

IONAD HIORT

THE ST. KILDA CENTRE

VOLUME 3: APPENDICES
APPENDIX I: DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT
FEBRUARY 2024

IONAD HIORT

THE ST. KILDA CENTRE

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT
PLANNING APPLICATION
FEBRUARY 2024 - REV. A



Dualchas.

Reiulf
Ramstad
Arkitekter

PREFACE

Ionad Hiort / The St Kilda Centre is a bold project in an exposed location. It will provide a place to tell the fascinating story of St Kilda on a dramatic site, in the native Gaelic language. It aims to provide a remote visitor experience, modern facilities and job opportunities for local community.

In this Design & Access Statement we demonstrate the development potential of the land at Geodha Sgoilt, to create modern visitor experience that respects both the dramatic landscape character, extreme weather and history of the site, whilst establishing a meaningful connection to the natural and built surroundings.

This document sets out a vision for the site and outlines the key constraints, opportunities and challenges that have been addressed through comprehensive conceptual design work from a full consultant team. This project demonstrates a commitment to investing in facilities in the Uig area and the wider benefits that this could bring to the community of the west of Lewis.

This document is to be read in conjunction with the following documents submitted in support of an application for Planning Permission in full, following the recommendations highlighted in the EIA Screening Opinion:

Information Packages:

- Architectural + landscape
- Civil engineering + drainage report

Environmental Impact Assessment:

- Socio-Economic Impacts
- Transport Impacts
- Landscape and Visual Impacts
- Cultural Heritage and the Historic Environment Assessment



MISSION STATEMENT

Ionad Hiort / The St Kilda Centre will be a world-class visitor centre situated at the *Geodha Sgoilt*, a spectacular cliff-top location on the Atlantic coast of south-west Lewis. The Centre will tell the stories of St Kilda, its history, traditions, language and culture, respectfully and creatively, from the perspective of its people. The Centre design will reference St Kildan and North Atlantic architectural heritage.

The site evokes the experience of life on the remotest edge of Europe. It will be, principally a Gaelic Centre, and showcase digital and multi-media interpretation, immersive experiences, and performances. The Centre will provide access to St Kilda related literature and research. Externally, St Kildan and local Hebridean environmental and wildlife interpretation will be included in rooftop exhibition structures and viewpoints, and WW2 heritage interpretation, incorporated into upgraded extant WW2 buildings.

As recognised by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the Centre will act as an exemplar for 'remote access' and sustainable, community-led tourism relevant to all World Heritage sites of comparable fragility or inaccessibility. Located in a sparsely populated and economically fragile part of the Outer Hebrides, it will act as a focal point for the economic, cultural, and linguistic regeneration of an island community, contributing to the retention of population and to the wider economic and social wellbeing of the Outer Hebrides.

Ionad Hiort Ltd.
2023

PROJECT TEAM

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Ionad Hiort Ltd.
Uig, Lewis

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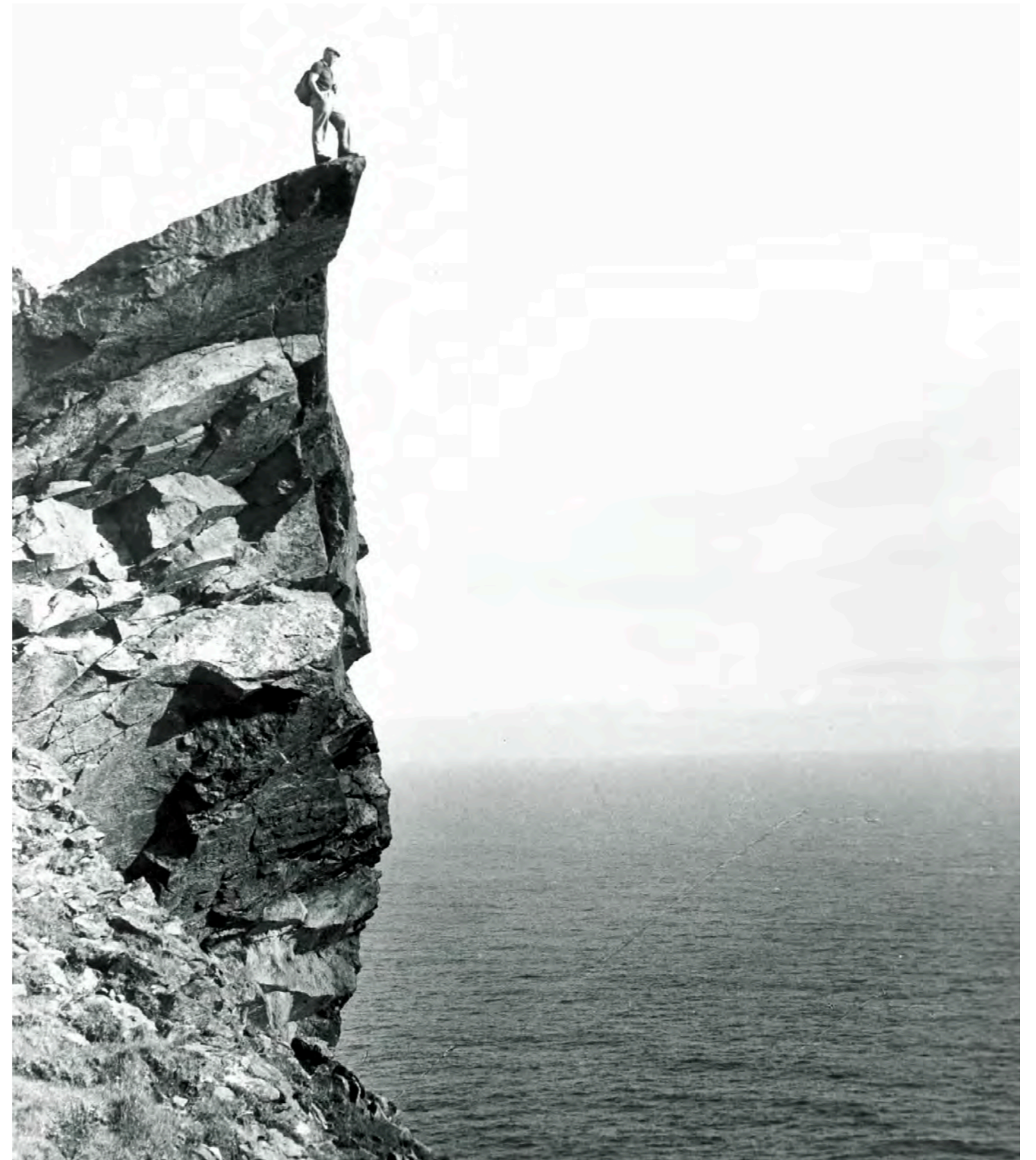
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Man on the Lover's Stone, Hirta, glass plate

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

After the global success of the St Kilda Opera, four public bodies, as well as The National Trust for Scotland, launched an island-wide competition for the location, in the Hebrides, of a St Kilda Centre. The purpose of the Centre was to showcase the archipelago's historical, cultural and environmental heritage and extend, across three Hebridean islands, the economic and social benefits associated with heritage tourism related to UNESCO World Heritage sites.

