

dùthchas. taigh is tìr.

birth right.
[HOME AND LAND.]

charlotte anne murray.

REVIVING BELONGING
THROUGH LAND, LANGUAGE
AND LIVING HERITAGE.

2025.

[THE WESTERN ISLES.]



abstract.

[OUTLINING THE PROJECT.]

Declaration

AB 965 Design Studies 5B 2024/25


MArch/Pg Dip Advanced Architectural Design
MArch Architectural Design International

Declaration

"I hereby declare that this submission is **my own work** and **has been composed by myself**. It contains **no unacknowledged text or images** and has not been submitted in any previous context. All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and all sources of information, text, illustration, tables, images etc. have been specifically acknowledged.

I accept that if having signed this Declaration my work should be found at Examination to show **evidence of academic dishonesty the work will fail** and I will be **liable to face the University Senate Discipline Committee**."

Name: charlotte anne murray

Signed: 

Date: 28.04.25

This project investigates the revival of cultural identity, self-sufficiency, and community resilience in the Western Isles of Scotland, guided by the Gaelic principle of dùthchas—a deep-rooted sense of belonging and responsibility between people, land, and heritage. Focused on the central loop of the Isle of Lewis, the work responds to interwoven challenges of depopulation, land underuse, language erosion, and over-reliance on tourism, while seeking to re-centre local knowledge, values, and agency.

Emerging from personal heritage, site visits, and generational memory, the proposal is both personal and political. It recognises that a single intervention cannot resolve these issues and instead proposes a tripartite design strategy; Reflect, Record, and Revive - each linked by a network of smaller, responsive spatial gestures.

Reflect is a space for learning, intergenerational craft, where memory becomes method.

Record acts as a research station and environmental archive, embedded within the land to document and monitor its rhythms, changes, and potential for regeneration.

Revive invites collective celebration and cultural activation, providing a platform for community-led events, oral histories, and seasonal gatherings.

Together, these spaces work to reignite a local relationship with the land, framed not as static terrain but as a living, evolving entity. Central to this is the belief that reconnection fosters self-sufficiency; when people know, care for, and cultivate the land they inhabit, they are more likely to protect it, invest in it, and envision a viable future upon it.

The material strategy draws from the landscape itself. Concrete incorporating local aggregate and sand, hempcrete from revived crofting strategy, and wool from sheep crofting all support sustainable building while reviving dormant industries. These materials inscribe island life into form, standing resiliently as physical records, just as abandoned croft houses and ruins do today, the land becomes a physical record marked by the lives lived in connection to it.

Informed by Gaelic oral tradition, ecological thinking, and spatial justice, this model offers a transferable framework for other rural communities seeking to reclaim their identity, economy, and land through meaningful, place-based regeneration. Ultimately, the project becomes both a tribute and a tool; an architecture of memory and action, shaped by land and those who belong to it.

clàr-innse.

[CONTENTS.]

dualchas.
[HERITAGE.]

briste.
[BROKEN.]

tìr.
[LAND.]

uisge.
[WATER.]

toradh.
[OUTPUT.]

ceangail.
[CONNECT.]

slànaich.
[HEAL]

[REFERENCES.
FIGURE LIST.
APPENDIX.]

manifesto.

[AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.]

01 REKINDLE DÙTHCHAS

Root every act of making in the deep, ancestral connection between people, land, and memory.

02 HEAL THROUGH SMALL INTERVENTIONS

Empower community-led revival through modest, adaptive, site-specific spaces that respond to place and need.

03 BUILD FROM THE LAND, FOR THE LAND

Source local materials — stone, aggregate, wool, hemp — to create structures that sustain and honour the landscape.

04 DESIGN FOR CHANGE AND ENDURANCE

Create architecture that is resilient, flexible, and destined to become tomorrow’s cherished ruins — a living record of revival.

05 WEAVE MEMORY INTO THE FUTURE

Reflect vernacular knowledge, record today’s lives, and revive culture to seed a more self-sufficient, self-determined tomorrow.

06 UPHOLD AUTHENTICITY

Prioritise genuine, culturally grounded design that emerges from the spirit of place — resisting pastiche and superficial replication.

the brief.

[PARAMETERS FOR DESIGN.]

OVERVIEW

This project investigates how the Gaelic concept of dùthchas, a deep-rooted connection between people, land, and heritage, can inform a contemporary response to pressing issues in the Western Isles, including depopulation, language erosion, loss of traditional industries, and land underuse.

Through a three-part architectural response Reflect, Record, and Revive the project creates a framework for sustainable and culturally-embedded development, rooted in self-sufficiency, craft, and collective memory. Each intervention acts as both a physical and symbolic tool to reawaken dormant ties between land and people, honouring traditions while addressing modern challenges.

AIMS

To *record* land use and heritage data for sustainable development and environmental understanding.

To *reflect* on local knowledge through an art and craft school that nurtures Gaelic language, stories, and skills.

To *revive* community life through a structure that celebrates cultural identity and fosters civic pride.

KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

Depopulation: The loss of generational presence and the erosion of village life

Language Decline: Gaelic speakers now a minority in their own lands.

Over-tourism: A growing dependence on seasonal economy with cultural commodification risks. Valued more highly than locals.

Loss of Industry & Land Underuse: Decline in crofting, fishing, weaving and overlooked land potential

DESIGN APPROACH

Community-first and place-specific: Sites rooted in family history.

