
The Heart of Neolithic Orkney (United Kingdom) No 514bis

1 Basic data

State Party

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Name of property

The Heart of Neolithic Orkney

Location

Mainland Orkney, Scotland

Inscription

1999

Brief description

The group of Neolithic monuments on Orkney consists of a large chambered tomb (Maes Howe), two ceremonial stone circles (the Stones of Stenness and the Ring of Brodgar) and a settlement (Skara Brae), together with a number of unexcavated burial, ceremonial and settlement sites. The group constitutes a major prehistoric cultural landscape which gives a graphic depiction of life in this remote archipelago in the far north of Scotland some 5,000 years ago.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

12 March 2015

2 Issues raised

Background

The settings of the both two groups of monuments: Brodgar-Stenness and Skara Brae are significant, not only in terms of their meaning, but also in terms of their experience. Brodgar-Stenness is located in a topographic bowl with interconnected ridgelines and expansive views across the undeveloped landscape. These views allows for visual connections to the larger archaeological landscape, with a number of sites located within the proposed buffer zone. The high concentration of contemporary burial and occupation sites in the buffer zone presents a valuable relict cultural landscape that supports the value of the main sites.

Skara Brae constitutes the remains of a domestic site and is located within a working pastoral landscape. The site is visually but also experientially different from Brodgar-Stenness in that it is geographically confined, has a strong connection with the sea and is well defined.

The landscape and monuments are fragile and vulnerable to increased visitor impacts such as footfall and incremental developments. Coastal erosion is also a concern. The current buffer zone does not consider these impacts, nor does it serve to support the broader context of the monuments, which are essential in their comprehension and Outstanding Universal Value.

Part of the landscape is covered by a two-part buffer zone, centred on Skara Brae in the west and on the Mainland monuments in the central west. Two layers of buffer zone were proposed for the site in the nomination dossier of 1998:

- 1) an Inner Buffer Zone (IBZ); and
- 2) an Outer Buffer Zone (OBZ).

The inner buffer zones were very tightly drawn around the monuments and were mainly aligned with existing cultural and natural heritage designations. The outer buffer zone of the Brodgar-Stenness group includes a broad area around the inner buffer zone; however, the Skara Brae outer buffer zone only includes a limited area around the site.

Modification

The proposed new buffer zones around Skara Brae and Brodgar-Stenness includes a much broader area around the sites themselves. The proposed revision to the buffer zone aims to firstly unify the myriad of buffer zones presented in the nomination dossier and 2001 Management Plan, and also the Zones of Visual Influence contained within the previous Local Development Plan. The proposed buffer zone also strives to ensure consistency between the buffer zone, the present Management Plan, the Orkney Local Development Plan and recently adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011) for the World Heritage Site. The Management Plan for 2014-19 draws on the work that has already been delivered through previous Partnership Management Plans and specifically builds upon the work of the 2008-13 Management Plan and also contains guidelines for the new buffer zone.

The proposed buffer zone introduces a Sensitive Area that creates a wide area around the sites and their associated buffer zones where the outstanding universal value and the setting need to be considered as part of any proposed developments. It serves to highlight areas where policies relating to the potential affects on the World Heritage Site and its setting should be taken into account. The revised buffer zone and sensitive area thus serve to protect the context of the sites and the key visual connections between the Brodgar-Stenness group of monuments. Protection is afforded in the Supplementary Planning Guidance through the identification of 'sensitive ridgelines' within the Sensitive Area and guidelines in terms of avoiding the approval of large-scale developments in the area. The overarching goal is protection of the OUV of the site as a whole.

According to the Supplementary Planning Guidance (2011), management of the site and its buffer zone will be the responsibility of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site (HONO WHS) Steering Group, which comprises representatives of the four Partner organisations: Orkney Islands Council, Historic Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The Steering Group includes a Development Management Officer and together with the County Archaeologist or the Conservation and Heritage Planning Policy Officer, all new development proposals should be reviewed.

ICOMOS considers that the proposed amendment to the buffer zone of Skara Brae in the west and the central west monuments of Brodgar-Stennes, will help to protect the relationships and linkages between the monuments and the wider open landscape. The buffer zone will also serve to protect the monuments that comprise the Property and those in the area outside it that support the outstanding universal value.

