises
- Policy 2 - Climate mitigation and adaptation
- Policy 3 - Biodiversity
- Policy 7 - Historic assets and places
- Policy 14 - Design, quality, and place
- Policy 29 - Rural development
- Policy 30 - Tourism

OHLDP:

- Policy DS1: Development strategy – Rural settlements
- Policy PD1: Placemaking and design
- Policy PD2: Car parking and roads layout
- Policy PD4: Zero and low carbon buildings
- Policy ED1: Economic Development
- Policy ED2: Retail and Service Provision
- Policy EI 2: Water and Waste Water
- Policy EI 4: Waste Management
- Policy NBH1: Landscape
- Policy NBH5: Archaeology

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

The Development Plan

Principle of development

- 12.1 The application site is located within an established 'rural settlement' as defined by Policy DS1, the spatial strategy of the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan (OHLDP), while Callanish is identified as being a 'remote rural area' in terms of NPF4 Policy 29 - Rural development.
- 12.2 Policy DS1 indicates the principal objective for these areas is to accommodate development to meet sustainable growth for local needs, including tourism. Economic development proposals that are of an appropriate scale and that do not threaten residential amenity will be supported. The siting and design should be appropriate to the established rural character and settlement pattern of the area while developments on 'croft land' should not adversely affect the operational use and sustainability of the croft.
- 12.3 NPF4 Policy 29 c) provides that development proposals in remote rural areas, where new development can often help to sustain fragile communities, will be supported where the proposal will support local employment, support and sustain existing communities, and is suitable in terms of location, access, siting, design, and environmental impacts.

Assessment

- 12.4 The Centre is existing and relates to Calanais I and subject to satisfying related policy tests on the detail of the development, the principle of development at this location is established. The works to alter and extend the Centre and the access and parking provision are largely contained within the parameters of the existing developed areas. However the proposed function suite extension to the south of the centre is located on partially undisturbed ground while an additional detached plant room building is proposed on the lower, undeveloped, portion of the site which abuts the public road and would be adjacent to an existing stone wall. The development, in terms of use, scale and form, is not disproportionate to the ancillary ground associated with the existing Centre and will be viewed wholly within the scope of the existing Centre and grounds. From a settlement pattern and character perspective, the proposed development sits well within the settlement and would not be out of keeping with its existing character. It is therefore concluded that the proposal would not have an adverse impact on rural character and settlement pattern of the local area.
- 12.5 The elements of access, siting, design, and environmental impact are considered in more detail in subsequent policy sections.
- 12.6 The proposal is to develop and an established visitor centre relating to one of the most prominent visitor attractions in the Outer Hebrides. The development and expansion of the centre is anticipated to support employment in the local area; increases the availability of cultural and hospitality services for the local community; and is suitably located on a site of existing development, serving a key tourist attraction in the area. The latest information provided to the Comhairle indicates 15 staff for the development. It is thus considered that subject to satisfying other Development Plan policies in detail, the principle of development at this location would be acceptable.

Placemaking, Quality and Design

Policy context

- 12.7 LDP Policy PD1 Placemaking and Design requires that development proposals must demonstrate a satisfactory quality of place-making, siting, scale, and design that respect and reflect positive local characteristics and will complement or enhance the surrounding built and natural environment. Policy 14 of NPF4 – Design, Quality and Place provides that development proposals will be designed to improve the quality of an area whether in urban or rural locations
- 12.8 Proposals for extensions and alterations should generally be subservient to, and appropriate in terms of the design, proportion, form and materials in relation to the existing building and neighbouring properties; they should result in no significant detrimental impact on the appearance of the existing building or the character and amenity of the surrounding area and neighbours.

Assessment

- 12.9 The advice of Architecture and Design Scotland was sought on the design of the building and the design approach supported by them.
- 12.10 The development as proposed would result in the visitor centre being larger than it currently is in terms of footprint. However, the ridge height and overall external envelope would not increase extensively when viewed from public roads and the surrounding area due to the broken massing of the design.
- 12.11 The height of the proposed building measures 7.2 metres (measured between the lowest exposed portion of the main southern extension at ground level to the highest point of the ridge level). However, visually, the building should have a height of approximately 6 metres at most points, and an eaves height of between 2.3 and 5 metres as it adapts to the changing ground levels. Smaller extensions, none exceeding 3.5 metres in height are designed to fit around the old farmhouse. The tallest feature in the design sits at the extreme north-east corner, a 7 metres high concrete structure

acting as an entrance marker point for the scheme, described in the design statement as a “Precast concrete column with inlain interpretation”.

