



Highland Archaeology Services Ltd

Bringing the Past and Future Together

Riverford, Conon Bridge

Archaeological Desk Based Assessment



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Contents

Contents	3
Illustrations.....	3
Tables.....	3
Legislation and Policy	4
Acknowledgements.....	4
Glossary	4
Introduction.....	5
Study Area.....	5
Desk Based Assessment.....	7
Historic Environment Record.....	7
Previous Archaeological Work.....	9
Historic Maps	9
OS Name book.....	11
Statistical Accounts.....	12
Site Visit.....	12
Discussion & Conclusions	13
Recommendations.....	14
Bibliography and References.....	14
Appendices.....	16

Illustrations

Cover photo: Picture from site 08/06/2022

Figure 1: Study area.....	6
Figure 2: DBA points	8
Figure 3: Extract from the 1st edition OS 6" map surveyed 1873.	10
Figure 4: Extract from the 2nd edition OS 6" map surveyed 1904.....	11
Figure 5: Large stones at edge of field	13

Tables

Table 1: DBA items.....	16
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Legislation and Policy

The common principles underlying international conventions, national legislation and local authority planning policies are that cultural heritage assets should be identified in advance of development and safeguarded where practicable; if disturbance is unavoidable appropriate recording of features and recovery of portable artefacts should take place. These have been set out in international agreements, UK and Scottish legislation, as well as national and local planning policies¹.

Professional standards maintained throughout the present project adhered to the Codes of Conduct and Approved Practice and Standards of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists².

Acknowledgements

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Glossary

- BGS - British Geological Survey
- DBA – Desk based Assessment
- CIfA – Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
- HES – Historic Environment Scotland
- HET – Historic Environment Team
- HHER – Highland Historic Environment Record (Monument and find records start ‘MHG’ and event records start ‘EHG’)
- NLS – National Library of Scotland

¹ A summary of relevant international, EU, UK and Scottish legislation and policies is available from the HAS office on request.

² Chartered Institute for Archaeology (CIfA) Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological Excavation.

Introduction

An Archaeological Desk Based Assessment (DBA) has been commissioned by Tulloch Homes in order to inform a planning application. This DBA seeks to establish the archaeological potential of the site by investigating records that may provide evidence for heritage assets within or around the proposed development area.

Both the Highland Historic Environment Record and the Canmore online facility 'Pastmap' have been consulted for previously recorded sites, findspots and investigation areas within 1km of the proposed development site

The National Library of Scotland's online historic map facility has been searched for evidence of historical or archaeological remains in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development area. The OS Namebook has been researched for placenames and features of relevance that were noted from the 1st edition OS map of the area.

Both the Old and New Statistical Accounts have been consulted for references to or details of historical and archaeological information of interest in and around the proposed development site.

A site visit was undertaken on 8th June 2022 in order to confirm the use and character of the site, and ground-truth the findings of the Desk Based Assessment.

Study Area

The proposed development site lies on the southern edge of Conon Bridge, Highland, between the railway line and the A862 road. The site is approximately 400m by 200m and is centred at NGR NH 54156 54640. The area is currently open agricultural land under crop.

The principle underlying geology of the site is Raddery Sandstone Formation bedrock, with Raised Beach Deposits of gravel, sand and silt.³

The Study Area comprises the site and a buffer zone of 1km surrounding the site boundary (see Figure 1). This area has been studied for archaeological and historical records that may provide information about the character and potential for archaeological remains within the proposed development site.

³ Geology of Britain viewer (BGS)