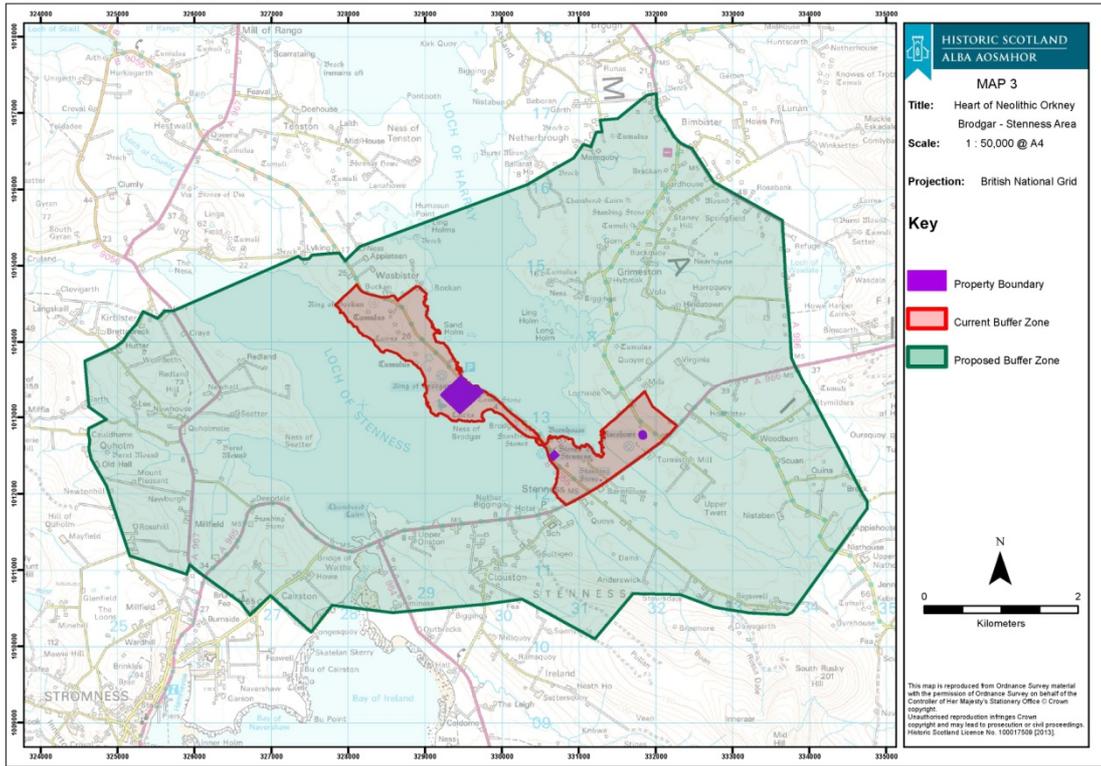
3 ICOMOS Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

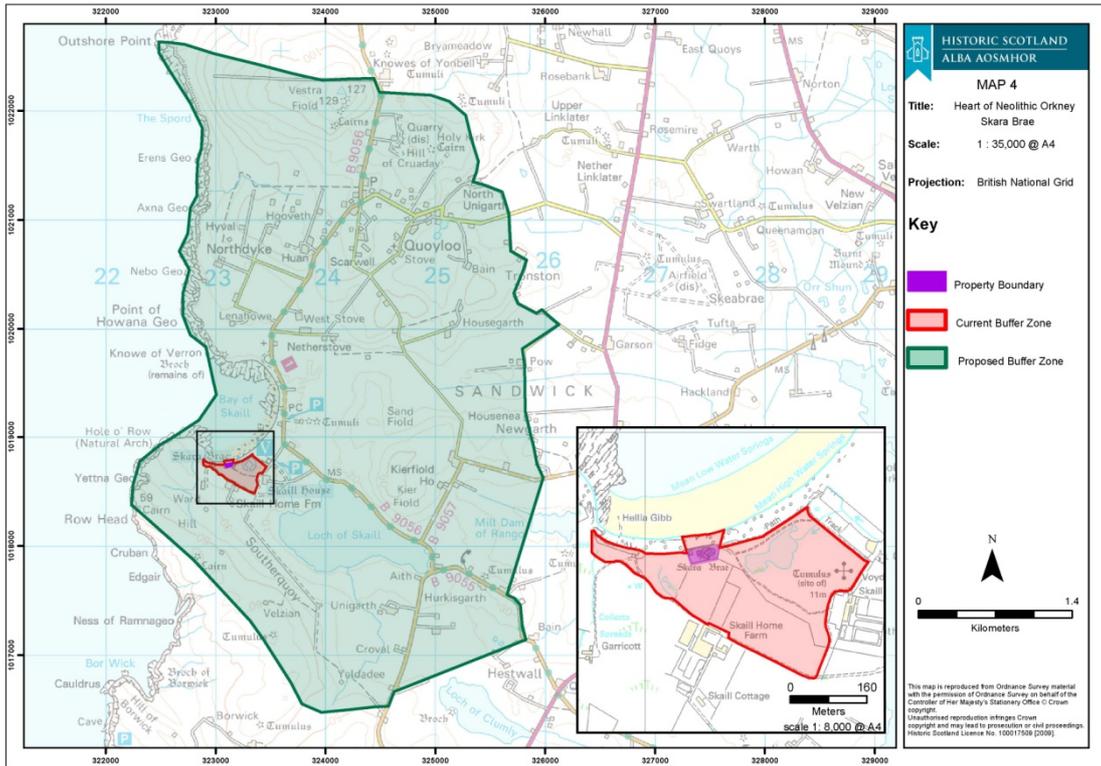
ICOMOS recommends that the proposed minor modification to the boundary of the buffer zone of The Heart of Neolithic Orkney, United Kingdom be **approved**.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party ensure that the revised buffer zones are included in the revised management plan 2014-2019 as announced and that the supplementary guidance for wind energy is approved.



Brodgar – Stenness Area - map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone



Skara Brae - map showing the boundaries of the proposed buffer zone