- 12.12 The proposed extensions will not exceed the highest part of the existing buildings on site, that being the ridge of the existing curvilinear stone and slate building which form part of the current Centre. The farmhouse has a similar height but sits on lower ground, thus appears lower in views towards the site. All the proposed works take cognisance of the changes in level across the site and, for the most part, work with these. In elements where retaining elements are required, it is tapered to meet with natural ground levels as soon as practicable and is clad in stone to blend with the bedrock outcrops that are common on the site, and the existing dry-stone walling. The architects for the project note they “*see the buildings as a simple palette of stone base courses*”.
- 12.13 The nearest built development is housing, with occasional agricultural buildings. Traditional and modern croft housing largely ranging in ridge heights of between 5.5 metres and 7.5 metres.
- 12.14 The design as proposed is contemporary and, to contain the envelope of the Centre, extensions largely fit amongst and wrap around existing building elements. The multiple small elements break up the massing with the Design Statement noting “*We see the various buildings as an ensemble or version of a farm steading with a variety of roof forms and building shapes which add interest but do not dominate.*”.
- 12.15 While there are multiple small buildings across a site of various levels and with a variety of built forms, on balance, it is considered that the colour and material palette help draw the overall proposals together as a group, in views looking towards the site. This is the key consideration for the building, which sits on its own and viewed in a rural and historic landscape context.
- 12.16 The glazing in the development has a strong vertical emphasis, consistent with traditional properties in this rural area, but with a much more expansive use of glass on the new extensions. The roof forms are atypical and in juxtaposition to the traditional dual pitch of the main farmhouse and the curved roof form, finished in slate, of the original centre. They are of a lower pitch and have stunted ridge lines which accommodate skylights. The roofs to the lower extensions on the farmhouse are shown finished in slate, with the large southern extension roof finished in zinc standing seam.
- 12.17 The wider material palette for the proposed extensions and outbuildings is varied, but largely recessive and natural – it includes natural dry-stone wall, stone cladding, wet dash, black stained and charred timber to walls; slate roofs; zinc to dormers and larger roof elements; and precast concrete elements at the entrance-way. The use of powder-coated metal windows and doors is shown, but no colour is detailed at this time, though image-renders show a recessive grey. There is a mix of materials, finishes and colours in the locality. It is considered that the material palette, though somewhat complex, has been sympathetically curated to avoid a monolithic appearance to the centre when taken as a whole. The variations in texture and minimal variation in muted colour ensure it is recessive from the wider views towards the Stones.
- 12.18 The proposed detached plant room, a late revision to the application, is located on the southern boundary of the site, on low ground adjacent to the public road. It is ‘tucked’ into the landscape, in a small hollow which will also see its level reduce to keep the building as low as possible. It will back-on to an existing drystone wall to help it bed-in to the existing built elements in the landscape. The plant room needs an element of vehicular service access. This has been negotiated to be the least visually intrusive with as little excavation as possible. To achieve this, a layby was suggested as an alternative to an off-road access and turning head. The final details of this will be managed by condition but will minimise works on site and should appear more akin to a road-side layby, which is already a frequent feature on the single-track public road.
- 12.19 There are no immediate neighbouring properties which would be impacted upon by the development.

12.20 Policy seeks amenity space and landscaping commensurate with the scale and character of the development. There is sufficient external space to accommodate the needs of the development, and elements of additional proposed soft landscape are evident in the submitted plans. A detailed landscaping and lighting scheme will be required by condition to ensure the suitability of the finalised details of proposals.

12.21 It is considered that the development has a neutral to positive impact on place-making, in that the siting, scale, and design do respect and reflect existing positive characteristics and the proposed development is assessed to enhance the surrounding built and natural environment. It is considered that, overall, the site has capacity to accommodate the design and scale of the proposal and it is in keeping with the aims of the relevant design and placemaking policies.

Economic Development, Retail and Service Provision

Policy context

12.22 The locations identified as the main sites to deliver strategic business needs are listed in the Development Proposals section of the LDP – this is largely based on strategic development of new and often larger scale business and industrial developments, and the Calanais Visitor Centre is not included in this. However, development sites, in other locations, will also be considered in recognition of the diverse nature of economic activity within the Outer Hebrides.

12.23 Policy ED2 seeks that provision of retail, service and other activities should be located to best serve the communities for which they are intended. Proposals for retail, commercial and public uses will be supported in main and rural settlements. In relation to retail specifically, the policy notes that, smaller scale developments (max 100sq.m), for example relating to croft diversification or tourist related development, will be acceptable where they meet the requirements of the Development Strategy.

Assessment

12.24 The centre is a community run commercial enterprise which supports employment needs in this rural community, as well as providing service provision through the café and other facilities. The proposed works would support the retention and enhancement of this facility, which serves the significant number of visitors to the area, as well as the local population. As such, it is considered that the development would contribute to the viability and sustainability of the community through employment and tourist facility provision.

Car parking and roads layout

Policy context

12.25 Policy PD2 of the OHLDP sets out the Comhairle approach to parking, roads, and interactions with the existing public road network. The policy context notes the importance of ensuring appropriate parking provision is made in terms of pedestrian and road safety, free flow of traffic, visual appearance and impact on neighbouring amenity.