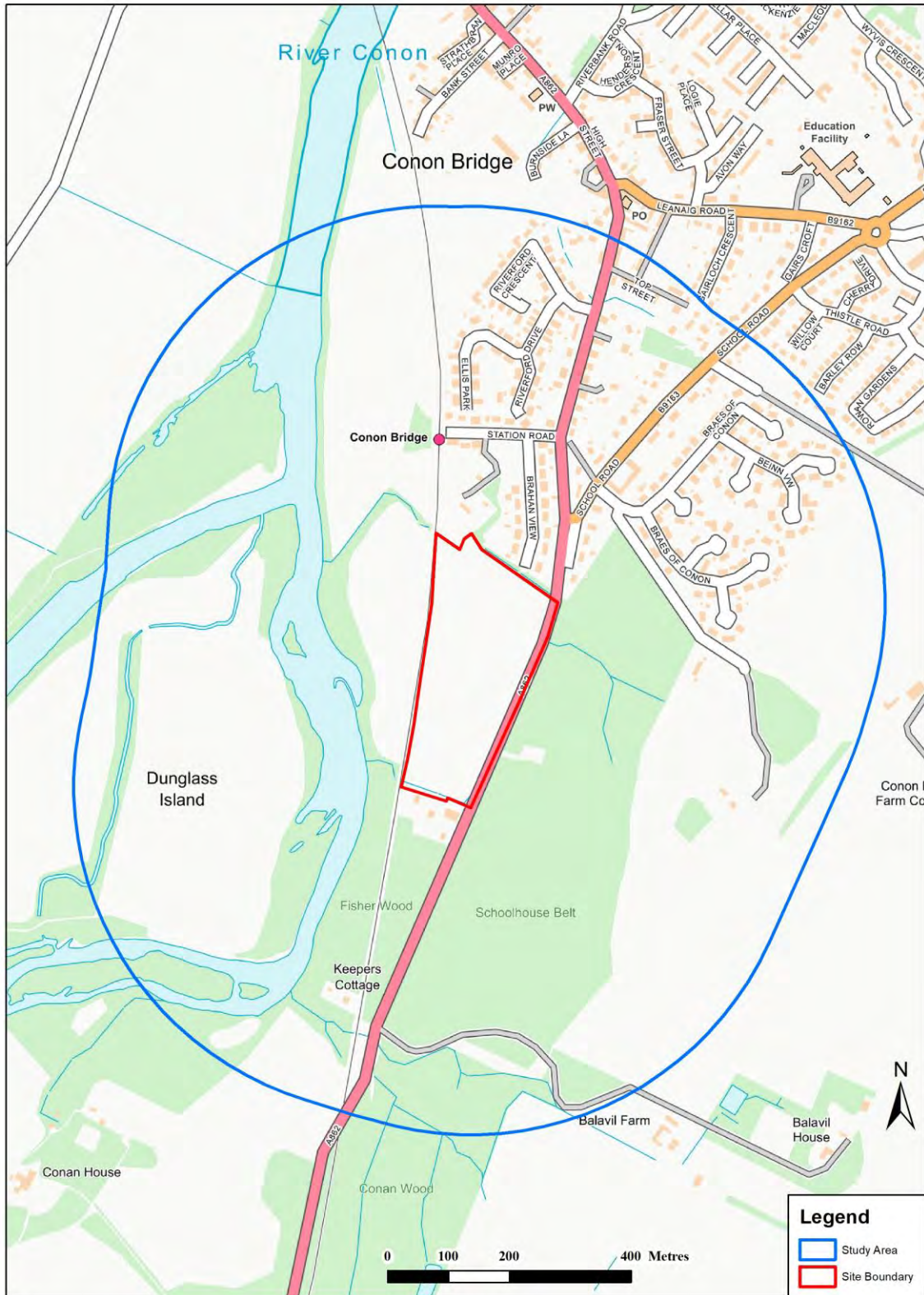


Figure 1: Study area

Desk Based Assessment

Historic Environment Record

No known historic or archaeological assets have been identified within the boundary of the proposed development. However, there are several historical and archaeological sites recorded within the wider Study Area (see Figure 2).

The closest historic asset to the site boundary is Riverford House, a two-storey grade C Listed Building dating to around 1800 (DBA1). It is located to the immediate north of the proposed development site. There is another cluster of Listed Buildings to the north of the proposed development site at MacKenzie gardens, where houses 1-6, a lynch gate and the boundary wall all enjoy grade C Listed status (DBA2). Historic mapping reveals more information about these buildings and this will be discussed below.