St Kilda itself is inaccessible for much of the year and expensive to visit. The National Trust for Scotland which has stewardship of St Kilda are also keen to reduce visitor footfall on the island to protect its rare and pristine environment.

The bid from the community of Uig, for a St Kilda Visitor Centre located on a clifftop site at the Geodha Sgoilt (which replicates aspects of the environmental and remote characteristics of St Kilda) was selected by Jura Consultants and the panel of public bodies, as the location of the main Centre with complimentary visitor facilities across the other islands of the Outer Hebrides.

While the site at the Geodha Sgoilt is remote, it is accessible, being only an hour's drive from the main island centre of Stornoway, and about 40 minutes from the nearest visitor facility at the Callanish Stones.

The St Kilda Centre site symbolically evokes the experience of life on the remotest edge of Europe. The Centre itself will be principally a Gaelic Centre, the language of St Kilda, and provide extensive digital and archival interpretation both inside the Centre and externally with interpretation incorporated innovatively in rooftop exhibition structures and viewpoints. The remaining WW2 building structures will be left untouched and preserved for future heritage interpretation.

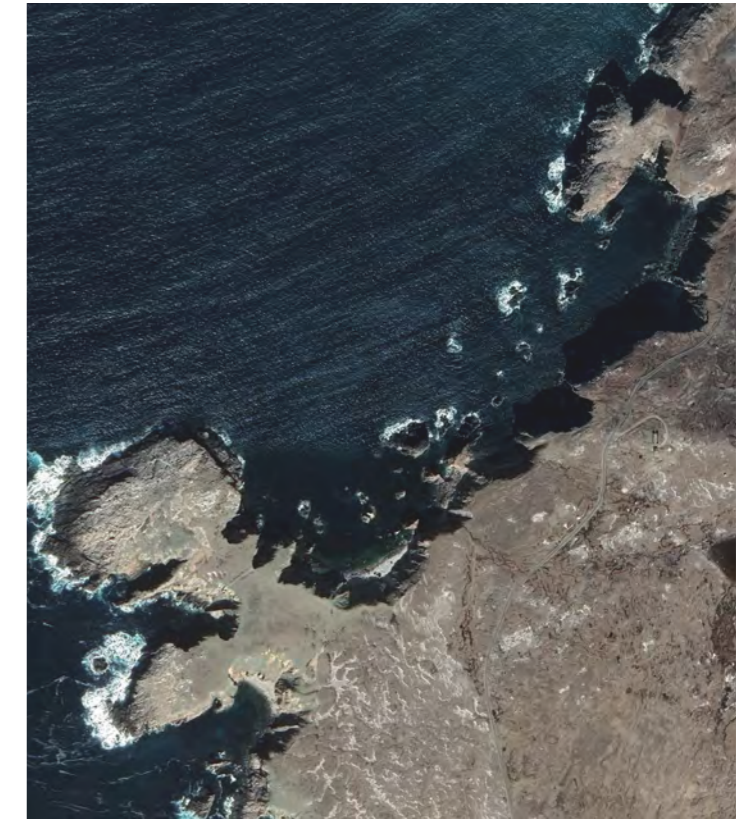
1.2 Applicant

Ionad Hiort Ltd. is a community company established in Uig in 2009 to develop the concept of a St Kilda visitor centre.

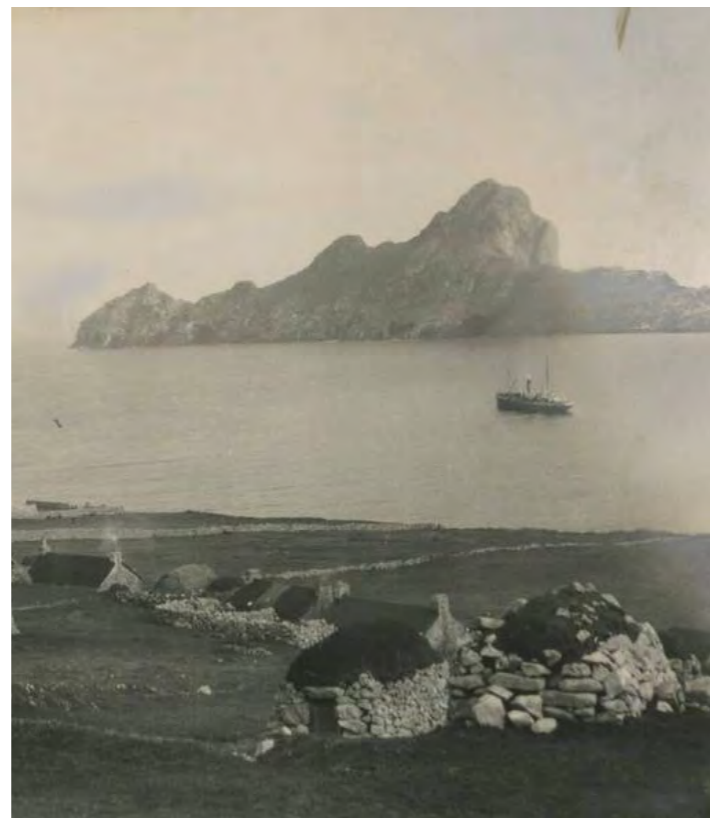
In 2009 there was a competition managed by Jura Consulting to select the most appropriate site for a Centre. In 2010 the Geodha Sgoilt site near Mangursthadh, Uig, Lewis was selected. In 2012 the Uig landlord gifted the land to Ionad Hiort Ltd.



Satellite image of St Kilda in relation to the west coast of the Outer Hebrides, Geodha Sgoilt highlighted



Aerial image of Geodha Sgoilt site



Looking out over Village Bay, Hirta, glass plate



Site at Geodha Sgoilt, from drone, looking WSW out towards St Kilda on the horizon

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.3 Approach

Working with the design team we have taken a holistic approach; developing the masterplan with an emphasis on respecting the natural character and man-made features of the spectacular site. The scheme has been developed and refined through analysing and responding to the constraints and opportunities of the site.