12.26 Road design and car parking should be suited to the type, location, scale and circumstances of the development. Subsequent development will be assessed cumulatively. The Comhairle will support the provision of electric car charging points in new development (subject to appropriate design and layout). Parking standards may be relaxed depending on context. Where car parking requirements cannot be met, the applicant will be required to justify the proposed provision and non-conformity with the Standard.

Consultation response

12.27 The Comhairle Roads Section has been consulted on this application as detailed in Paragraph 9.1 above.

Assessment

- 12.28 The world famous Calanais Stones attract a significant number of visitors each year, particularly in the summer holiday season. Visitor numbers are likely to increase, and the tourist season be extended by visits anticipated from cruise ship passengers arriving at the new Deep Water Port at Stornoway.
- 12.29 The proposed development of the Centre will increase its visitor capacity and associated parking provision to accommodate the number of visitors. Policy sets the parking provision for development as proposed and as such, the provision of adequate parking and manoeuvring for the site is a significant consideration.
- 12.30 In the initial submission, the development was significantly lacking in car-parking provision in relation to the required ratios in the LDP. The site was approximately 10 bays short, based on initial assessments of requirements for the extended mixed-use centre and the bus parking and drop off arrangements inadequate. Further, tour buses are a common method of transport to and from the centre and as such, on-site provision for bus-parking, manoeuvring, and safe areas to manage the alighting and boarding from buses is a key planning issue. However, the initial application submission saw the bus-parking and drop off provision reduced significantly, the developer contending that bus traffic would be addressed through a management system whereby the Centre would only accommodate 'pre-booked' tour buses. However, as this could change in the future, this proposal presented a significant challenge from a planning perspective.
- 12.31 In the intervening period since the application was submitted, a separate application was submitted, determined and work undertaken to provide a separate 10-bay car-parking area to the south of the existing parking area. This has an independent access point and is not linked through to the existing car-parking area on account of levels. This 10-space car-parking area has now been incorporated into the parking bay provision for the proposed development, albeit with a separate access point.
- 12.32 The proposed development places an increased emphasis on more sustainable travel options and increasing all accessibility parking and walking routes into the Centre.
- 12.33 The development introduces four fully accessible car-parking spaces on the higher parking level of the site with an accessible route to the Centre, as well as ensuring the bus drop-off point meets accessibility requirements. Achieving level access will require a retaining wall to be introduced to ensure parking and disembarking at the requisite levels. While the proposed retaining wall is substantial, with a height of almost 3 metres at its highest, it will be stone faced and viewed in the context of a significant number of other structures and stone outcrops which are interspersed in the parking area and the front of the Centre.
- 12.34 The proposals also include six electric vehicle charging bays. While these spaces would be preferred as additional provision to the main car-parking offer, it is acknowledged that these are a positive addition to the ambitions for increased sustainable transport. There is also an increase in dedicated cycle parking provision on site, promoting usage of non-motorised transport.
- 12.35 Protracted negotiations and design assistance from the Comhairle have helped achieve a layout which allows for a bus to arrive and wait at the centre safely while a bus is already in the 'drop-off' bay; to allow for a bus to turn and stop in a waiting bay to then collect their passengers after drop-off, concurrently with a bus in an adjoining 'pick-up' bay loading passengers.
- 12.36 These negotiations resulted in a revision to the application with the proposals under consideration providing a comparable provision with the current provision, i.e. 4no. bus parking bays on site with suitable turning head. This is considered essential given the increase in centre capacity and the increased frequency of buses on site due to the movement of large tour groups, often from the cruise ships now visiting the island and using the new Deep Water Port facilities.