Typologies derived from the vernacular (airighs, crofts, stone walls, weaving sheds)

Materials sourced and processed locally (hemp, wool, stone), promoting closed-loop systems

Interdisciplinary influence: landscape architecture, oral history, ethnography, and participatory design

dùthchas.

A GAELIC CONCEPT.

n. masc.

/du:xəs/

MEANING:

[THE DEEP-ROOTED HEREDITARY
CONNECTION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND
NATURE.]

**TO ME IT IS A DRIVING FACTOR TO THIS
PROJECT.**

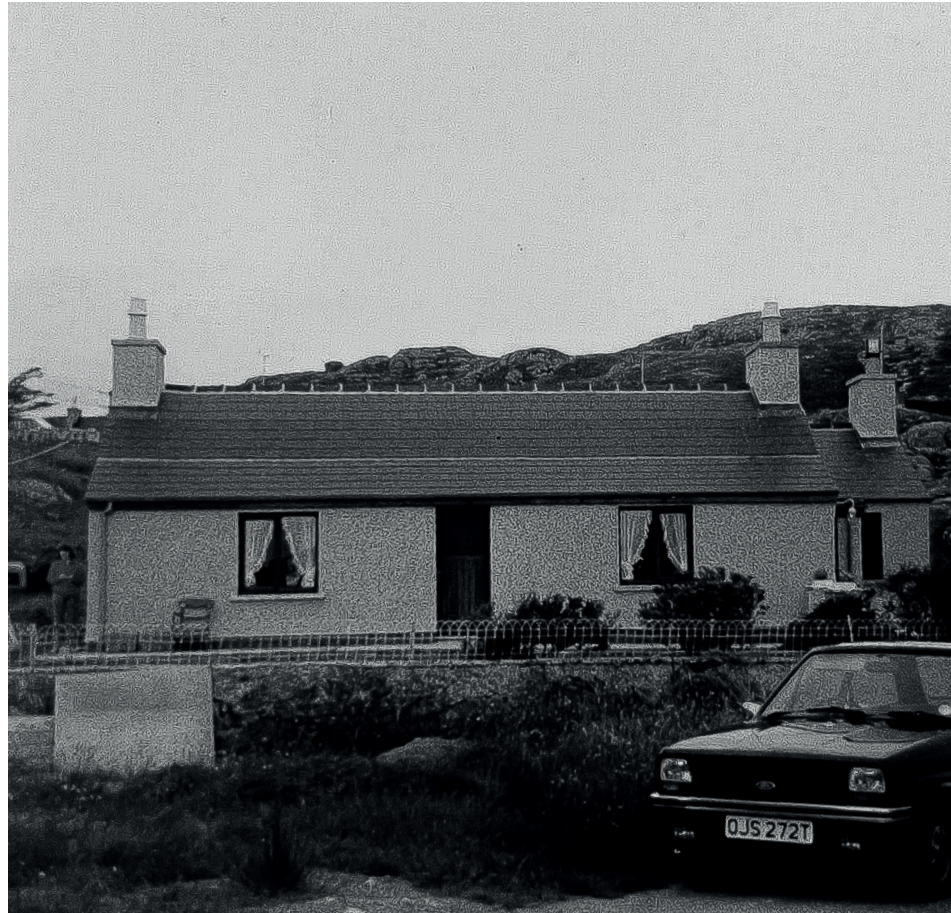
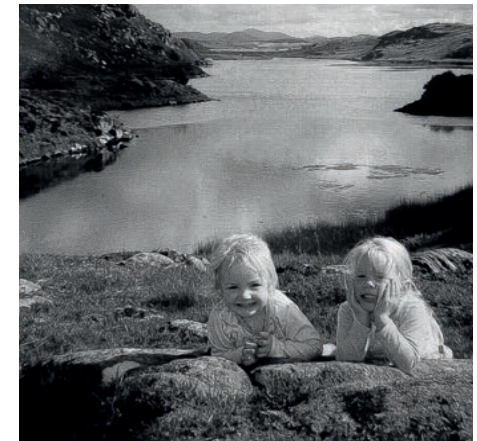


figure 01: 27 tolsta chaolais.



figure 02: heritage links to land through generations.



no.27 tolsta chaolais.

58.2465278, -6.7807052

This project begins with a croft: No. 27 Tolsta Chaolais. My great-grandmother's home, and memories tied to the land reaching back generations. This land remembers, even when we forget. Through it, I rediscover identity, family, and the future of the Hebrides.

dualchas.

[HERITAGE.]

reclaiming identity.

[UNIQUE IMPORTANCE OF LAND.]

In Scottish Gaelic culture, the land is not merely a resource, but a living archive of ancestry, memory, and belonging. The concept of dùthchas encapsulates this intrinsic relationship, denoting not just ownership of land, but a profound, reciprocal connection between people and place. It is a worldview in which identity is inseparable from the landscape, every hill, stone, and shoreline carries the weight of story and inheritance.



Feumaidh an t-ialamh a chuid fhèin.
[THE LAND MUST RECEIVE ITS OWN PORTION.]
TM MacDonald Proverbs.

For generations, Gaelic identity has been rooted in this intimate bond. The land has shaped language, tradition, and livelihood, forming a cultural topography where memory is mapped through crofts, lochs, and coastal edges. Yet, modern land policies, economic pressures, and depopulation have fragmented this connection, leaving many disconnected from the places their families once tended and called home. THIS PROJECT IS BOTH A RESPONSE TO AND A RECLAMATION OF THAT LOSS.