The design has considered the immediate and wider landscape character, climate and topography, alongside the built infrastructure, historical structures and materiality. Through careful consideration of these factors, alongside local and national planning policy, we have set out to propose a development that is at once robust and welcoming, and of an appropriate form, scale, orientation and architectural language for the site.

The proposed Visitor Centre layout, design, landscaping and connectivity have also been fully considered.

1.4 Design Ethos

Dualchas and Reulf Ramstad Arkitekter have been immersed in the story of St Kilda and the strong community desire to build the Centre since we were originally commissioned to work with Ionad Hiort Masterplan in 2016. The project epitomises our interests in working with peripheral communities and stories on the rim of the North Atlantic.

Dualchas believe that truly sustainable architecture not only has to be of high quality, it must also have a connection to the past and to its place; architecture that will be cherished and cared for by future generations. This is reflected in a portfolio of architecture which responds to the characteristics of each site and learns from the cultural and historical context in which it operates. Dualchas buildings seek to address the specifics of brief, location and budget to produce site-specific, sustainable, intelligent architecture.

Reulf Ramstad Arkitekter is an independent architectural firm based in Norway and Denmark with a high level of expertise and a distinct ideology. The firm focuses on interlacing a strong conceptual approach with experience from past accomplished projects. With a highly varied portfolio, the projects are geographically and contextually diverse, from compact urban locations to dramatic untamed landscapes. The portfolio of the office contains great contrast in scale, context, budget and program, and includes visitor centres, cultural buildings, town halls, churches, and landscape projects, amongst others.



2 houses at Portnalong, Skye, Scotland, Dualchas Architects



Trollstigen Visitor Centre, Rauma, Norway, Reulf Ramstad Arkitekter



Kornets Hus, Hjørring, Denmark, Reulf Ramstad Arkitekter



The Black House, Armadale, Skye, Scotland, Dualchas Architects

2.0 PROJECT BRIEF

2.1 Ambition

The St Kilda Centre will facilitate transformational economic and social regeneration within the remote crofting area of Uig and more widely through the Hebrides. It will create a modern, iconic building which uses new technologies to tell ancient stories and utilises external spaces in ways that immerse the visitor into the wild clifftop environment at the Geodha Sgoilt. It will also reclaim and remediate long-term derelict land and buildings, bringing them into productive and creative use.

The project seeks to address several important issues specific to subject and location:

- To capture the story of St Kilda
- To provide a base for locals and visitors to experience St Kilda remotely
- To provide a focal point for the regeneration of an island community
- To provide an experience of Hebridean culture, Gàidhlig language and landscape

The project will regenerate the top ten rural SIMD area of Uig by delivering a high quality world-class visitor attraction and research base for the double UNESCO St Kilda Archipelago (a top ten world visitor destination).

The Centre will offer iconic and breath-taking viewpoints across the North Atlantic seascape to St Kilda.

The project is a unique opportunity for public and community enterprise to collaborate to regenerate a derelict and undeveloped area of World War II structures consisting of 6.5ha of unproductive croft land.

The Centre will offer innovative digital and remote access technologies to respectfully tell the story of St Kilda's people and culture, preserving the fragile environment of St Kilda and recognising the unique indigenous Gaelic culture and natural and scenic assets.

2.2 A Transformational Project

It is anticipated that the Centre will attract 30,000 visitors per annum in year 1 increasing to 40,000 per annum by year 5. An estimated 9 full time and 6 seasonal jobs will be created in the Centre.

This is a multidimensional, transformational project in both local and global context, contributing to UNESCO, Scottish Government and local Strategies.

The St Kilda Centre is one of three independent but inter-linked visitor hubs being developed along a proposed St Kilda Heritage Trail (*Slighe Hiort*) which is a major component of the Outer Hebrides 2030 Visitor Development Strategy and Outer Hebrides Great Place Strategy.

The Centre will also act as a locus for research (i.e. sustainable tourism, depopulation, cultural, environmental, sustainable living in remote regions).

The project has been recognised by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris as a global exemplar for remote access to the hundreds of World Heritage Sites where visitor access in large numbers is either impossible or undesirable.

“The ethos behind the project is about using the story of a dead community to create a future for a surviving island community”

James Rebanks
The St Kilda Centre - A World Class Idea
2015



The St Kilda "Parliament"



Uig Sands, Lewis

2.0 PROJECT BRIEF

2.3 The St Kilda Story

The story of St Kilda, or Hiort, is one that resonates not just for the communities of the Western Isles, but peripheral communities everywhere across the world.

How do communities which are far from the centres of power and money survive and flourish?

What lessons can we learn, and how do we invest in a future that is uncertain and buffeted by global events?

- This is a world renowned story of a community on the 'edge of the world', where the remaining 36 islanders were evacuated 29 August 1930
- It is the UK's only dual designation UNESCO listing, and one of 39 in the world
- 4,000 years of human habitation are evident
- The islands inhabitants spoke Gàidhlig, with a specific Hiortach dialect
- A popular yet sensitive tourist destination
- Home to nearly 1 million sea birds, including UK's largest colony of Atlantic puffins
- Unique native wildlife
- Extraordinary geology
- Contemporary use as army base

The St Kilda Centre at Geodha Sgoilt is a major opportunity to highlight the importance of the St Kilda story, in a global sense:

- A showcase of island's historical, cultural and environmental heritage
- Use of architecture, landscape and exhibition to tell a rich and important story
- Capitalise on economic and social benefits related to heritage tourism of UNESCO sites
- An alternative attraction to often inaccessible St Kilda islands
- Reduce visitor footfall on St Kilda while still providing memorable and rich Hebrides experience
- Landscape as protagonist in telling the story of St Kilda and Hebrides
- The site also has significant topographical similarities and sight lines to St Kilda

2.4 Gàidhlig Culture

Gàidhlig is the language of Hiort and the Hebrides. It is therefore important for the Centre to be an immersive Gàidhlig experience. Utilising modern technologies, the experience could be universally appreciated.

- The project will allow the Gàidhlig-speaking community most closely connected to Hiort to tell their story in their own words
- A unique and immersive experience can be created, with Gàidhlig language and culture, told through architecture, landscape and exhibition
- Cultural confidence can be gained by giving value and recognition to Gàidhlig and the Outer Hebrides
- The project will provide employment and economic opportunities embedded within a Gàidhlig culture
- The surrounding landscape of St Kilda Centre can be a protagonist in narrative, helping visitors relate to a Gàidhlig way of life



Village Bay, Hirta



Children in the St. Kilda school room

3.0 SITE + CONTEXT

3.1 The Edge

The site selected for Ionad Hiort is both challenging and inspiring.

