Case information

Case ID	300016758
File Reference	AMH/575/2/1
Name of Site	Rhianrivach, broch 400m N of

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 2303 3617
Designation No. (if any)	SM575
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	30/04/2015
Decision Date	19/09/2016

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1939 and the documentation does not conform to current standards. The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monument continues to be of national importance. The decision is to update to entry in the Schedule as **Rhianrivach, broch 185m NNW of Achow**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

Monument first scheduled in 1939; with no later amendments.

2.2 Development Proposals

N/A.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for amendment as part of the 2015 Highland project and the site was visited on 30/04/2015.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment against the Scheduling criteria has been carried out (see Annex A). The monument was found to meet the criteria for scheduling.
The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.
https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/

3.3 Other considerations

N/A

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria
Rhianrivach, broch 185m N of Achow

1 Description

The monument is a broch, a complex stone-built substantial roundhouse, dating to the Iron Age (between 600BC and 400AD). The broch is visible as a substantial grass covered stoney mound with an associated bank and ditch. It is located on a slight hillock, southeast of Rumster Forest at around 110m above sea level.

The broch mound measures 18m in diameter and rises 2.4m above the surrounding ground. Close to its base, the broch is encircled by a ditch and associated bank. To the west, the mound is slightly terraced to a lower level and has evidence for related structures. The monument is located in a prominent position on rising ground on the hillside with extensive views over the surrounding landscape and to the North Sea.

The scheduled area is irregular on plan and includes the remains described above and an area around them within which evidence relating to the monument's construction, use and abandonment is expected to survive, as shown in red on the accompanying map. The monument was first scheduled in 1939, but the documentation did not meet current standards: the present amendment rectifies this.

2 Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria (Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.)

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The monument is an example of a broch, visible as a grass covered stoney mound. A slight ditch and bank encircle the broch and to the west of the broch mound is a lower terrace which exhibits evidence for other structures. Overall the site survives in good condition with no record of an excavation at the site. The level of preservation of the broch together with the remains of outer-works are an important part of the monument’s significance.

The broch itself appears relatively undisturbed and the monument has very high potential to support future archaeological research. The scale of the mound indicates that the buried broch walls are likely to survive to some height. By analogy with a number of excavated brochs there is potential for buried structural features such as intramural cells and stairs, scarcement ledges and internal stone partitions within the broch mound. There is further potential for the buried remains of associated structures on the broch platform. Additionally, the broch, outworks and any associated structures are expected to contain deposits rich in occupation debris, artefacts and palaeoenvironmental evidence that can tell us about how people lived, their trade and exchange contacts, and their social status, as well as provide

information about broch architecture and construction methods. This monument's high potential is demonstrated by recent excavations at other Caithness brochs, such as Nybster, and by the publication of investigations at Howe on Orkney, where a broch mound was found to preserve rich buried deposits.

Broch towers are primarily seen as a specific specialised development of complex Atlantic roundhouses and the presence of outer-works and outbuildings on the broch mound at Rhianrivach indicates this site may have had a complex development sequence. Brochs were large complex structures that could have accommodated either an extended family or a small community. While there would have been a social hierarchy within this community, the construction of these elaborate towers is often understood in terms of elite settlement. Other interpretations have stressed their likely role as fortified or defensive sites, possibly serving a community across a wider area. Brochs are complex structures likely to have had numerous purposes and a complex role in prehistoric society.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Brochs are a widespread class of monument across northern Scotland with notable concentrations in Caithness, Sutherland, Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles and the northwest Highlands. This monument is significant as an upstanding and well-preserved example with associated outworks, which is located in close proximity to a number of other brochs including Appnag Tulloch (scheduled monument reference SM519 and Canmore ID 8634) 1.8km west-southwest, Rumster (scheduled monument reference SM573 and Canmore ID 8635) 2km northwest and Achavar (scheduled monument reference SM510 and Canmore ID 8598) 2.3km east-northeast. There are also other types of broadly contemporary monuments in the landscape surrounding the monument including a large collection of hut circles and related field systems (scheduled monument reference SM7242 and Canmore ID 8659) 2.3km west-southwest and a substantial dun (scheduled monument reference SM2301 and Canmore ID 8608) 2.6km southwest. There is therefore potential for comparative study on a local and national scale to better understand the function of such monuments, their interrelationship and the significance of their placing within the landscape, in particular in relation to our understanding of Iron Age social hierarchy, changing settlement patterns and systems of inheritance.

The broch sits on a south-southeast facing slope in a prominent position on a rise in the ground which maybe artificial or artificially enhanced. There are wide open views across the surrounding landscape and beyond to the coast 2.2km to the south. Many broch towers were deliberately sited to be focal points in the landscape, and this example would have been clearly visible from the lower lying ground to the south and from the sea.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

N/A.

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded the site is in a stable condition and well preserved. This amended designation increases the size of the scheduled area to include potential related remains. Designation as a scheduled monument remains the most appropriate mechanism to secure the preservation of the monument, and ensure the recognition of its national importance.

4 Assessment of national importance

This monument is of national importance because it has an inherent potential to make a significant addition to our understanding of the past, in particular of Iron Age society in Caithness and the function, use and development of brochs. It is a well-preserved example in a prominent position within the landscape. The upstanding mound indicates this monument is likely to retain structural characteristics, with potential for survival of walls and features such as intramural cells. The outer-works of the broch are of significance with an encircling ditch and bank along with evidence for associated outbuildings on the broch platform. The broch adds to our understanding of settlement patterns and social structures during the Iron Age in Caithness and the potential for further study is enhanced by the other numerous brochs in the vicinity. The loss of the monument would significantly diminish our future ability to appreciate and understand the development, use and re-use of brochs, and the nature of Iron Age society, economy and social hierarchy in the north of Scotland.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland http://www.canmore.org.uk reference number CANMORE ID 8630 (accessed on 30/04/2015).

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record reference is MHG10863 (accessed on 30/04/2015).

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MacKie, E. W. (2007) 'The Roundhouses, Brochs and Wheelhouses of Atlantic Scotland c. 700 BC - AD 500: architecture and material culture. Part 2 The Mainland and the Western Islands'. *BAR*, vol 342. Oxford.

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