

MEMORANDUM

To DIRECTOR OF LIBRARIES AND LEISURE SERVICES
From DIRECTOR OF PLANNING
F.A.O. R. Gourlay, Regional Archaeologist.

Your Ref. HNC 96SE005A (SITE CODE) Our Ref. CA.05/F/1/RP/AA Date 5th September, 1989.
Please Ask For Mr Patton, Extension 590.

ACHVARASDAL BROCH, REAY PARISH.

Please find the enclosed report which I have prepared in respect of the policy woodland of Achvarasdal House.

The report is self-explanatory. I would be grateful to receive your comments with regard to Section 5, last paragraph. I am due to meet with the Church next week and it would be useful to learn of your comments by then. Perhaps you could ring Robert Patton.



Phoned R. Patton 7/9/89
to my back 8/9/89.

SMC Required - Discussed at 14/9/89.
Discuss with Lesley Malburn.



POLICY WOODLAND
ACHVARASDAL HOUSE

1. History

As a consequence of the storms which occurred on 13th February of this year a number of localised areas of windblow resulted. These were centred on the conifer plantings, the location of which are shown on Map I.

At the request of the local Member, Councillor Godfrey, my Forestry Officer, Mr Robert Patton, visited the site in the company of Mr Edwards of Fountain Forestry Ltd. Fountain Forestry, under the instruction of the owners, is responsible for the clearance of this windblow.

2. Ownership

Achvarasdal House and the policy woodlands are owned by the Church of Scotland as an Eventide Home.

3. Status and Condition of Woodland

The woodland is locally, in an otherwise open and treeless landscape, a very important amenity feature and is also viewed, at a distance, from the A836 Thurso to Tongue road. The woodland maintains a high conservation value. A number of pleasant and sheltered woodland walks exist and are used by residents of the Home and also, informally, by local residents. Several sections of the full footpath system as shown on the O.S. map are overgrown.

The woodland can be placed in to three broad categories for convenience. Please see Map II.

3.1 Blue Hatching

Broadleaved planting (early) consisting mostly of sycamore and beech but with other species such as ash, birch, rowan, elder etc. some of which are naturally sown. The main planting, although mature, is generally in good health and vigour. Natural regeneration is present throughout these areas and with a dense cover in certain locations.

A feature of the main driveway is the tree avenue of green and purple beech and sycamore.

3.2 Red Hatching

Several areas of coniferous planting (earliest 50 years) consisting mostly of Sitka spruce and an area of larch (younger). There is also some Scots pine.

The Sitka spruce areas have been worst affected in the storm. These have been largely cleared now by Fountain Forestry. I understand that the clearance operation has been self-financing only.

3.3 Green Hatching

Scrub woodland comprising mainly of birch, willow, rowan etc. with associated ground flora. The main area to the east of the main driveway holds two areas of wet marsh ground. Unfortunately in the past Lodgepole pine and some spruce were planted within the northern margin of this area. Due to the prevailing ground conditions they have not been successfully established.

4. Woodland Management Proposals

As categorised in 3. above.

4.1 Removal of any poor or damaged trees.

Promotion and development of natural regeneration to enable a mixed aged structure to be secured. In due course some selective felling will be required to accommodate the development of the understorey.

Introduction of other species (i.e., above those regenerating) to increase visual diversity, to accommodate site conditions (i.e., shade) and increase the range of the woodland habitat. Consideration should be given to including an element of exotic conifers.

The above are long term management objectives.

4.2 Early replanting of the blown areas with a range of broadleaves and an element of exotic conifers. Due to the surrounding tree cover sheltering the majority of the sites, an opportunity exists to increase the range of species beyond that already existing at Achvarasdal. However, careful species selection will be required.

The area of larch requires to be carefully selectively thinned at this time to promote the development of the dominant trees.

4.3 Removal of any poor or damaged trees.

Promotion and development of natural regeneration and coppice growth. Some selective planting may be required to augment the above.

Removal of the failed Lodgepole pine and Sitka spruce.

It is proposed to manage these areas primarily for their conservation value, maintaining mixed-aged indigenous tree cover, the marsh areas, other open space and ground flora. Management input will therefore be low key.

5. Recreational Features

As already mentioned in 3. above, a system of woodland walks exists. In proposing public use of the woodland as an element of the overall management proposals it is important to respect the privacy and, as far as possible, the security of the Home. It may be that limited lengths of fencing together with discrete signposting will be required also.

The privacy of the North Cottage and East Cottage may require some diversion of the existing footpath.

Some initial footpath works are required together with basic ongoing maintenance. A number of seat positions and perhaps a vantage point are proposed in association with the footpaths.

An undoubted feature of the property is the visually striking Broch to the rear of the House. The site together with the adjacent Standing Stones (fallen) are scheduled. The site is overgrown and there is no well defined access route to the structure. Subject to consultation with the Historic Buildings and Monuments Section and the Regional Archaeologist, it is proposed that access should be provided to the Broch together with some form of interpretation and a seat position. This will involve vegetation being cleared and maintained thereafter and a proper access route being formed.

6. Financial Assistance

- 6.1 Through the Planning Department's "Amenity Woodland Budget" it is proposed that an allocation be made on the basis that public use of the woodland is allowed. An allocation is available in this current financial year.

The Council may wish to discuss entering into a formal Management Agreement with the Church.

- 6.2 Grant assistance is available through the Countryside Commission for Scotland in relation to footpath works, seating and signing. Certain woodland works may also be eligible for assistance. There is no standard rate of grant but assistance of up to 75% of total expenditure may be given.
- 6.3 Grant assistance through the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme. The above woodland management proposals would, in principle, be eligible for entry into this scheme. Grant rates are fixed and based on an area basis. Payments are in instalments and subject to adequate ongoing management.
- 6.4 Assistance from the Church of Scotland. Apart from obvious financial assistance it may be that ongoing maintenance of the Broch site and footpaths can be undertaken by ground staff at the House.
- 6.5 Commissioning of a Manpower Services Project Team to undertake certain elements of the work.

7. Proposed Course of Actions

- 7.1 Early meeting with the Church of Scotland Area Manager, Miss M.C. Wilkie, Inverness to allow an opportunity to discuss the above. Before proceeding as below the Church will require to give their approval in principle to the proposals. This matter may require to be considered by their Department of Social Responsibility Committee, Edinburgh.

- 7.2 Commissioning of a Management Report and Working Plan, including detailed costings. In view of Fountain Forestry's involvement at Achvarasdal and their local base, it is likely that they would be approached to undertake the above.

It is proposed that the Planning Department will meet the cost of the report.

- 7.3 Approach the various funding agencies to conclude a financial package and work timetable.
- 7.4 Submission of report and budget to the Church for final approval.
- 7.5 Notwithstanding the above it is hoped that works can be implemented this Autumn/Spring.

Director of Planning
24th August, 1989.

C.C. Miss M.C. Wilkie, Area Manager, Church of Scotland, Cameron House,
Culduthel Road, Inverness.
Councillor R. Godfrey, Mo'Dhachaidh, Reay, Thurso, KW14 7RR.
Divisional Planning Officer, Caithness.