Situated on the west coast of the Isle of Lewis on the north-western periphery of the European continent, it can be said to be on *the edge*. However, on clear days the last and outmost isle of St Kilda can be seen from the site, over 50 miles to the south-west.

During more sea-faring times, Lewis had a strong connection with the other communities on the western edge of Europe and was once part of the Norse Kingdom of the Isles (9th-13th centuries). Lewis was also on a transit route along the Atlantic coast. This can be evidenced from the many Norse-based local place names and by the finding of the 12th century Lewis Chessmen at Uig beach in 1831. These are believed to have originated in Trondheim, Norway.

In modern times the location on the edge of the continent has led to much more challenging conditions for Lewis, being far removed from the main population centres and land-based transport routes. This is reflected in the falling population of the Hebrides, including Lewis, as people have left for better work opportunities and convenience.

Exposure to the harsh Atlantic weather which prevails from the south-west, means that the low-lying landscape of the west of Lewis is largely stripped back to rock and thin layers of soil and peat, with little trees in evidence.

An interesting collection of sites of interest exist within easy reach of the site at Mangursthadh. These form a strong grouping of both cultural and natural interest within which Ionad Hiort should take its place:

- Gearannan black house village
- Dun Carloway Broch
- Callanish Standing stones
- Bostadh beach and iron age settlement
- Uig bay
- Mangursthadh beach

3.2 Location

The site at Geodha Sgoilt, stretches along a cliff-top, one mile south of Mangursthadh township. 50 metre high cliffs drop straight into the sea, with fragmented sea stacks and needles sitting just off the coast.

The site is approximately 350 metres long by 200 metres wide and is bisected north/south by a single track road with passing places.

The site was also home to a former MOD radar station during the Second World War. All structures were dismantled, bar two stone buildings that remain, one roofed, one unroofed. A number of concrete base structures and service ducts and paths remain on the site.

The site gently rises from the top of the sea cliffs across the width of the site to the edge of a moor that stretches inland to the base of Mealaisbhal, the highest point in Lewis. This moor, like most of the interior of Lewis, is a mixture of water and rock

A number of small lochans are dotted among this landscape including the nearby Loch Druim Grunavat.

Just south of the site and stretching out west into the sea beyond is the peninsula of Aird Feinis. This narrow arm of land is surrounded on all sides by steep sea cliffs and culminates in a small cairn at its highest, most exposed point, where the earth covering has been scraped back by the wind to reveal the flat, bleached rock beneath.

The unique location gives Geodha Sgoilt a clear outlook from parts of the site to several important natural features:

- Hiort (54miles SW)
- The Flannan Isles (19miles N)
- Mangursthadh beach (1mile N)
- Mealaisbhal (2miles SE)
- Scarp (8miles S)



Geodha Sgoilt, looking over the stacks from Aird Feinis



The Uig Chessmen, found on Uig beach in 1831 and believed to have originated in Norway

3.0 SITE + CONTEXT

3.3 Land

The site is made of rock, earth and water.

The hard Lewisian Gneiss forms rocky outcrops, flat slabs, rough gravel and coarse sand. These rocks and natural aggregate are overlaid with a thin layer of soil and grass.

Water runs through the site from the higher ground at the edge of the moor down to the cliff edge. There are only a few small burns visible, meaning rainwater drains across the surface of the rock, through the gravel, sand and earth. This creates pockets of saturated earth among the rocks and grass.

“The island is porous, like petrified sponge. It’s landscape is not landscape. It is liquid. It’s waterscape is not waterscape. It is solid. There are areas of glacial erosion and of sedimentary transportation. The metamorphic gneiss is three thousand million years old. It is the result of several defamations. It is the oldest rock in Scotland.”

Jonathan Meades
Isle of Rust - Off-Kilter,
BBC Scotland 2009

3.4 Sea

The powerful presence of the sea can be felt throughout the coastal landscape. The sound of the swell and crashing waves are constant. They are experienced at varying levels of intensity depending on proximity to the cliff edge and the modulating natural landforms.

The cliff edge itself gives a sense of danger and disorientation. Combined with the persistent wind and spray, this is an elemental experience.

From the edge, the sea cliff stacks appear close as the sea swells around their bases. They bear close resemblance to many of the stacks in the St Kilda archipelago, although at a smaller scale.

The distant view out to the (almost) unbroken horizon consists of only water and sky. The constantly changing light, swell and visibility allow a visitor to contemplate the curvature of the earth and the scale of the ocean.

3.5 Wind and Rain

With such an exposed location, wind is an almost constant presence. The prevailing wind comes straight off the Atlantic, bringing with it rain and sea spray.

Winds are high, with 100mph speeds recorded regularly and 40-60mph often.

On average more than half of the days in a month bring precipitation to the Geodha Sgoilt. These conditions continue to make their mark on the landscape.

3.6 Wildlife

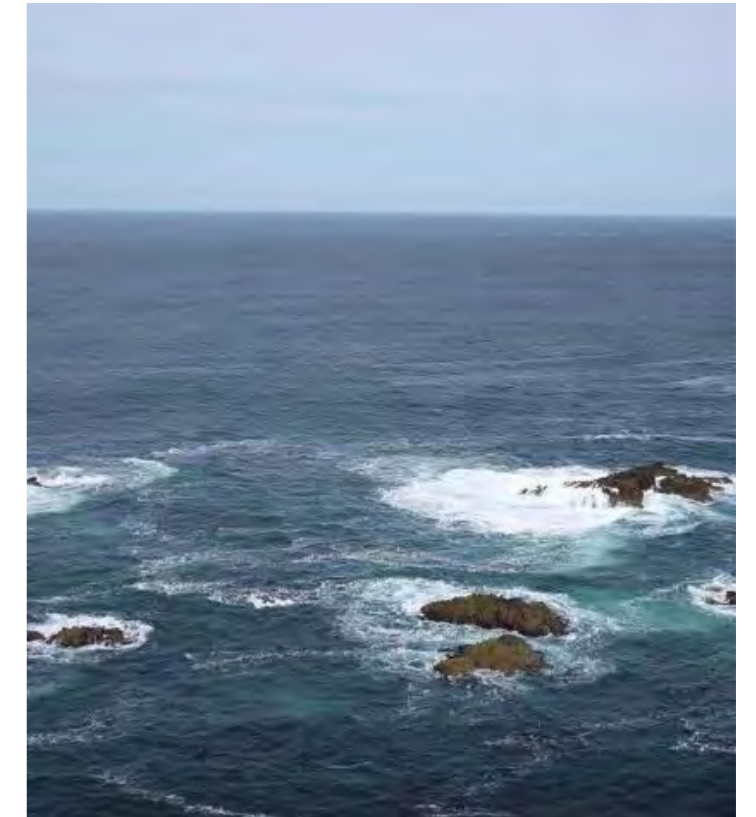
There is little opportunity for wildlife on the site due to its rocky nature, but rabbits can be seen, moving between their burrows in the thin earth on the adjacent rocky outcrops.