Rooted in my own heritage, the work is a journey of reconnection; to villages like Tolsta Chaolais and Shawbost, where my grandmothers were raised, and to the crofts and moorlands that shaped the rhythms of daily life. It is an attempt to listen to the land through the lens of inherited memory and contemporary urgency, and to recover a sense of belonging not just as an individual, but as part of a wider cultural fabric.

By reactivating land through sustainable material practices, community engagement, and spatial intervention, this project becomes a form of cultural repair. It is a reassertion of Gaelic identity through architecture, not as spectacle, but as stewardship. In doing so, it proposes a future where the land once again becomes a vessel of continuity, agency, and cultural pride, where to reclaim land is also to reclaim language, lineage, and self.

figure 03: heritage links on both sides of family.



NO.27 TOLSTA CHAOLAIS

figure 04: exploratory collage section through 27 tolsta chaolais.

briste.

adj
/brɪsɪdʒə/
unch

[BROKEN.]

[BRISTE REVEALS THE FRACTURES — THE CULTURAL, ECOLOGICAL, AND ECONOMIC DISRUPTIONS THAT HAVE MARKED THE HEBRIDES IN RECENT DECADES. FROM DEPOPULATION AND LANGUAGE EROSION TO LAND UNDERUSE AND EXTRACTIVE TOURISM, THIS SECTION DOES NOT SHY AWAY FROM COMPLEXITY. IT LAYS BARE THE PRESSURES OF DISCONNECTION, OFFERING A CANDID VIEW OF THE CHALLENGES FACING COMMUNITIES WHOSE DEEP ROOTS HAVE BEEN TESTED BY MODERN SYSTEMS THAT DO NOT SERVE THEM.]

geographical barrier.

[CULTIVATION OF CULTURE.]



figure 05: locating the isle of lewis.

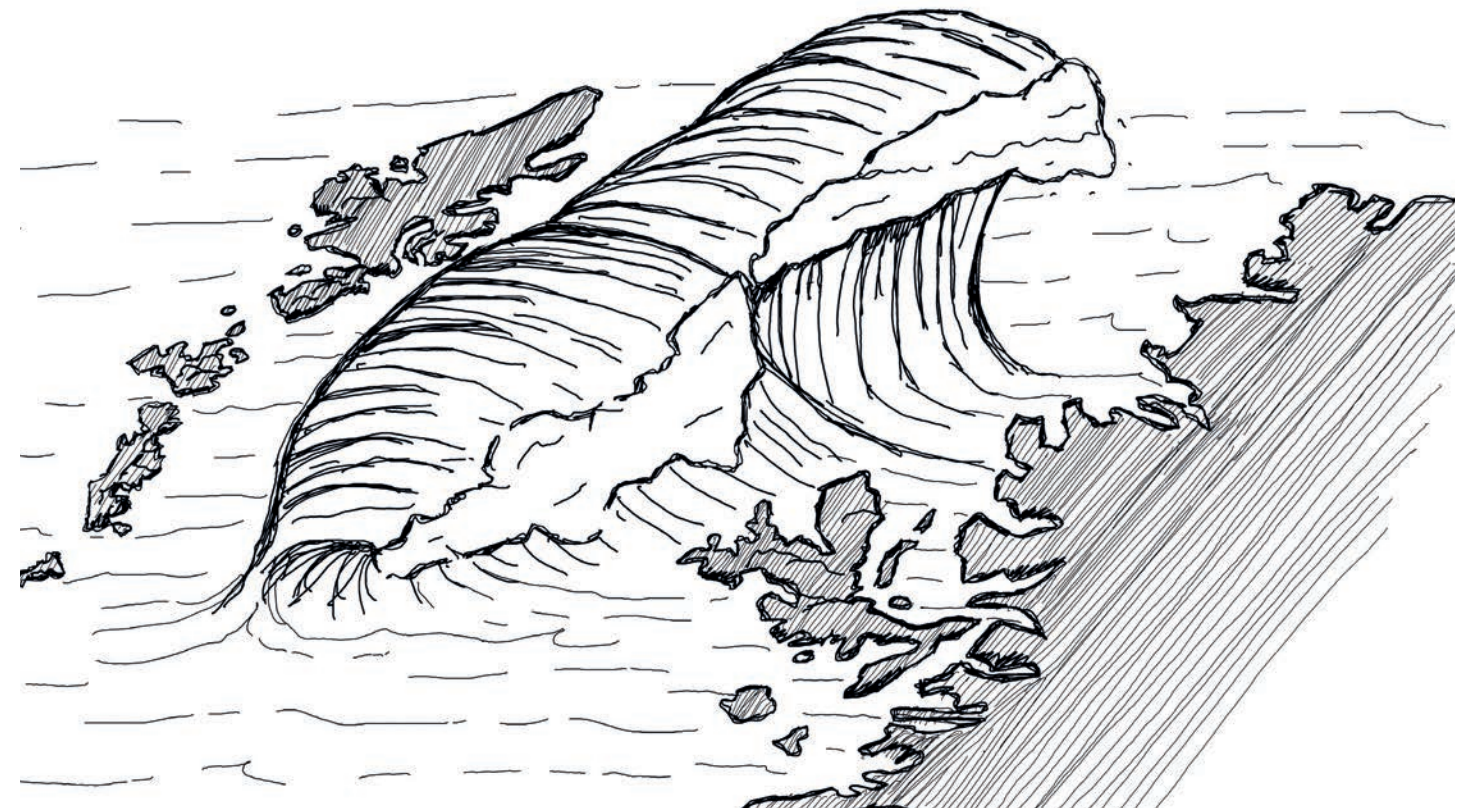


figure 06: a geographical barrier.