The most notable archaeological feature within the Study Area is Scheduled Monument Conon Bridge Henge – a 26m diameter approximately-circular ditch and bank (DBA3). Henges are typically considered to be prehistoric monuments associated with ritual or religious practices, usually associated with the Neolithic or occasionally Bronze Age period. This henge is unusual in that it has a causeway across the ditch but no corresponding break in the bank. Excavations of a similar monument at Pullyhour, Caithness yielded a Bronze Age date.

The railway line to the west of the proposed development site and associated station just to the north were opened in 1862 as part of the ‘Far North’ section of line between Inverness and Wick (DBA4). Photographic survey of the station site in 2012 recoded a small area of cobbling which appeared to represent all that remained of the station.

The general location of two findspots have been represented by a record in the nearest grid square corner (DBA5 and 6). These represent significant finds – the pin of an Early Historic era penannular brooch, and a bronze socketed axehead likely to date to the Late Bronze Age. Both of these finds were recovered during metal detecting and allocated through the Treasure Trove system to Inverness Museum.

Two features of the river were noted during the ‘Roads Through Ross’ community archaeology project, which sought to understand historic routeways through Ross-shire. DBA 7 notes the location of a possibly man-made channel which may have facilitated ferry crossings at this part of the River Conon. DBA8 is the location of a ford marked on the 1st edition map, which will be discussed further below.

Conan Lodge to the south of the site is a historic building which was once listed but has had its category C Listed Building status removed. It was an ancillary building within the grounds of Conan House, dating to the later 19th century (DBA9).

There are no Garden and Designed Landscapes, Conservation Areas, Battlefields or World Heritage Site boundaries within the Study Area.