The ubiquitous sheep roam the moors between fences and they leave their trace in fragments of fleece left between rocks and on fence posts

The cliffs are rich with birdlife, albeit to a lesser extent than on St Kilda, and their calls are a continual accompaniment to the sound of the sea.



Rocky landscape of the upper part of the site



Looking down into the bay below the site



Site condition: water / earth / gravel



Sheeps wool from a fence post on the site

3.0 SITE + CONTEXT

3.7 Site Features

The site contains a number of distinct natural and man-made features that require to be considered carefully in proposing a new Centre and related services on the site. These are described briefly below, and are located on the annotated site plan in Section 3.8:

A - Rocky Outcrops

These form a natural edge to the entrance to the site from the north, concealing the rest of the land and the view beyond, until the visitor rises above them.

B - Concrete Pads

Relics of the former radar station, these were the concrete bases for the Nissen huts that provided accommodation and support buildings to the WW2 base. Their arrangement created a sheltered central courtyard.

C - Radar Station Structures

The ex-radar station is a simple unroofed structure consisting of two separated C-shape stone wall structures. These enclose a large external space with a profiled concrete floor structure bearing grooves of the floor-bearing mechanisms the its former use.

D - Water Treatment Plant

A recent, functional addition to the site. Some low-level earth mounding conceals a water treatment plant serving the nearby townships.

E - Glen

A wide, shallow glen to the south of the site, that contains a burn at its base, that falls toward the cliff edge, draining rainwater to the sea.

F - Cliff Edge Outcrops

There are two distinct outcrops at the head of the cliffs. The more northerly one is a gently rounded wide piece of land with cliffs to three sides. The other is a thin point of land that sticks out more dramatically towards the stacks, while falling continuously toward the edge.

G - Road

The single-track public road passes through the middle of the site. It is accompanied by a number of passing places, a metal crash barrier to the north end and a cattle grid in the middle section. It gently rises and falls along its length, with the natural contours evened out through a combination of cutting and banking.

H - Bunker

This interesting structure sits outwith the immediate site and consists of an underground fortified room and steps formed in concrete, cast in a corrugated formwork. It is currently flooded to ground level.



A - Rocky Outcrops



B - Concrete Pads



C - Radar Station Structures



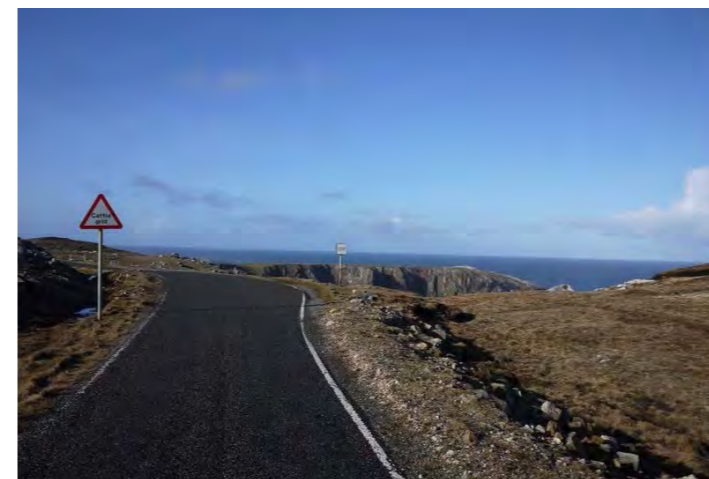
D - Water Treatment Plant



E - Glen



F - Cliff Edge Outcrops



G - Road



H - Bunker

Note:

For more detailed assessment and images of the existing structures, refer to the attached *Cultural Heritage and the Historic Environment Assessment*, compiled by Highland Archaeology and contained within the attached EIA report.

3.0 SITE + CONTEXT

3.8 Annotated Existing Site Plan

Key:

- A - Rocky Outcrops
- B - Concrete Pads
- C - Radar Station Structures
- D - Water Treatment Plant
- E - Glen
- F - Cliff Edge Outcrops
- G - Road
- H - Bunker



4.0 PROPOSED DESIGN

4.1 Design Evolution

Since the original Ionad Hiort Masterplan of 2016, the concept design for the Centre has evolved and been refined in response to brief variations, and functional and aesthetic concerns.

4.1.1 Masterplan Concept – 2016

The Masterplan brief sought a plan for the phased development of the site and an iconic concept design for the Centre. This organic, expressive design was derived from the stone structures of Hiort and the dramatic and exposed cliff-top site.

The design took the approach that there is no way to hide this building. From almost every angle it breaks the skyline, it's silhouette forming a new landmark. It's body providing shelter, whilst it's arms reach out to various features – both within and outwith the site.

4.1.2 A'Chiad Cheum (The First Step) – 2018

The proposed 2016 Masterplan provided a phased strategy for delivering a world-class visitor experience. The phasing was intended to allow the project to grow into the site, and from there, into the surrounding community. In 2018 *A'Chiad Cheum* was proposed as the first phase of development on the site, that looked to demonstrate the potential of the site to attract visitors and deliver the world-class facilities set out in the Masterplan.

As well as a car park, cliff-top walk and site paths, a small interpretation centre was also proposed, providing exhibition, café, office, toilet and storage facilities. The building was simple, visually quiet and demountable – so that it could be replaced by the new Visitor Centre when required. The proposal received Planning-in-Principle in 2019.

4.1.3 EIA Scoping - 2022

Following our design team appointment in 2021, we developed a design for the Centre, based on brief and budget reduced from the original Masterplan. The relocation of the public road was no longer part of the project and therefore the building had to be located either above or below the road.

To allow exposure to the most dramatic outlook, the building was located between the road and the cliff-top. A simplified design was based on a series of rectilinear stone walls forming a sheltered entrance courtyard to a square-planned building. An open multi-functional space at its centre, is formed between service and exhibition blocks. It also featured a viewing room at the end of the building, facing out to St Kilda on the horizon, and a tall lantern rooflight over the public space.



Masterplan concept, 2016



A'Chiad Cheum, radar station structure concept, 2018



Masterplan concept, 2016



EIA Scoping Opinion submission, 2022

4.0 PROPOSED DESIGN

4.2 Final Design

The concept of building a new centre at Geodha Sgoilt is a bold one, but one that needs a set of rigorous design principles as the site is challenging, both locationally and climatically.