The Western Isles exist in a delicate balance: culturally rich yet geographically isolated. The stretch of sea that separates the islands from mainland Scotland has long shaped the character of life here — nurturing strong community ties, unique traditions, and a profound reliance on the land and sea. However, this physical separation has also created a vulnerability. Economic opportunities are limited; access to resources, education, and infrastructure often lags behind; and contemporary pressures such as depopulation, over-tourism, and cultural erosion are compounded by the difficulty of connection to wider national and global systems.

The landscape itself can be both a barrier and a sanctuary. Harsh weather, expansive moorlands, and rugged coastlines have historically made settlement and agriculture challenging, requiring resilience and ingenuity from those who live here. Today, the same conditions complicate efforts to build sustainable futures. Crofting, once a lifeline of subsistence, struggles against modern economies of scale. Transporting goods and materials remains costly and inefficient, reinforcing a dependence on imports and further weakening local self-sufficiency.

vanishing hearth.

[DEPOPULATION.]



figure 07: depopulation issues.

Over the past century, the Outer Hebrides have faced a steady decline in population, with young people leaving in pursuit of employment, education, or affordable housing. According to the National Records of Scotland, the Western Isles is projected to lose over 6.1% of its population between 2018 and 2028, the steepest decline in Scotland. Whole crofting townships now contain hollowed homes, their chimneys stilled and doorways sagging.

Gaelic culture is inherently place-bound. As families move away, ancestral knowledge tied to specific landscapes is lost not only who lived there, but how they lived there. This project seeks to record and reflect these disappearing ways of life, while imagining frameworks for return be it seasonal, symbolic, or permanent.

silenced land.

[LOSS OF LANGUAGE.]

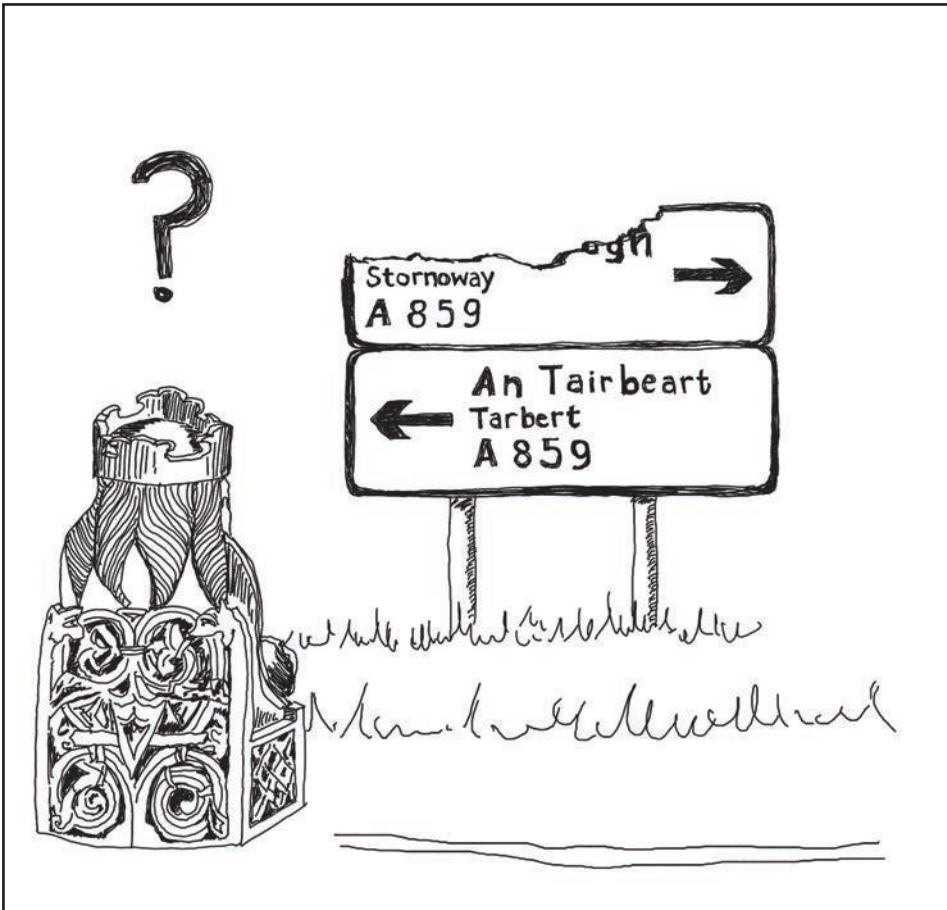


figure 08: language loss.

Gaelic is not just a language—it is an archive of landscape, weather, emotion, and belonging. Yet today, only 1.1% of Scotland’s total population speaks Gaelic, with the highest concentrations in the Outer Hebrides. Even there, decline is stark: Census 2022 data shows a drop from 61% to 45% of Gaelic speakers in the Western Isles since 2001. Gaelic is now for the first time a minority language in the islands.

Language erosion severs intergenerational continuity, especially when children are raised with only English in their schools, media, and games. While Gaelic Medium Education (GME) is growing, community spaces are needed where language lives in daily life, not just classrooms. The proposed structures provides a space for Gaelic to thrive in song, craft, and shared making not as a museum piece, but as a living tongue.

forgotten labour.

[LAND UNDERUSE.]