- 12.37 In the revised proposals for this application, a small extension to this area is shown to accommodate motorcycle parking and a surfaced path abutting the public highway to allow people to walk to the main parking area, before making their way to the Centre.
- 12.38 While it has taken a protracted period of time to secure the revised car-parking and bus provision it is considered, having regard to the overall constraints on the site, that while parking bay provision is still less (by 2 car-parking spaces) than that advocated by the Development Plan, that the number is adequate having regards to the projected staff numbers and Centre capacity. It is proposed that a condition be applied to ensure the number of spaces detailed in the plans is achieved, and suitably identified on-site.
- 12.39 However, while the number of spaces is considered adequate, concerns over pedestrian safety remain in respect of the revised layout of the parking area. More specifically, the bus parking bays for collection/pick-up (post visit) are remote from the footpath to the Centre and as a result there is potential for a significant number of people to be walking through the carparking area with manoeuvring and moving cars to reach the collection/pick-up point for the buses.
- 12.40 Pedestrians are considered the most vulnerable road users, including within carparks, and should be given priority. Within a carpark, Sustrans guidance recommends either a segregated space or a shared space with *minimal markings*. They note concern where pedestrian or cyclists are directed along car park aisles that access car parking bays, particular consideration should be given to the amount of manoeuvring, and particularly reversing, likely to be occurring at any one time.
- 12.41 The developer's transport consultant, was invited to reconsider the layout, and having explored options, responded as follows:
- *In the existing arrangement, there is no delineated pedestrian route to the visitor centre, pedestrians must either walk through the vehicular circulation spaces in the existing car park or on the vehicle route to the 4 coach bays, where coaches will be reversing.*
 - *The site is very constrained spatially and there are substantial level changes to negotiate, introducing a fully separate/distinct pedestrian route is challenging in either the existing or proposed layout.*
 - *The approach taken in the proposed layout is to from accessible and legible routes from the upper wheelchair parking, from the coach drop off and the lower existing car park to the visitor centre. In terms of pedestrian movement which crosses over with vehicular circulation, the proposed layout aims to reduce risk through the introduction of the delineated route in the lower car park. This will assist in reducing the crossover of pedestrian movement and reversing coaches, by directing this movement through the lower car park, where comparatively risk is significantly lower.*
 - *The creation of a delineated pedestrian route in the lower carpark would be an improvement on the existing situation, where pedestrian movement is occurring across all vehicular circulation areas, including the reversing area associated with the 4 coach bays. In short, on this restricted site, we believe we have balanced the opportunities for improvement where possible with the well understood limitations that the site presents.*
 - *To locate a path along the rear of the carparking spaces adjacent to the dry-stone wall (in the lower car park) as suggested [by the Comhairle as Planning Authority] would essentially require all of the trees in the avenue (on the car park side of the lane) to be removed. The path could not be introduced around them without impacting on their viability. It is also notable that the pinch points between the wall and parking spaces are as little as 1m wide. This is insufficient for a pedestrian link path. Also, the gradient along the line of this path would be in the order of 1:8 and 1:10 – so very steep (we are tied with levels at both ends and cannot vary the route substantially within the available space). Essentially though, a path (with pinch points) could be proposed if the trees are removed. This will obviously impact on visual character and habitat value.*

- 12.42 The marked pathway routes pedestrians to walk past 14 parking-bays and is not supported as good practice by Comhairle Roads.
- 12.43 However, the development proposed is not on the public highway and pedestrian circulation on site will ultimately be the responsibility of the operator. The options presented by the applicant have been thoroughly reviewed and tested by the Comhairle for further improvement and the plans before Members while not ideal present the best solution that can be achieved.
- 12.44 Consideration has therefore been given to the layout now proposed, the initial and subsequent advice of Comhairle Roads; the above comments of the developer's transport consultant; the current parking layout at the Centre and the overall constraints of the site. On balance, while concerns remain around the pedestrian routing as proposed, it is concluded that this issue would not merit the refusal of the application.
- 12.45 Further, the separate 10-bay parking area constructed in 2023 and the proposed motorcycle parking ideally require a footpath to provide a walking route for pedestrians from these spaces through to the main carpark and the Centre. A footpath has been identified on the site plan as level with and following the route of the public road. To ensure clear separation from the public road and traffic, the road edge path will need to be clearly delineated, and this will require to be secured by condition.
- 12.46 Suitable surface water drainage will also be required for the area to be extended for the motorcycle parking, and this will also require to be secured by condition.
- 12.47 A smaller access/layby is proposed alongside the public road at the southern boundary to accommodate service vehicles for the proposed plant room building. The finalised details of this are outstanding but the principle is considered acceptable, and details will be secured by condition.
- 12.48 Overall, it is therefore considered that the extent of the parking provision is adequate, acknowledging site constraints but concerns remain around pedestrian routing through the carparking areas. However, all options have now been explored and the developer has proposed the current layout as the only practical solution. It is considered that the car/bus parking layout has some deficiencies and is not wholly compliant with policy. However, conditions are proposed to manage the extent of the parking provision, layout and demarcation, and overall the deficiencies do not lend sufficient weight to refuse the application.

Tackling the climate and nature crises; Climate mitigation and adaptation; and Zero and Low Carbon Buildings

Policy context

- 12.49 NPF4 requires that when considering all development proposals, significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises, and that developments should be designed to reduce, minimise, or avoid greenhouse gas emissions.

Assessment

- 12.50 The proposed building would require to meet modern insulation and heat loss standards, which will largely be achieved as a result of the requirements of the Building Warrant application process and, while the extension to the building, and ancillary works, are likely to result in a neutral impact on global climate change, the energy efficiency and low carbon technologies secured through the Building Warrant application process would be positive in themselves as the current centre does not evidently employ any renewable technologies.
- 12.51 The proposal will incorporate solar panels behind the parapet roof of the plant room.