The brief is inspiring and demands a deep understanding of the cultural narrative of the project. To realise the ambitious brief within a tight budget, on this challenging site, the Centre has to be economic, pragmatic and poetic.

The pre-Planning stage allowed our team to reappraise the brief and budget for the project. The understanding gained during the 2016 Masterplan was revisited, to re-evaluate the options for working on the site.

4.2.1 Location

In the previous 2016 Masterplan, it was proposed to move the public road to the east, to allow the Centre to sit in the centre of the site. This is no longer part of the brief, for both financial and sustainability reasons.

The reason the site was chosen initially, was not only its outlook to St Kilda on the horizon, but its exposure to the dramatic cliffs and sea-stacks, that are reminiscent of the archipelago. As a place of pilgrimage, it is important that visitors experience a feeling of exposure and of being on *the edge*.

Therefore, the building has been located between the road and cliff-top. The land on the seaward side of the road is largely untouched and the building is located on a wide promontory that exaggerates its exposure, whilst also obtaining visual shelter from the north by a large rocky outcrop.

The access road and car park are located on the inland side of the road, on land that has been previously developed as part of the WW2 radar station and more recent water treatment works.

Note:

For more detailed assessment and images of the proposed structures in context, refer to the attached *Landscape and Visual Assessment*, compiled by LUC Landscape and contained within the attached EIA Report.



Proposed Ionad Hiort from the south, 2023



Proposed Ionad Hiort from the north, 2023

4.0 PROPOSED DESIGN

4.2.2 Forms

The Centre is a low, narrow rectilinear structure, 65m long and 15m wide. It sits perpendicular to the road, reaching out to the cliff edge.

A set of three almost parallel walls, reminiscent of the long walls in the village on Hirta, reach out to meet the visitor, directing them either up onto the rooftop landscape or down into a sheltered courtyard.

The roof is protected by a low stone parapet that allows users to walk out to the end of the building and look down on the sea-stacks and cliffs below. It is populated by a variety of timber structures that form small exhibition spaces, service enclosures and lift access to the entrance lobby. These structures, whilst a variety of heights and sizes, are a distinct family of sheltering forms, much like a contemporary interpretation of the cleits of St. Kilda.

The stone walls also form a stepped entrance courtyard, that can be utilised as a sheltered outdoor amphitheatre. They also lead the visitor to the Centre's entrance.

The horizontal, low form will appear as if inserted into the existing contours that will be largely undisturbed.

4.2.3 Openings and Orientation

The solid stone building has only one principal opening on each of the north, south and west elevations.

The multifunctional public space, housing the café, library, discovery space and foyer, has two large, glazed openings: one to the north, facing a large rocky outcrop and a view to the Flannan Isles; and one to the south, facing out across the gently rolling, closely cropped grassy landscape of the site. The glazing is recessed in both openings, introducing some relief and allowing the escape doors to swing outward within the depth of the walls.

The opening in the west elevation provides a huge window to the Ocean Room, the terminus of the journey through the building, on axis with the entrance. Set flush with the stone walls, the window faces out over the sea-stacks, to the horizon. This space allows visitors to sit and observe the landscape and often extreme weather conditions from a place of safety.

These three windows, each provide an outlook onto a different element of the landscape character of the site.

4.2.4 Materials

Stone is the material of St Kilda. It was the only construction material to hand on the islands. It formed all eras of shelter: from gathering folds; to bothies; to houses; to cleits. It also forms the wide variety of enclosures: from fanks; to field divisions; and the head dyke.

The building structure will be a steel frame, to allow for speed and robustness of superstructure construction, in such an exposed environment. It will be clad entirely in local granite and gneiss stone. This will comprise a combination of both newly quarried stone and reclaimed stone. The clients are in the process of purchasing several redundant stone structures in order to reclaim and recycle local weathered building stone. This will be incorporated into the elevations with a clear narrative rationale. A test panel will be built before construction begins.

Paved surfaces are to be of a Caithness flagstone, a high quality durable Scottish material that will complement the external cladding stone.

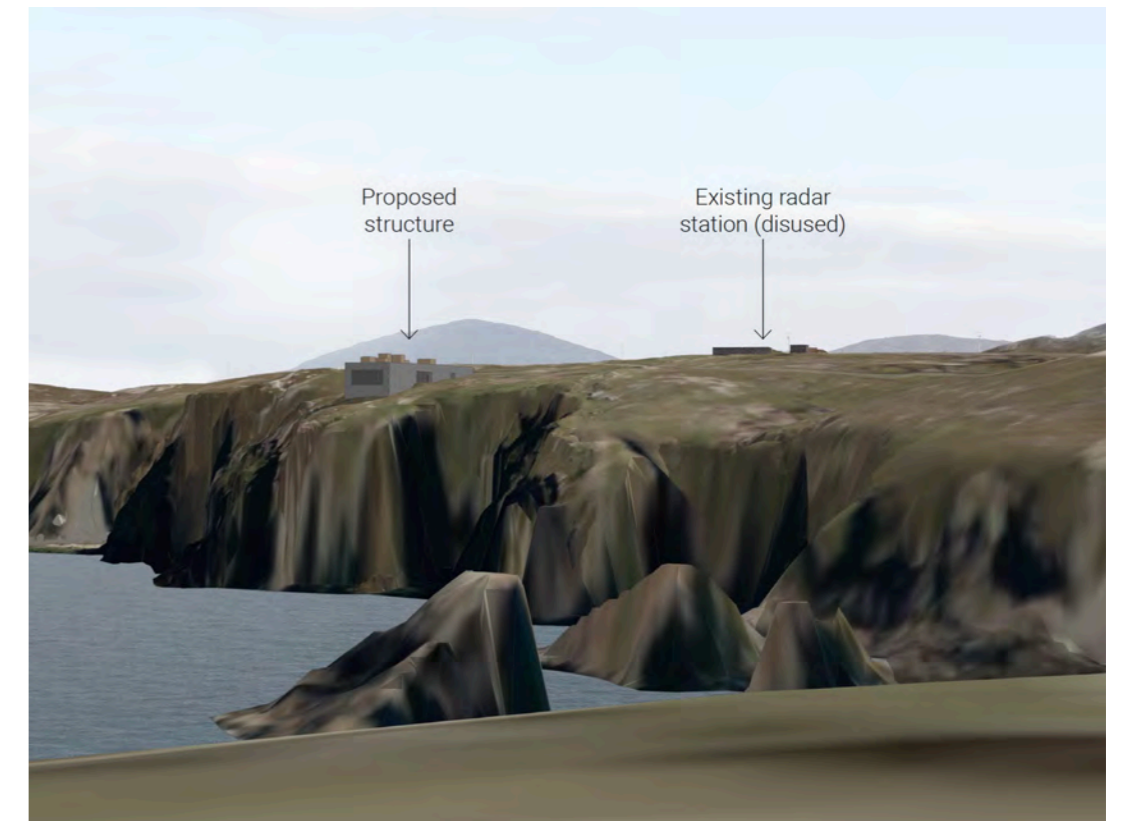
A warm but rustic interior will be created by forming the spaces entirely in Scottish douglas fir, as both linings and carpentry elements.