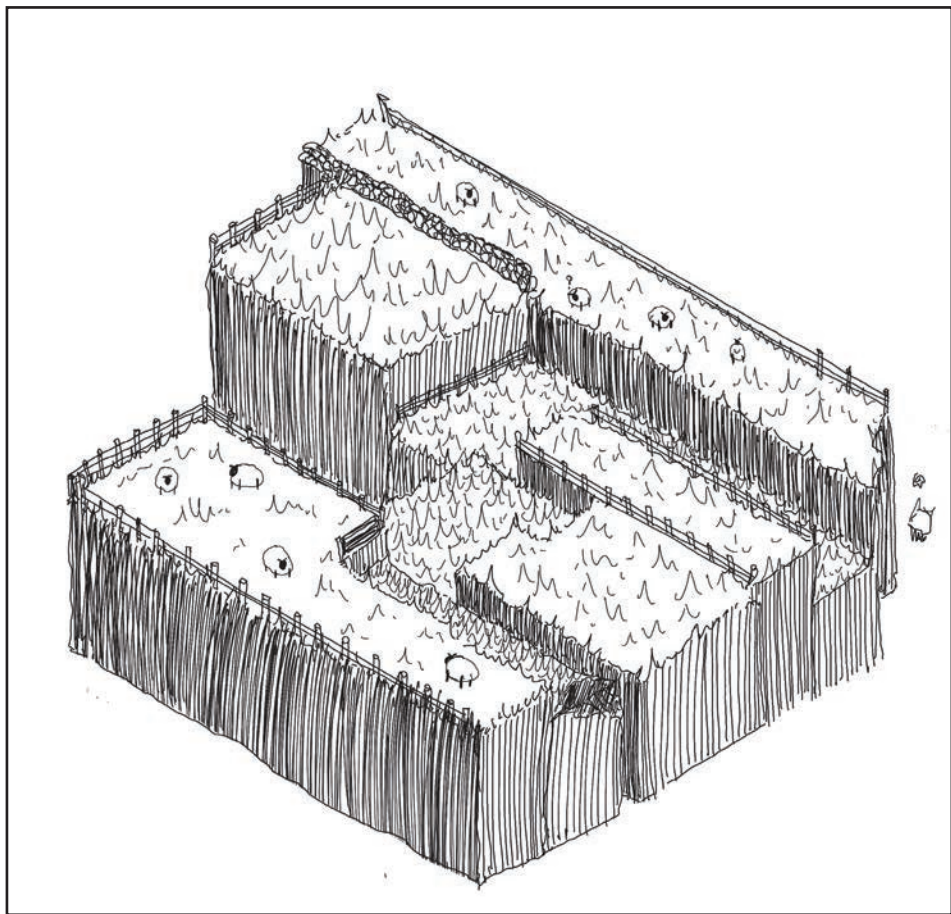


figure 09: land underuse.

The crofting system, once the beating heart of Hebridean sustainability, is now weakened. Many crofts lie abandoned or underused, partly due to unclear inheritance law, a lack of local opportunity, and the cost of revitalisation. Almost all of Scotlands population lives within around 2% of it land, we must use our land, particularly in rural landscapes, more effectively.

“*Cha bhi toradh gun saothair.*”
[THERE WILL BE NO PRODUCE WITHOUT LABOUR.]
TM MacDonald Proverbs.

Industries like weaving, fishing, and boat-building have dwindled. By growing building materials like hemp, reintroducing wool processing, and teaching textile skills, the project envisions a looped economy rooted in land. This doesn’t romanticise the past but retools it for contemporary resilience.

Structures in this project (Record, Reflect, Revive) respond to this loss by demonstrating potential, not by replacing industry, but by laying a path for community-led reactivation.

seen but not known.

[COMMODIFICATION.]