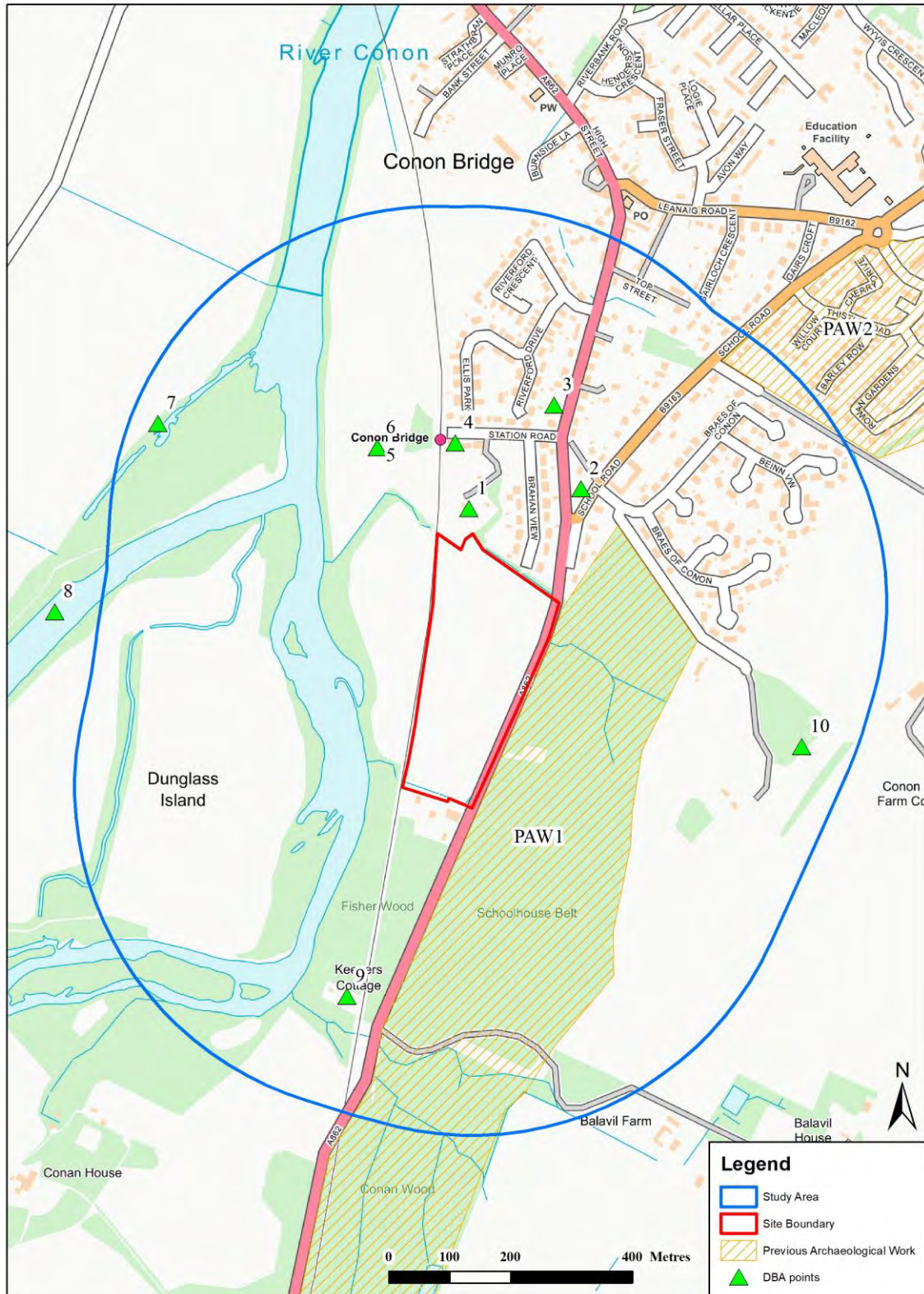


Figure 2: DBA points

Previous Archaeological Work

There have been three programmes of Previous Archaeological Work (PAW) within the study area. To the east and south of the site a walkover survey was undertaken within Conon Wood by Stuart Farrell in 2004 (PAW1, EHG1060). He confirmed the location and character of features around David's Fort well to the south of the study area, but found no evidence of archaeological features within or close to the study area considered here.

In the Braes of Conon area on the north eastern edge of the study area (PAW2) two phases of archaeological fieldwork have been undertaken. An initial programme of trial trenching was undertaken by Headland Archaeology in 2010 (EHG3531) followed by targeted excavation and monitored topsoil strip in 2012 (EHG3741). Findings included a heavily truncated roundhouse, and a sunken trough which may have been the remains of a Bronze Age burnt mound. These findings suggest a potential for survival of buried prehistoric remains in the fields surrounding Conon Bridge.

Historic Maps

Conon Bridge is notably absent from early maps, including Blaeu (1654), Moll (1745) and Roy (1747-52), seemingly only becoming established with the creation of the bridge by Thomas Telford in the early 1800's, and subsequently the railway in the 1860's. The first real detail is therefore only really present in the 1st edition 6 inch OS map, which was surveyed in 1873 (see Figure 3). Here it is possible to make out several of the assets already noted in the DBA.

It is apparent that at this time the village was concentrated to the section of road immediately south of the bridge, with much of the study area still being open fields. Riverford (DBA1) is depicted as a cluster of structures within garden ground with a tree-lined avenue from the main road (now the A862). A well is shown to the north of the avenue. The northern structure of DBA2 is depicted but the other listed structures that make up the listed buildings are not yet constructed by this date. The annotation 'School' may refer to one of the structures to the east. The henge (DBA3) is depicted as a 'Fort' surrounded by open fields.

The station (DBA4), only 10 years old at this point, is clearly depicted with associated set-down areas. A single, regular channel is depicted at DBA7, although no function is hinted at. The ford at DBA8 is annotated. A wier is shown across the broken section of river closest to the proposed development site. DBA 9 is shown as a 'Pheasantry and Kennel'. The quarry at DBA10 is annotated as 'Conanside Quarry' within an area of rough ground, suggesting it was out of use at this time.

There are no additional features of interest within the study area on this map.



Figure 3: Extract from the 1st edition OS 6" map surveyed 1873.
Ross-shire and Cromartyshire (Mainland) LXXXVIII

By the second edition 6 inch map (surveyed 1904) it is clear that the school is situated within a building to the east of DBA2, and the other buildings have been constructed. The large building to the north of Riverford (DBA1) appears to be a 'Nurses' Home'. The ford at DBA8 is no longer depicted although the wier still is. There is an additional field boundary across the middle of the proposed development area, which is likely to be a fence line.