4.2.5 Renewable Energy

The building will utilise an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) system to provide heating and hot water to the building. The type of ASHP proposed for the Centre transfers heat extracted from the outside air to a low temperature hot water system. The ASHP uses less energy than a traditional fossil-fuel boiler system as it only requires low temperature hot water. It also sources its electricity from the National Grid and increases the efficiency of the electricity input to create a much higher output. The ASHP units are integrated into one of the roof top structures to shelter them both from weather and visually.

The building will be heated by underfloor heating (UFH) embedded in a concrete screed, providing the most efficient heating method to the required flexible, open spaces. Hot water will be provided by a simple instantaneous hot water system fed by the ASHP.

Fresh air ventilation will be provided by a series of localised Mechanical Ventilation Heat Recovery (MVHR) units. The MVHR units shall have an integral heating coil fed from the proposed ASHP solution. These units have the ability to have CO2 control as they generally only serve one space.



View of proposed Ionad Hiort, Extract from Landscape Visual Impact Assessment



Detail from the head dyke, Hirta

5.0 ACCESS STATEMENT

5.1 Existing Access

The site is currently bisected by the single-track C-Road that runs south from Uig to Islibhig and Breanais. Several passing places and a cattle-grid are located within the site.

The area of the site to the west, between the road and the sea-cliffs, is only accessible by foot and the cliff edge is protected by a post and wire stock fence.

To the east, on the inland side of the road, a track leads uphill to the former RAF Islivig radar station. This track serves both the former radar station structure and the former Nissen-hut group. It has been resurfaced in loose aggregate within the last 10 years and provides service access to the public water treatment plant on the site. The former radar station stone structure has been re-purposed as a sheep fank, but this is now no longer in use.

The site generally consists of rough, rocky ground with a shallow covering of earth and grass.

5.2 Proposed Access

Access to the Centre requires the construction of a new access road (A), car park and the re-purposing of the existing track to from an efficient one-way system (B).

As noted in Section 4.0, the Centre is to be accessed from road level by a lift (C) from the roof and a path to the entrance courtyard (D). This will avoid the detrimental effect that a full access road to ground floor level would have on this sensitive landscape location.

The access, traffic, fire-fighting and servicing strategies described below have been discussed and agreed in principle with relevant CnES departments and SFRS.

5.2.1 Roads

A new access road is to be constructed from the north, to access the new car park (A). The vast majority of visitors will approach from this direction. The new road will climb a gentle gradient to the car park. The existing track will be re-purposed and re-surfaced to the same standard as the new road (B). The junction with the road will be remade to conform to best practice. These two roads will connect to create a one-way system with the car park and the existing road.

5.2.2 Parking

A new car park is to be formed on the most level part of the site, in the location for the former WW2 Nissen hut grouping (E). Locating the car park here will reduce its impact on the wider landscape character, by utilising previously developed ground, with minimal groundworks required.

This main car park will provide 33no. car park spaces; 2no. large camper-van spaces; and 4no. coach parking spaces. The location of this car park will require visitors to walk down a path and cross the road to reach the Centre. 3no. accessible parking spaces are to be formed at road level within 45 metres of the access lift to the main entrance lobby (F).

5.2.3 Paths

Access from the main car park will be a path that follows a gentle natural depression in the land, down to the main road (G). A pedestrian crossing will provide access to the continuation of the path to the paved entrance area of the Centre, which can be accessed from the roof by lift, or by steps from the sheltered courtyard.

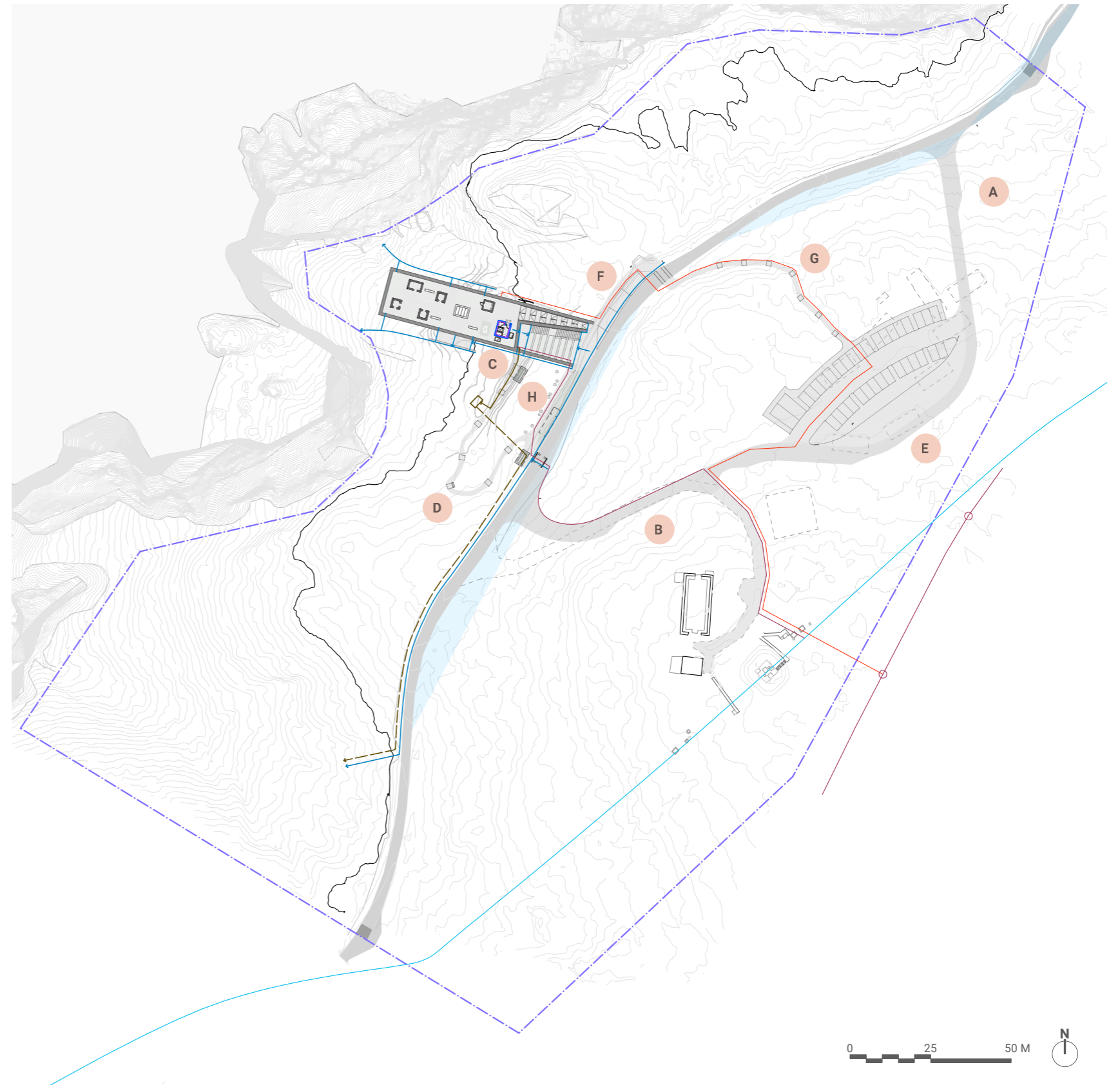
Another path will run from the service bay down to the entrance by a compliant access path (D).