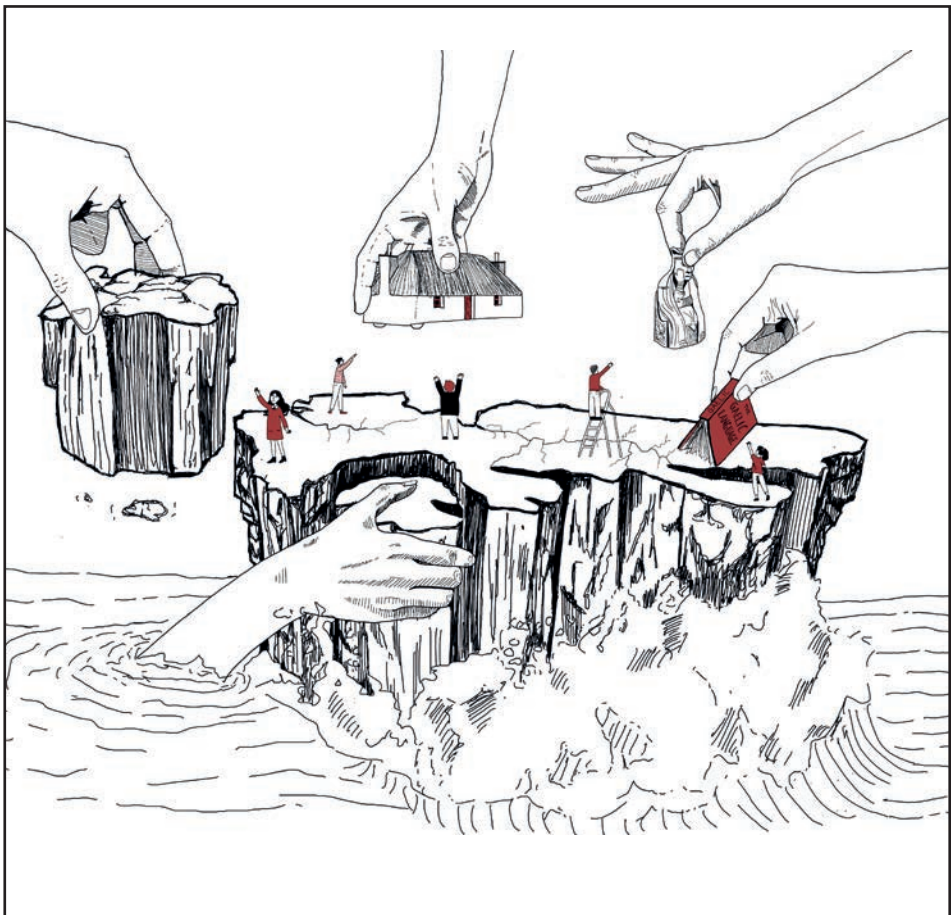


figure 10: erosion.

The Hebrides welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, a dramatic increase over the past two decades. While the economic boost is critical, over-tourism strains local infrastructure, raises property prices, and dilutes authentic experience into consumable cliché. On average, over 219,000 people visit the Isle of Lewis alone each year, more than ten times the local population.

Tourism must become symbiotic, not extractive. Revive is designed not as a spectacle, but as a commons: a space where visitors witness local life with humility and participation, not expectation. Interpretation is led by the community. Visitors are not the centre but they are welcome to the edge.

tìr.

n. fem.

/tʲiːrʲ/

gen. -e

pl. -ean

[LAND.]

[TÌR IS NOT PASSIVE TERRAIN — IT IS AN ACTIVE PRESENCE, A SHAPING FORCE. HERE, THE LAND IS EXPLORED AS A DYNAMIC CHARACTER: PEAT-RICH, SALT-LICKED, WIND-SCULPTED, AND SPIRITUALLY RESONANT. THROUGH ANALYSIS OF CROFTING PATTERNS, GEOLOGICAL CONDITIONS, AND TYPOLOGIES OF PLACE — FROM MOORLAND TO LOCHSIDE — THIS CHAPTER ESTABLISHES A LANDSCAPE IDENTITY THAT GUIDES BOTH MEMORY AND MATERIAL. THE LAND IS UNDERSTOOD NOT AS SCENERY, BUT AS ARCHIVE, TEACHER, AND COLLABORATOR.]

site selection.

[HERITAGE AND GEOGRAPHICALLY LED.]

The decision to focus on specific sites across the central loop of Lewis emerged from an immersive field trip. Over the course of several days, I travelled the circular route with my family, a journey that was both research-led and emotionally resonant. Memories of taking this same journey since before I can remember made the experience deeply personal. As we drove through the inner artery of the island, I documented the landscape through photographs, pausing frequently to capture moments, atmospheres, and potential interventions. These images grounded in lived experience became an archive of the land’s diversity and the people’s quiet endurance.

Each chosen site reflects not only distinct geographies but also threads of my own lineage and memory. In Tolsta Chaolais, a village clustered around a loch and nestled among rising hills, I felt the pull of maternal heritage, a place tied to childhood stories and stillness. Its topography, enclosed and intimate, stands in contrast to Shawbost, where my paternal grandmother was raised. There, the western edge of the island asserts itself in rocky cliffs and vast, open seas — the drama of land meeting ocean a powerful metaphor for resilience. Finally, Barvas, expansive and windswept, represents the raw moorland heart of Lewis. Its openness, marked by grazing land and elemental exposure, holds a different kind of beauty one shaped by exposure rather than shelter.

Together, these sites form a triangulation of land typologies: lochside enclosure, coastal edge, and moorland expanse. Each presents unique spatial conditions and social histories, allowing the project to reflect a spectrum of Hebridean life past, present, and future. The choice to ground the work in this loop of land honours both familial connection and geographical significance, proposing that through localised focus, broader regenerative impact is possible across the island.