12.52 While of a larger scale in a local context, the development is of a local classification in planning terms. There is a demonstrable need for an enhancement to the existing visitor centre to provide for the significant increase in visitors since it was originally built, and to meet the needs of the nature of visitors from the increasing number of cruise ships visiting the island and sending large tour groups to local attractions via bus.

12.53 Due to the current building regulations regarding insulation and energy use, emissions created through use of the building should be minimised and not undue in the wider context of a climate change. Building regulations will also now require that the nature of this development includes for electric car charging provision, with 6no. bays identified on site. The provision of cycle storage and bus parking ensures promotion of both active and communal travel modes.

Waste Management

Policy context

12.54 New developments must have space to accommodate recycling facilities. These require to be designed and built into all new development proposals, both during the construction phase and the completed development.

Assessment

12.55 There is sufficient space on the site to accommodate the necessary waste containers for waste management on the site; both in the construction and in the day-to-day use of the centre when completed. A dedicated enclosed bin store is proposed, which is considered appropriate for the nature of the facility and its location within the wider setting of the scheduled Calanais. It is considered the development is in accordance with policy EI4 of the OHLDP.

Water and Wastewater

Policy context

12.56 New developments in areas with public water supplies should connect to the public water supply. New buildings in settlements with public sewerage systems, will be required to connect to the public sewer unless the developer can demonstrate that there are specific technical reasons as to why the development cannot reasonably be connected to a public sewer. New developments will be required to adopt the principles of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

Consultation response

12.57 Scottish Water advises that both public fresh and foul water infrastructure serves the area. There is also infrastructure on site.

Assessment

12.58 A public water supply is available, and the proposal is for foul sewage to connect to the public sewerage network. This will be required by condition to ensure compliance with this policy. Surface water from the site is detailed in an accompanying Drainage Statement to discharge to existing surface systems and to additional soakaways within the site boundaries, in keeping with the policy aims.

Biodiversity

Policy context

12.59 NPF4 – Policy 3 – Biodiversity provides that development proposals will contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity, and integrate nature-based solutions, where possible, and that proposals for local development will include appropriate measures, proportionate to the nature and scale of development to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, in accordance with national and local guidance. Further, that potential adverse impacts on biodiversity and the natural environment will be minimised through careful planning and design.

12.60 The Government's National Strategy is to reverse decline and improve biodiversity. [NatureScot 'Developing with Nature' guidance](#) provides guidance for developers in support of policy 3(c) of the

NPF4. The guidance sets out measures to integrate nature-based solutions into application schemes. Some of the appropriate measures include approaches such as planting for pollinators, wildflower meadows, orchards, tree, scrub and woodland planting, boundary hedges, ponds for wildlife, drain escapes, biodiverse sustainable drainage systems and rain gardens.

Assessment

- 12.61 The area of undeveloped site has been used in the past for grazing and is currently minimally maintained grass. The tree-planted land adjacent to the farmhouse access is to be maintained so far as possible although 5no. of approximately 30 trees will be removed to facilitate construction.
- 12.62 In mitigation, replacement tree planting is proposed throughout the site and while a bio-diversity enhancement plan has not been provided at this point there is adequate space within the site to accommodate nature-based solutions. The approaches set out in the [NatureScot 'Developing with Nature' guidance](#) could readily be incorporated into a landscaping scheme. A soft landscaping scheme which will require to demonstrate the proposed development contribution to biodiversity enhancement can be secured by condition ensuring that prior to development commencing, the requirements of NPF Policy 3 would be met.

Landscape

Policy context

- 12.63 Development proposals should relate to the specific landscape and visual characteristics of the local area, ensuring that the overall integrity of landscape character is maintained. Development proposals should not have an unacceptable significant landscape or visual impact. If it is assessed that there will be a significant landscape or visual impact, the applicant will be required to provide mitigation measures demonstrating how a satisfactory landscape and visual fit can be achieved.

Assessment

- 12.64 The proposed development for the extension to the visitor centre, additional ancillary plant room, WCs, bin store and revised hard landscaping and parking areas, are considered to be acceptably located, within the settlement and pattern, and has been designed such that the impact of the proposal on the character of the wider landscape would be minimal. It is considered that the overall works relate acceptably to the landscape and visual characteristics of the local area, ensuring that the overall integrity of landscape character is maintained.

Historic Assets – Archaeology

Policy context

- 12.65 LDP Policy NBH5: Archaeology and NPF4 Policy 7: Historic assets and places look to protect archaeology and scheduled monuments.
- 12.66 LDP Policy notes that development proposals which preserve, protect, or enhance the archaeological significance of heritage assets, including their settings, will be supported. Scheduled Monuments (scheduled archaeological remains) are nationally important monuments or archaeological sites. Development proposals that will adversely impact upon scheduled archaeological remains or the integrity of their settings will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances where there is no practical alternative site and where there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.
- 12.67 LDP Policy NBH5 incorporates specific provisions around the Callanish Sensitive Area (detailed on the Development Plan Area Context Map) where there is a heightened potential for impacting on known sites and their settings as well as the possibility of encountering unknown archaeological sites and features. If ground disturbance is part of the development, developers may be required to carry out a pre-determination evaluation prior to determination of any planning application. These points should be viewed as considerations in proposed development designs and not as an impediment to development.