All other features appear very similar to the 1st edition, and there are no additional features of note.



Figure 4: Extract from the 2nd edition OS 6" map surveyed 1904.
Ross-shire and Cromartysire (Mainland) LXXXVIII

OS Name book

The OS Name book was a document compiled by surveyors during the creation of the 1st edition Ordnance survey maps whilst recording and researching placenames to feature within the map. It is a fascinating document which captures some important details about the structures and landscape features it records. The following relevant placenames provide some information:

Conon Station (DBA4): "This is a small wooden building on the Highland Railway, two miles south of Dingwall, and nearly half a mile south of Conon. It is slated and in good repair, and is the property of Highland Rly Co. Inverness."⁴

Riverford (DBA1): "This is a large farm house, situated near Conon Station, and is two storeys high having suitable outbuildings attached the whole being slated and in perfect repair Sir, K, Mackenzie, proprietor (Conan House)."⁵

School: "This is a small school & dwelling house attached two storeys high thatched and in good order It belongs to neither Free nor Established churches, and is supported by Government grant Sir, K, MacKenzie & school fees average attendance 72. The ordinary rudiments of education are taught to both sexes. Sir K, MacKenzie proprietor."⁶

⁴ OS1/28/31/29

⁵ ditto

⁶ ditto

Fort (DBA3): “This name applies to a circular trench situated in a clump of Fir Wood about 10 Chains East of Conon Station, No information can be obtained in the locality respecting it further, than it is supposed to have been a fort forming one of a Chain of similar entrenchments which can be traced through by Beauly into Strath Glass.”⁷

Conanside Quarry (DBA10): “This name applies to a pretty large quarry partly disused owing to the depth of earth that has to be removed before getting at the stones. The stones are a hard freestone, very durable and good for building purposes and very many of the fine bridges on the Highland Railway have been built out of it. It is on the property of Sir K. McKenzie.”⁸

Statistical Accounts

At the time of the Statistical Accounts, the study area sits within the United Parishes of Urquhart and Logie Wester. The Old Account, published in 1793, was written in 1792 by the Reverend Mr Charles Calder. He describes how the population varies from just under 2600 to around 3000 in the latter 18th century due to a number of inhabitants leaving when the exemption of duties of excise on spirits produced within Ferintosh was ceased in 1786.⁹ He also gives some interesting detail about the inhabitants of the parish, including the number of houses, the number of occupants within houses, the age demographics and the trades available.

It is mentioned that salmon fishing takes place in the Conan river (p.211), and that land had been improved along Conan-side. Very little of the ground was enclosed (p.212), and the parish was ill-supplied with fuel (p.213). The only mention of antiquities is a description of large conical heaps of stones in the south west of the parish containing stone cists, likely to be prehistoric burial cairns (p.214). The fords were noted to have been fatal to many, taking several people’s lives (p.215).

The New Statistical Account (1845) was written by the reverend John MacDonald, Minister in 1840.¹⁰ He noted that much of the parish was cultivated (p.365) and that the patron of the Conan area had a zeal for reclaiming waste ground and introducing modern systems of husbandry among his tenants (p.374), farms were being enclosed and subdivided (p.376), and that the village of Conan Bridge was a ‘thriving place’ with a population of more than 300 (p.377).

The account also mentions the school, describing it as:

“established a few years ago by Sir F. A. Mackenzie on his own property, in the west end [of the parish]; and to which, besides having provided, at his own expense, the whole of the requisite accommodations, he very laudably grants a small salary out of his own pocket, and allows the master a good garden.”¹¹

There are no ‘antiquities’ or other heritage features likely to apply to the proposed development area within this account.

Site Visit

The site visit was undertaken on 8th June 2022. The weather was overcast but bright and dry, with good visibility. The proposed development area was confirmed to be an agricultural field under

⁷ OS1/28/31/33

⁸ OS1/28/31/34

⁹ OSA p.207-10

¹⁰ NSA, p.363 & p.380

¹¹ NSA, p.379

barley crop at the time of the visit. Care was taken to ensure that no crops were disturbed during the visit.