5.2.4 Fire-Fighting

A service bay is to be formed at road level and adjacent to a new fire hydrant for the purposes of fire-fighting in or on the Centre (H).

5.2.5 Recycling, Waste and Deliveries

A service bay is to be formed at road level and adjacent to a new bin store for the purposes of receiving waste and recycling from the Centre (H). An additional bin store will be formed at ground floor level. Deliveries can also be made from this service bay. Deliveries can be made via the lift from the roof or by the ramped path (D). A building management plan will be put in place to manage these requirements.



6.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Previous Planning-in Principle (19/00175/ PPP) – 2019

Following the completion of the initial concept Masterplan for the site in 2016, it was decided that a phased approach to develop the site was the best route to achieve a successful, popular and, most importantly, fundable project.

The initial Phase One project – *A'Chiad Cheum* (The First Step) – was developed to provide core visitor facilities and to prove the potential for the site to host a larger visitor centre (as described in section 4.1.2 above).

A'Chiad Cheum was granted Planning-in-Principle in June 2019. It was granted with several conditions that required further consideration, summarised below:

- Siting of the development
- Surface water drainage
- Means of access (parking/turning)
- External appearance
- A programme of archaeological assessment

6.2 Planning Consultation – June 2022

Following the appointment of the current design team in 2021, the project was developed for a single-phase project that, whilst smaller than the original Masterplan concept, is still substantial in its scale and ambition for storytelling and community strengthen-ing. The design strategy was largely as the current proposal

Dualchas met with Planning Officers on site in June 2022. It was noted that project was generally well received and the developing narrative: of making a bold but simple building below the existing road; and keeping the access road and parking above the road, was supported in principle.

The most important issues to Planning were determined to be:

- The separation of the parking and the building, require a road crossing
- The location of the building close, to the cliff edge, in proximity to the scenic sea stacks, require careful consideration and justification
- The lantern rooflight was a significant presence in the landscape and alternative options should be explored for this element.

It was noted that a pre-application EIA Screening submission was required to enable the Planning Department to approach all statutory consultees for their response to the project, prior to the Planning application being submitted.

6.3 EIA Scoping Opinion – December 2022

The revised scheme was submitted for Environmental Impact Assessment Screening in December 2022 .

It was determined that the application should include an EIA Report with sections covering:

- Socio-Economic Impacts
- Transport Impacts
- Landscape and Visual Impacts
- Cultural Heritage and the Historic Environment
- and giving consideration of alternatives and cumulative effects

6.4 EIA Report – 2023

Dualchas have coordinated the EIA Report and have appointed a number of specialist sub-consultants to carry out the assessments:

- Biggar Economics (Socio-Economic Impacts)
- Tetrattech (Transport Impacts)
- LUC Landscape (Landscape and Visual Impacts)
- Highland Archaeology (Cultural Heritage and the Historic Environment)

The EIA Report accompanies this application.

***“With a sympathetic approach to design, the proposal should not affect the special qualities of the NSA [National Scenic Area]. We would encourage such an approach, especially for what is intended to be an iconic heritage building.*”**

We welcome this proposal to interpret the unique natural and cultural heritage of St Kilda, and make it more accessible to a wider audience. The developer has already engaged with SNH about this, and we look forward to assisting as the project proceeds.”

Scottish Natural Heritage
2022

7.0 CONCLUSION

Ionad Hiort / The St Kilda Centre is a bold proposal for a new remote visitor centre on a clifftop site at Geodha Sgoilt. The proposal balances the opportunity to create a building with a dramatic landscape experience, with the risk of its visual impact on the wider location of Geodha Sgoilt.

To realise the ambitious brief within a tight budget, on this challenging site, the Centre has to be economic, pragmatic and poetic. It achieves this by making a simple low building in natural stone, situating it on a wide promontory located behind a large rocky hillock, so that the building is concealed on approach, and by locating the necessary car parking area in the most discreet, level location.

The Centre is a destination and a place to be immersed in both the story of St Kilda and the harsh, exposed landscape of the site. It achieves this by creating a series of experiences for visitors within the building:

- a sheltered, stepped courtyard;
- a sculpted central entrance;
- a light filled public-space with views to the north and south;
- organically planned, carefully-lit exhibition spaces;
- a spectacular Ocean Room, giving an elevated outlook to the west over the sea, stacks, cliffs and a distant view of St Kilda, when the conditions are right.

The stone façades form a solid, robust structure, rooted in the landscape and refer to the stone structures and enclosures of St Kilda. The low-lying nature of the building, means there is a large, easily accessible roof terrace which will provide a safe external viewing area, with carefully landscaped paving and natural planting. A series of external exhibition structures will provide shelter and interpretation in this man-made landscape.

We believe that this statement and the accompanying Environmental Impact Assessment provide clear support for the proposed strategy for opening the Geodha Sgoilt site up to visitors safely, whilst creating a building that is responsive in equal parts to location, brief and budget. The statement and EIA Report further demonstrate that the proposals have been developed and refined in direct response to the observations made during the extensive pre-Planning process.



Proposed Ionad Hiort from the south, 2023

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