



ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE UPDATE

Report by Depute Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide an update on the Archaeology Service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Outer Hebrides Archaeology Service's main priorities are protecting, managing, and documenting the historic environment throughout the Outer Hebrides.
- 2.2 Following on from lessons learnt from the cyber-attack, the Archaeology Service is reviewing future needs and cost implications for robust digital storage and back-up requirements.
- 2.3 The number of proposed large-scale projects in the Outer Hebrides has increased significantly over the last year and this will pose significant challenges to the Archaeology Service in terms of managing and monitoring mitigation strategies for these projects when they begin.
- 2.4 The Archaeology Service continues to respond in support of national agencies such as Treasure Trove Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, and Police Scotland. It also supports and advises internal (Comhairle) projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle:**
 - a) **notes the ongoing work within the Comhairle's Archaeology Service; and**
 - b) **notes the positive impact of the new HER database.**

Contact Officer:	Colin George Morrison, Team Leader, Heritage and Culture
Appendix 1:	None
Background Papers:	None

IMPLICATIONS

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

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	There are no financial implications at this stage.
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None.
Equalities	There are no identified equality issues within this Report.
Corporate Strategy	The Heritage Service's aims and priorities are aligned with the Corporate Strategy 2022-27.
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Outer Hebrides Archaeology Service's main priorities are protecting, managing, and documenting the historic environment throughout the Outer Hebrides.
- 5.2 The Historic Environment Record (HER) is a database comprising of information on all known sites of archaeological and historical interest and is link to a Geographical Information System (GIS).
- 5.3 The database holds descriptions of monuments, buildings, records of fieldwork and research and legal protections through designation as well as linked photographs and reports.

COMHAIRLE ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICES

- 6.1 The HER is curated and continually updated by the Archaeology Service and makes recommendations to the Planning Service as a statutory requirement. The HER is the principal tool that informs all planning advice and also informs management advice on Council assets and other archaeological sites throughout the Outer Hebrides.
- 6.2 Following on from lessons learnt from the cyber-attack, the Archaeology Service is reviewing future needs and cost implications for robust digital storage and back-up requirements. The HER was removed from the Council IT infrastructure in 2021 to an externally hosted service and was not impacted by the cyber-attack.
- 6.3 The Archaeology Service continues to provide advice and support for development management purposes. This comprises of householder and agricultural development as well as larger scale commercial developments. It is also consulted on permitted development applications and other large scale infrastructure projects.
- 6.4 The number of proposed large-scale projects in the Outer Hebrides has increased significantly over the last year and this will pose significant challenges to the Archaeology Service in terms of managing and monitoring mitigation strategies for these projects when they begin, due to a lack of resource within the service. These types of large-scale projects include, but aren't restricted to, SSEN projects, Scottish Water mains renewal, Renewable Energy (on and offshore) & Peatland Restoration projects.
- 6.5 The research into locating alternative data sources to replace information and imagery from the Archaeology Service archive that was lost in the cyber-attack is ongoing.

- 6.6 The Archaeology Service is exploring alternative ways to offset a lack of resource and resilience from the impacts of climate change by researching potential data capture techniques through drone technology. The west coast of the Outer Hebrides is noted for its high levels of preservation within its archaeological sites. These range from the earliest settlers of the Mesolithic period, through to the 18th century. Due to the prevalent machair environment the coastline is also vulnerable to impacts of sea level rise, increased storminess, and subsequent coastal erosion.
- 6.7 Appropriate drone technology may allow a cost effective and resilient response to recording sites prior to or after storm episodes. Such datasets will preserve archaeological sites by record and may feed into potential funding sources aimed at climate change mitigation in the future.
- 6.8 The Archaeology Service continues to offer support and advice to research projects that not only pursue academic research aims but also show added benefit and value to the public.
- 6.9 Recent projects include 'Islands of Stone' led by a team from the Universities of Reading and Southampton. This project carried out an investigation of crannogs, which has pushed the tradition chronology of these features back into the Neolithic and increased our understanding of this period. This project gave well attended public presentations of their findings at a variety of venues in the islands.
- 6.10 The Uist Virtual Archaeology Project (UVAP), led by UHI OH Archaeology Department, developed an innovative mixed media approach to engaging the community and visitors with existing archaeological sites and presenting a visual interpretation/experience of the results of earlier archaeological investigations. This project won three archaeological achievement awards held by Council for British Archaeology in 2022.
- 6.11 The Archaeology Service continues to respond in support of national agencies such as Treasure Trove Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, and Police Scotland. It also supports and advises internal (Comhairle) projects.