The boundary between the site and the road may have once been a stone wall as there is a bank now covered with turf in which some stones are visible. The field is lower than the adjacent road. There are some large boulders at the edge of the field, but these are likely to be clearance from the field to benefit ploughing and do not appear to have belonged to any form of structure (see Figure 5). There were no other visible features deemed to be of heritage value.



Figure 5: Large stones at edge of field

Discussion & Conclusions

The Desk Based Assessment has confirmed that there is archaeological and historical activity within the study area. The presence of a henge monument near to the site attests to prehistoric activity in the area, confirmed by the excavations by Headland at Conon Brae. This demonstrates that there is archaeological potential at the site, despite the lack of surface remains. The recovery of a bronze age axe-head and an early historic brooch pin by metal detecting in the area also suggests that artefacts have the potential to survive.

Historic documentation and maps confirm that the area has been predominantly rural until relatively recently, when the expansion of Conon Bridge has crept to the edges of the proposed development area. The scattering of listed buildings represent the surviving 19th century rural dwellings that were present in the area.

There is historic evidence for the significance of the fords prior to the construction of the bridge, which were the local means of crossing the river in order to gain access to the local market town at Dingwall. The river also provided some salmon fishing and it is possible that this took place close to the wier. The presence of the nearby school will have also attracted travel past the site. The construction of the railway and nearby station will have been a major undertaking, and there may be some detritus discarded from that event surviving within the development area.

Recommendations

Whilst there are no records suggesting the presence of specific structures or events within the proposed development site, and no visibly upstanding structural or earthwork remains, there is a scattering of historical and archaeological sites in the surrounding area. These include prehistoric sites, an early historic artefact, and historic evidence for nearby facilities such as fords, schools and the railway. It is also clear that the site has been used for agriculture for at least the last 200 years. Although this has the potential to have caused some damage to potential buried remains through ploughing, it is still possible that features and artefacts may survive within the site.

Overall, there is a reasonable potential for buried archaeological or historical remains to be present within the proposed development area. Although this is not specific enough to allow targeted excavation. It is therefore recommended that a programme of trial trenching is undertaken in order to establish the likely presence or absence of buried archaeological features within the site.

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Appendices

Table 1: DBA items

DBA no.	Designation #	Canmore #	HHER #	Name	East.	Nor.	Notes
1	LB14913	12862	MHG8990	Riverford House	25415	85490	category C listed, circa 1800, 2 storey.
2	LB44622	233716	MHG31372	Conon Homes	25433	85493	Conon Cottage and 1-6 Conon Homes (1902?), Lynch gate, boundary wall. Category C listed
3	SM1666	12781	MHG9059	Conon Bridge Henge	25429	85507	Well preserved henge, 26m diameter with ditch and bank, single causeway. Unusual form, possibly Bronze Age.
4	-	105464	MHG21602	Railway Station	25412	85500	Opened in 1862, part of the 'Far North' Line from Inverness to Wick. Photographic survey in 2012 showed only small area of cobbling survived.
5	-	273779	MHG48673	Find spot - brooch pin	25400	85500	pin from penannular brooch, found during metal detecting on a farm in Conon Bridge, allocated to Inverness Museum in 2003. (COTT.45/03)
6	-	-	MHG59128	Find spot - socketed axehead	25400	85500	late bronze age, irish style, found metal detecting in 2015. Allocated to Inverness Museum (CO.TT. 146/15)
7	-	-	MHG55061	Ferry Crossing?	25364	85504	Possibly constructed

Riverford, Conon Bridge
Archaeological Desk Based Assessment

							channels associated with a ford over River Conon
8	-	-	MHG55060	Ford of Conon	25347	85473	Main ford over River Conon. This site is thought to be associated with a possible early medieval routeway
9	-	-	MHG31369	Conan House Lodge	25395	85410	Formerly grade C listed building, later 19th century
10	-	-	MHG29380	Conon Brae Quarry (disused)	25469	85451	Former quarry site noted during survey in 1998