12.68 NPF4 Policy 7 provides that proposals affecting scheduled monuments will only be supported where direct impacts on the scheduled monument are avoided; significant adverse impacts on the integrity of the setting of a scheduled monument are avoided; or exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the impact on a scheduled monument and its setting and impacts on the monument or its setting have been minimised. It also notes that proposals should also be informed by national policy and guidance on managing change in the historic environment. This should include the *Historic Environment Policy for Scotland* (HEPS) which sets out a series of policies to guide decision making surrounding historic assets. Of particular relevance are HEP1 (decisions affecting any part of the historic environment should be informed by an inclusive understanding of its breadth and cultural significance), HEP2 (decisions affecting the historic environment should ensure that its understanding and enjoyment as well as its benefits are secured for present and future generations), and HEP4 (changes to specific assets and their context should be managed in a way that protects the historic environment, and opportunities for enhancement should be identified where appropriate).

Consultation responses

12.69 Comhairle Archaeology highlights the key areas of historic environment interest as follows. The Historic Environment Record (HER) shows that this site is located between the main groupings of the Calanais Stones Complex. All three of these sites are scheduled ancient monuments, comprising of the Calanais Stones, Ceann A' Gharaodh stone circle and Cnoc Fillibhir Bheag stone circle. Numerous other undesigned archaeological features are noted in the surrounding landscape. Within the development site boundary only Callanish Farmhouse is recorded on the HER. It is identified on the 6" 1st ed Ordnance Survey sheet (1849) and comprises of three buildings. The current surviving building is clearly shown and is annotated 'Callernish Inn'. This building is likely to date from the 18th century, however the exact dating for its establishment is not currently known.

12.70 Comhairle Archaeology notes that the development will impact previously undisturbed ground and as such there is a heightened potential for unknown archaeological material to be encountered. Additionally, the existing farmhouse is to be modified both externally and internally and is of the view that the setting and character of the eastern elevation of the farmhouse will be negatively impacted by the proposed design.

12.71 Given the importance of the site from both an archaeological and an architectural perspective, Comhairle Archaeology recommends that a program of archaeological works should be carried out. This should take the form of an up-to-date Desk Based Assessment in order to put the historic environment within the context of the proposed new development. Additionally, an Historic Building Survey (Enhanced) should be carried out both externally and internally of the farmhouse, with the internal survey done once the modern interior has been stripped out and prior to any construction occurring. Furthermore, it is recommended that archaeological monitoring in terms of a Watching Brief is carried out on all ground-breaking in the southern area of the site. Any ground-breaking or demolition of or within the farmhouse will also require archaeological monitoring.

12.72 Historic Environment Scotland (HES) have provided two formal consultation responses – both on the original submission and the finalised plans, as well as advice in the intervening periods. Both the formal responses of HES have been considered in the planning assessment.

12.73 HES advise that over recent years there has been a significant amount of pre-application discussion between them and stakeholders regarding the development of the Centre, and that HES has provided comments on earlier iterations of the scheme to help steer the applicants towards a solution that will not have a significant adverse impact on the setting of the Calanais Standing Stones monuments.

12.74 The existing Calanais Visitor Centre that serves the monument (and is the subject of this planning application) is independently owned and operated by Urras Nan Tursachan. The Scheduled area of the Calanais Standing Stones is a 'Property in Care' of HES.