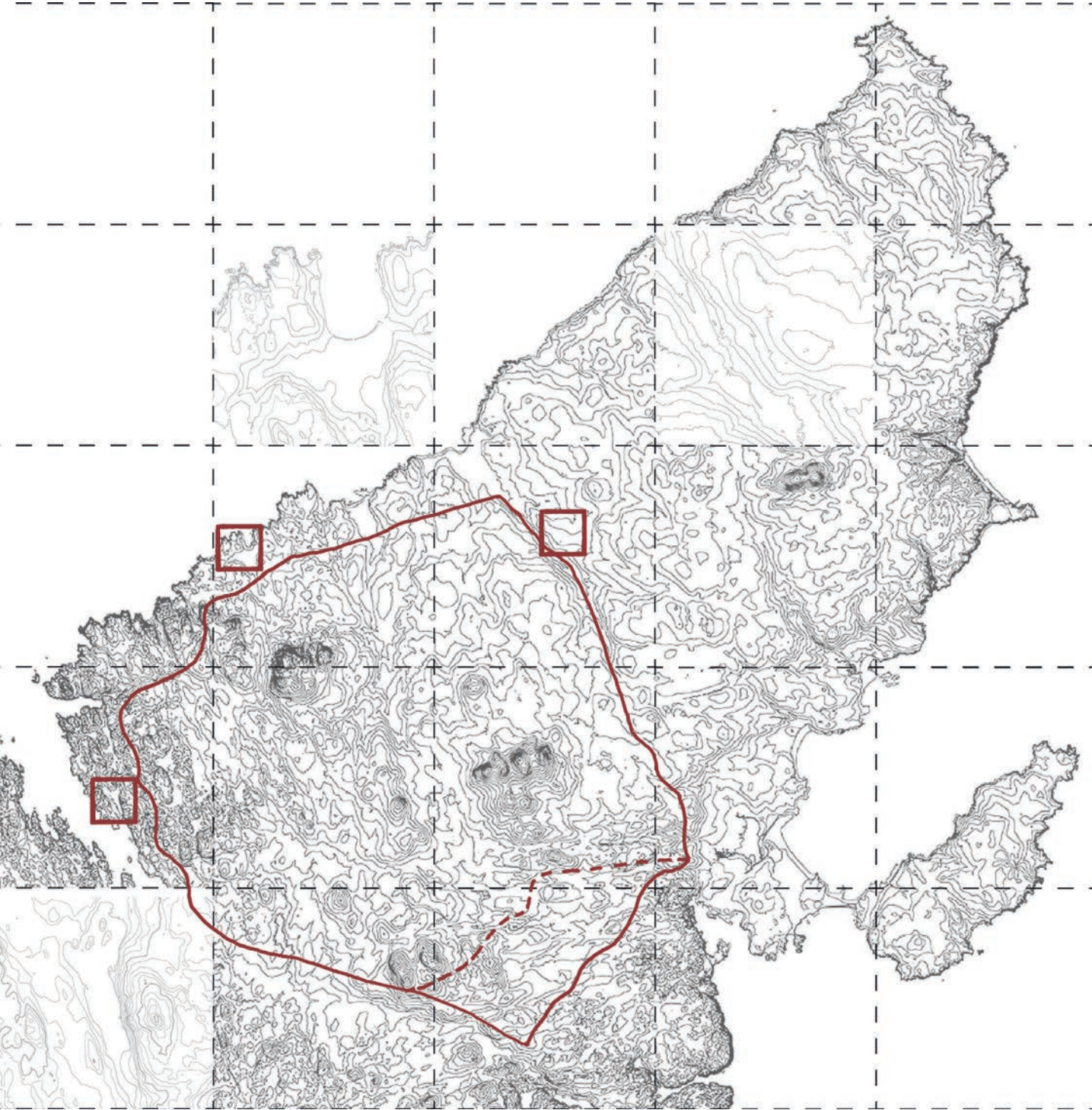


figure 11: site selection.

site selection.



figure 12: field trip visual log.

[FIELD TRIP VISUAL LOG.]

strategy of the “loop”.

[CENTRAL HEARTBEAT OF LEWIS.]

In approaching the question of site selection, the geographic focus has been placed deliberately on “the loop” the inner circular route that forms the connective core of the Isle of Lewis. This area is more than a practical crossroads; it is the beating heart of the island’s infrastructure, linking the west coast with the east, and providing a critical junction to all major arteries that extend north to the Butt of Lewis and southward into Harris.

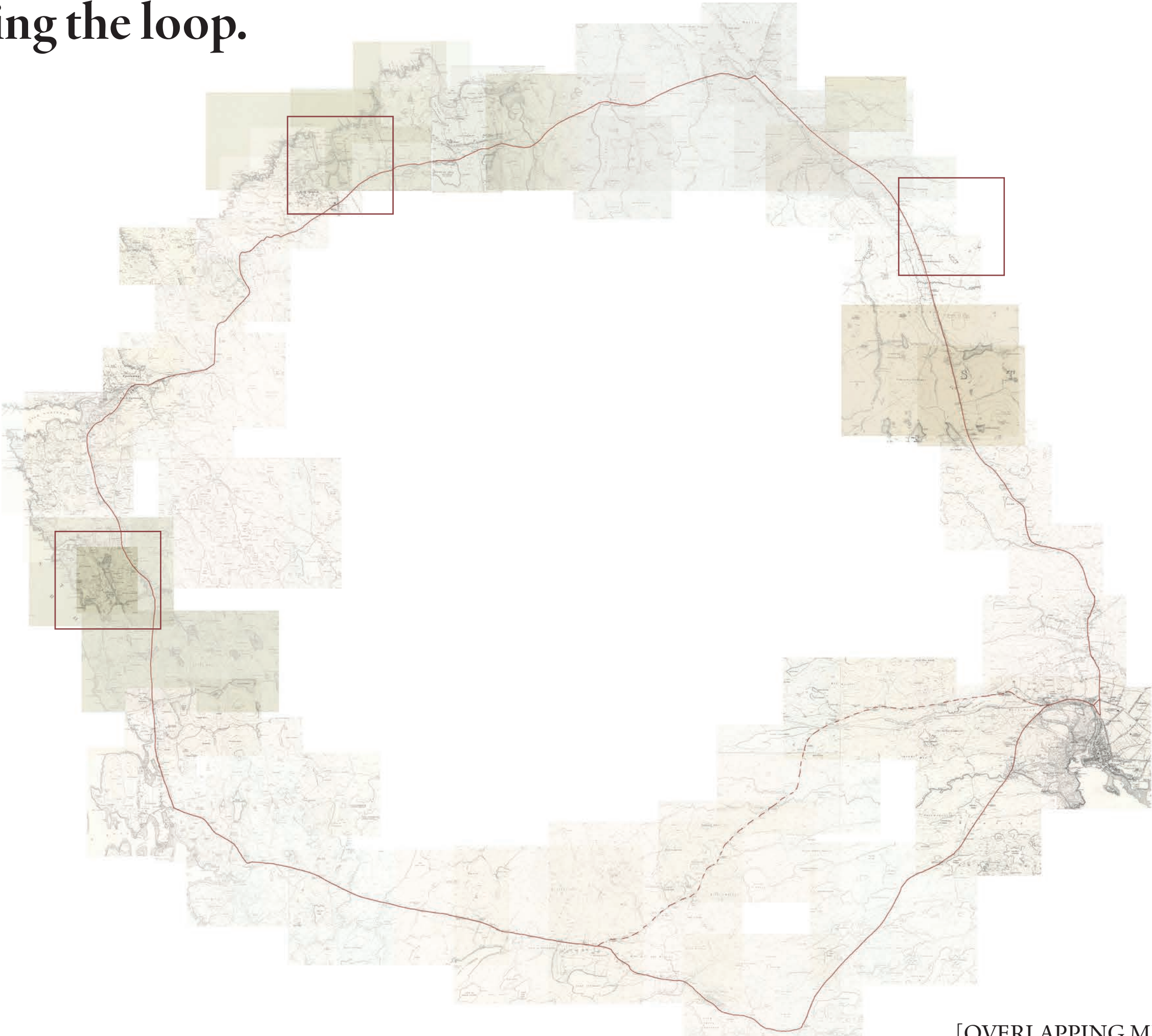
By concentrating efforts here, the project embraces the potential of centralised regeneration a single point of revitalisation that ripples outward. The loop is not only physically central but symbolically so, positioned within proximity to settlements, crofting lands, key cultural assets, and transport links. It offers the ideal foundation for a networked approach to community-led revival, one that strengthens what is already in place while acting as a launchpad for wider impact.

