Case information

Case ID	300016733
File Reference	AMH/514/2/1
Name of Site	Achvarasdal House, broch

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	NC 9834 6469
Designation No. (if any)	SM514
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	26/03/2015
Decision Date	16/09/2016

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1938 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 the entry in the Schedule as **Achvarasdal House, broch 65m NE of**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument was first scheduled in 1938. There have been no subsequent amendments.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals affecting this assessment.

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3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for amendment as part of the North 2015 Scheduling Enhancement Project. The site was visited on 21/04/2015.

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

Elizabeth McCrone
Head of Designations
Heritage Management
Historic Environment Scotland

Contact	Kyle Armstrong, Designations Officer Kyle.armstrong@hes.scot Tel: 0131 668 8740.

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria

Achvarasdal House, broch 65m NE of

1 Description

The monument is a broch, a type of complex Atlantic Roundhouse which is a drystone dwelling dating to the Iron Age (between 600BC and AD 400). The broch is visible as a substantial grassy mound with exposed interior walls, located on a flat-topped low rise of ground 225m north of Achiegullan Burn at around 45m above sea level.

The broch measures approximately 18m in external diameter and 10m internally. The interior walls survive to a height of 1.7m and there is an entrance at the east-southeast. The entrance passage contains two opposing door checks, set 1.25m in from the outer wall face, and there is evidence for a blocked doorway or cell on the north face of the passage, just behind the door check. Inside the broch, on the east wall face, there is a blocked doorway to an intramural stair or cell. There is evidence for possible outbuildings or related structures surviving in the substantial grassy mound surrounding the broch. The monument is surrounded by a 19th- century house and woodland but would have had fairly open views across the low-lying landscape towards Sandside Bay, 2.2km to the northwest.

The scheduled area is sub-circular 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 above ground elements of the modern wall, post and wire fence, local signage and the top 150mm of the path are excluded from the scheduling. The monument was first scheduled in 1938, but the documentation did not meet current standards: the present amendment rectifies this.

2 **Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria** (Scottish Historic Environment Policy, 2011 pp71-73)

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The monument is a well-preserved example of a broch, visible as a grass-covered mound with exposed interior walls. The broch mound possibly contains evidence for outbuildings. Overall the site survives in good condition with very high potential to support future archaeological research. Excavation of the interior of the broch took place probably around 1870 but the exterior and mound appear largely undisturbed. The excavations exposed well-preserved interior features including an entrance

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passage, door checks, a possible guard cell, an intramural stair or cell which has been blocked off at a later stage, and some smaller artefacts including a quern stone. By analogy with other excavated brochs, the exterior of the broch and the surrounding mound are likely 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.

Brochs in Caithness are typically thought to date from the mid first millennium BC to the early part of the first millennium AD although there are few precise scientific dates and our understanding of their dating has traditionally been based on typological studies of artefacts recovered from broch sites. The broch may have been the site of an earlier dun, a small enclosed site with defensive elements, with the defences being re-used and altered. The potential presence of outerworks and outbuildings on the substantial mound at Achvarasdal indicates this site may have had a complex development sequence. Scientific excavation would allow us to develop a better understanding of the chronology of the site, its date of origin, state of completeness, survival of outerworks and outbuildings or related structures, and any development sequence.

Broch towers are primarily seen as a specific specialised development of complex Atlantic roundhouses. They 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.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Although the views to and from the broch are partially obscured by woodland, it would probably have occupied a prominent location, with wide open views across the surrounding landscape and beyond to the coast 2.2km to the northwest. Achvarasdal house broch is important as an upstanding and well-preserved example of a broch. It is one of at least six confirmed and possible brochs within a 5km radius of the monument including Bridge of Isauld (Canmore ID 7258) 800m west-northwest, Achunabust (Canmore ID 7389) 1.1km east and Achbuiligan Tulloch (Canmore ID 7256) 1.1km northeast. Immediately to the north of the broch are two fallen prehistoric standing stones (SM421).

Brochs are found across Scotland, with a focus on the north and west including the islands. There may have been links between neighbouring brochs or they may indicate community catchments. This broch has the potential to enhance and broaden our understanding of prehistoric society and community.
There is potential to study these sites together to understand their functions within the local communities and possible chronological development in the area. There is high 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.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

N/A.

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded the site is in a stable condition. This amended designation increases the size of the scheduled area to include 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 Iron Age society in Caithness and the function, use and development of brochs. Achvarasdal is an upstanding and well-preserved example of a broch located close to a number of potentially contemporary broch sites in the area. It displays key architectural details within its interior such as an entrance passage with door checks and blocked doorways to intramural features. There is high potential for the preservation of related structures and deposits in the largely undisturbed mound surrounding the broch. The loss of the monument would 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 Caithness and further afield.

5 References

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