- 12.75 The monument comprises the world-famous standing stones at Calanais (also known as Callanish) and associated features, sited on the summit of a low rise, on the west coast of Lewis in the Western Isles. The arrangement of the Calanais Standing Stones is unique. In essence, it comprises an approximate circle of standing stones from which long lines of stones, including an 'avenue', radiate in four directions. Within the stone circle are also the remains of a small, chambered cairn, robbed in antiquity. In the south-west part of the site are the foundations of an early modern house and corn-drying kiln.
- 12.76 HES notes that *"The cultural significance of this monument is vested in its survival as one of Scotland's most remarkable and impressive monuments that forms the centrepiece of a very extensive ritual landscape that expresses a complex cosmological belief system dating back 5000 years. The relationship of the monument to other sites within the wider Calanais complex as well as the surrounding landscape is critical to its understanding and cultural significance; located on a small ridge and enclosed by low hills to the north-east, east and south-east, the monument is a prominent skyline feature widely visible from the surrounding area, and the remainder of the Calanais complex is also mostly intervisible with the monument. As such, the visual relationship between the various components should be seen as a single continuous ritual arena, and the retention of this setting ensures that the cultural significance of the monument can be understood, appreciated and experienced."* In their final response, they note of the various elements of the Calanais complex that *"These aspects are integral to the monument's setting and highly sensitive to change."*
- 12.77 In response to the specifics of the application, HES do not object to the development. They note a number of comments in relation to the details of the development, including: *"the form and massing of the new extensions respect and respond to the visual language of the existing historic structures on and around the site, with similar ridge heights of roofs to the existing and similar pitch, although the visual prominence of the historic farmhouse is somewhat lost within the current scheme when compared to previous iterations."* Also, in relation to the addition of the plant room: *"Throughout our advice to the applicant prior to this iteration we have strongly advised against developing the underdeveloped area to the south of the Visitor Centre as this could result in a substantial and negative alteration to the character of the area. It is therefore disappointing to see that the plant room is now proposed here."*
- 12.78 In relation to the most dominant element of the extension, the function room, HES note *"the two blocks are likely to sit neatly alongside one another in key views associated with the setting of the monument."* Also, *"A small standalone toilet block is proposed for the north side of the complex, but this is well screened by topography so is unlikely to be prominent in key views associated with the setting of the monument."*
- 12.79 They surmise that, from their perspective, no further mitigation is required (other than that already achieved by design) in order to sufficiently ameliorate impacts on the setting of the monument, and whilst there will be a small change to the character of the monument's setting it is not of a severity to challenge the legibility of the monument within the landscape. As such, the proposed development is unlikely to have a significant adverse impact on the setting of the monument.
- 12.80 Again, the addition of the plant room did elicit slightly stronger concern, stating: *"The applicant has supplied a Design Statement stating that the original location for the plant room, within the Centre, proved no longer viable due to ground conditions. We understand that the costs of removing the rock here would be prohibitive. We would continue to recommend that the viability of alternative options be explored. However, as currently proposed, whilst the plant room would result in an increase in the overall footprint of development outwith the main area of the Visitor Centre, the steps taken to locate it in a hollow and make it blend in with its surroundings mean that the impacts would not be significant enough to object to this aspect of the proposed development."*

Assessment

- 12.81 The development site is located approximately 100m south of an archaeological site that is recognised as being of national importance and is designated as a scheduled monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (SM 90054 Calanais or Callanish Standing Stones).
- 12.82 Developments which would adversely impact upon scheduled archaeological remains or the integrity of their settings would not be acceptable. It is important to note that, while the development is within the wider setting of Calanais in the wide views towards the site, this does not indicate an undue impact on its integrity. Modern development has been permitted within the setting of Calanais and much existing prior to its designation; as such new development does not necessarily indicate an unacceptable impact.
- 12.83 In assessing the proposals, comments from Comhairle Archaeology, HES, and on-site assessment by planning, supplemented by the draft visualisations from the developer have all be taken together to consider the overall development and its impacts on the historic environment. This includes impact on archaeological potential in disturbed ground; the historic, but undesignated, farmhouse; and the setting of the entire Calanais complex series of scheduled monuments.
- 12.84 From an archaeological perspective there is a high potential for interest in all areas of ground disturbance and archaeological monitoring and recording will be required. The developer is aware of this and has already drafted a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) which has been considered suitable by Comhairle Archaeology. A series of conditions will be applied to secure the finalised WSI and the remaining requirements for archaeological works.
- 12.85 The Callanish farmhouse is not a listed structure but holds significant historical interest due to its longevity on site and its history as a building of key role in the development of the peninsula of Callanish over a long period of time. To secure the history of this building, which will be significantly altered by the proposed development, an historic building survey will be required by condition.
- 12.86 The setting of the Calanais complex of historic assets, particularly Calanais I (the Calanais Stones) in this instance, is extensive and sensitive to change from built interventions and alterations to the landscape. This has been a primary consideration for all parties, including the developer, as evidenced in their engagement with HES over a considerable period while designing the project.
- 12.87 The development has to meet a number of requirements to achieve the aims of the developer, which is challenging within the constraints of the site. However, it is important to balance the needs of the developer to improve the offering on site, with protecting the historical integrity of the scheduled monuments which the centre serves.
- 12.88 The most contentious elements remaining in the finalised proposals relate to development spanning outwith the existing developed footprint of the centre and its immediate surrounds. The recently consented and developed 10-bay parking area caused concern at the time of application due to it moving into the southern portion of the centre site which has minimal development, with just two dry-stone walls radiating from the centre towards the edge of the public road. While this was approved. HES stated a note of concern about further development in this area. The current application now contains a plant room in a similar location.
- 12.89 However, when reviewing HES notes of concerns, it has not merited an objection on the grounds of the very low height, stone finish, and minimal visual intrusion of the plant room if developed in accordance with the details on plan. Similarly, based on the assessment by planning, the plant room as proposed is not considered to have an undue impact on the setting of Calanais complex due to its recessive materials, nature of its low intensity use, and its low level in the landscape.

12.90 It is accepted however that this should not set a precedent for development creep into the undeveloped green space which could have a cumulative impact that could be damaging to the setting of the scheduled monuments. Future proposals in this area and in locations spreading out from the current concentration of development may not be considered to be acceptable.

12.91 Overall, the manner in which the scheme has been designed, positioned, and detailed in terms of materials, finishes and colours, it is assessed that – subject to conditions to manage these matters and the appropriate investigation and recording of relevant historic environment information – the development would not have a significant adverse impact on the setting of the Calanais Standing Stones complex of monuments or on the archaeological resource of the area.

Tourism

Policy context

12.92 NPF4 Policy 30 requires that development proposals for new or extended tourist facilities be in locations supported by the LDP.

12.93 National policy states that proposals for tourism related development will take into account:

- i. The contribution made to the local economy.
- ii. Compatibility with the surrounding area in terms of the nature and scale of the activity and impacts of increased visitors.
- iii. Impacts on communities, for example by hindering the provision of homes and services for local people.
- iv. Opportunities for sustainable travel and appropriate management of parking and traffic generation and scope for sustaining public transport services particularly in rural areas.
- v. Accessibility for disabled people.
- vi. Measures taken to minimise carbon emissions.
- vii. Opportunities to provide access to the natural environment.

Assessment

12.94 NPF4 Policy 30 requires that development proposals for new or extended tourist facilities be in locations supported by the LDP.

12.95 The extension to the centre should provide positive benefits for the local economy through an increase in direct employment and indirect benefits from providing an enhanced attraction to encourage visitors to the area.

12.96 The potential impact from an increased number of visitors has been considered, with the key concern being to ensure sufficient on-site parking, pick-up/drop-off and circulation space. Policy seeks appropriate management of parking and traffic generation. The provision has been discussed above in response to the policy on Car-parking and Roads and while concerns remain are deemed to provide capacity for the site as extended. More sustainable travel options are supported by the provision of cycle stands, and on-site provision for bus drop-off/lay-over and pick-up.

12.97 The development does not affect, directly or indirectly, the provision of homes or services for local people. It will provide an enhanced facility which can serve local people also.

12.98 Accessible parking areas and routes to and through the visitor centre have been clearly prioritised in the design of the development.

12.99 Sustainability measures in the form of installing solar panels; raised standards of insulation through the application of modern building standards; and utilising largely existing buildings and disturbed ground for the development, should ensure minimisation of emissions resulting from the works.

- 12.100 The development is predominantly to allow for facilities for those visiting the Calanais Stones, located in this rural location. The site is surrounded by both agricultural and natural green areas.
- 12.101 As assessed under above policy considerations, the nature, siting and scale and design of the development is considered acceptable. On balance, the parking provision, traffic flow, and pedestrian routes are considered acceptable.

Material Planning Considerations

- 12.102 No representations were made to the application and all relevant material considerations, including comments from consultees, have been addressed under the policy sections above.

REASONED CONCLUSION

- 13.1 Planning Authorities are required to determine planning applications in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. An assessment has been carried out against the provisions of the Development Plan which is comprised of the relevant policies of NPF4 and the OHLDP. Consideration has also been given to all relevant material planning considerations.
- 13.2 The key planning issues in the determination of the application are:
- the principle of extending an existing visitor centre within a rural settlement, its quality of design, and role in placemaking;
 - the impact of the proposed works on the historic landscape and settings of scheduled monuments of the Calanais complex of historic assets; and
 - the impact on road safety and the capacity of the site to manage the traffic likely to be generated by the expanded use of the centre.
- 13.3 The principle of development at this location is established and the development proposals assessed as acceptable in terms of the Development Plan in respect of the quality of design, and role in placemaking, and avoidance of adverse impact on the historic landscape and setting of scheduled monuments of the Calanais complex. The tourism benefits are a significant material consideration given the appeal and importance of the Calanais site. A suite of conditions is recommended to manage a number of issues identified by the policy assessment above.
- 13.4 In conclusion, concerns remain regarding pedestrian routing within the site and in relation to the risk of establishing a precedent for expansion of buildings beyond the existing grouping into undeveloped areas around the Centre; given the risks of this compromising the setting of the Calanais Stones complex.
- 13.5 However, as assessed above, these have been weighed up within the context of the Development Plan and it has been concluded that these do not carry sufficient weight to merit refusal of the application.
- 13.6 It is therefore concluded that while not wholly compliant with the Development Plan, that on balance the development should be approved subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1 to this Report.

RECOMMENDATION

- 14.1 It is recommended that the planning application be approved subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1 to this Report.