Fixing or reinvesting in this central area does not isolate; it connects. In doing so, it reactivates dormant links and sets in motion a new kind of accessibility, not just in the literal sense of roads and routes, but in the cultural and economic flows that traverse the Hebrides. As such, the loop becomes a place of both gathering and departure a central area around which memory, movement, and making can orbit.



figure 13: “heart” of lewis.

mapping the loop.



[OVERLAPPING MEMORIES.]

figure 14: mapping the loop.

a productive landscape.

[SOURCE LOCAL.]

In the context of the Outer Hebrides, particularly the Isle of Lewis, sourcing building materials locally is not only a nod to tradition but also a practical necessity. The island’s exposure to high wind speeds, like the Butt of Lewis “the windiest place in the UK” makes traditional timber construction less viable due to the lack of forestry and the challenges posed by such severe climatic conditions.

Historically, the vernacular architecture of Scotland has relied heavily on locally available materials. Structures like blackhouses and crofters’ cottages were constructed using stone, turf, and thatch, materials that provided resilience against the harsh weather and integrated seamlessly with the landscape . This tradition underscores the importance of utilizing indigenous resources to create sustainable and contextually appropriate buildings.

In modern sustainable construction, hempcrete a bio-composite made from the inner core of the hemp plant mixed with a lime-based binder has emerged as an eco-friendly alternative to conventional building materials. Hempcrete offers excellent insulation properties and is considered almost carbon-negative, capturing carbon dioxide during the hemp growth cycle . Incorporating hemp cultivation into the Isle of Lewis’s agricultural practices could revitalise crofting, promote land use, and provide a renewable resource for construction, aligning with the island’s sustainability goals.

Additionally, the use of locally sourced stone for facades not only connects new constructions to the island’s architectural heritage but also ensures durability and reduces transportation emissions. Similarly, sourcing sand and aggregate from local suppliers like Angus Maciver Ltd. supports the local economy and minimises the carbon footprint associated with material transport .

By focusing on local material sourcing, hemp for insulation and hempcrete, stone for structural integrity, and locally obtained sand and aggregate, construction on the Isle of Lewis can achieve greater self-sufficiency. This approach not only honours traditional building practices but also addresses modern sustainability challenges, ensuring that new developments are resilient, environmentally responsible, and deeply rooted in the local context.

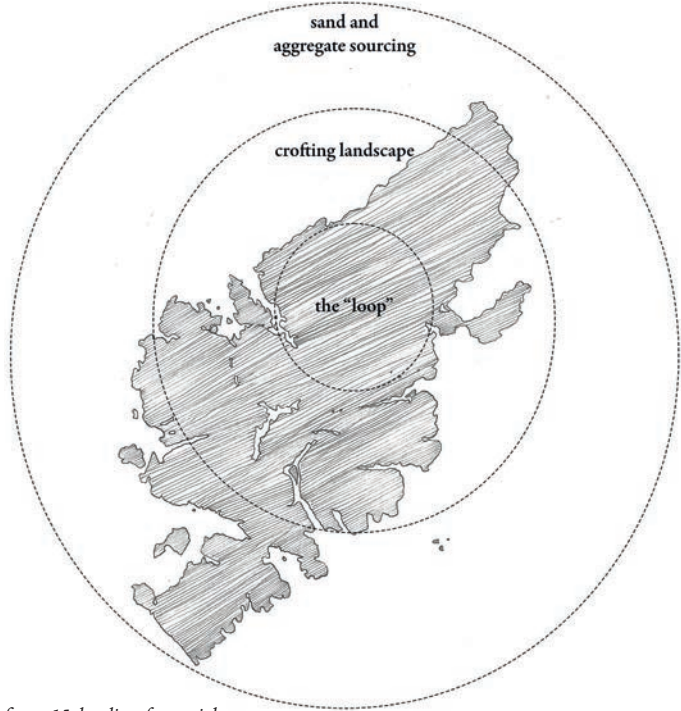


figure 15: locality of materials.

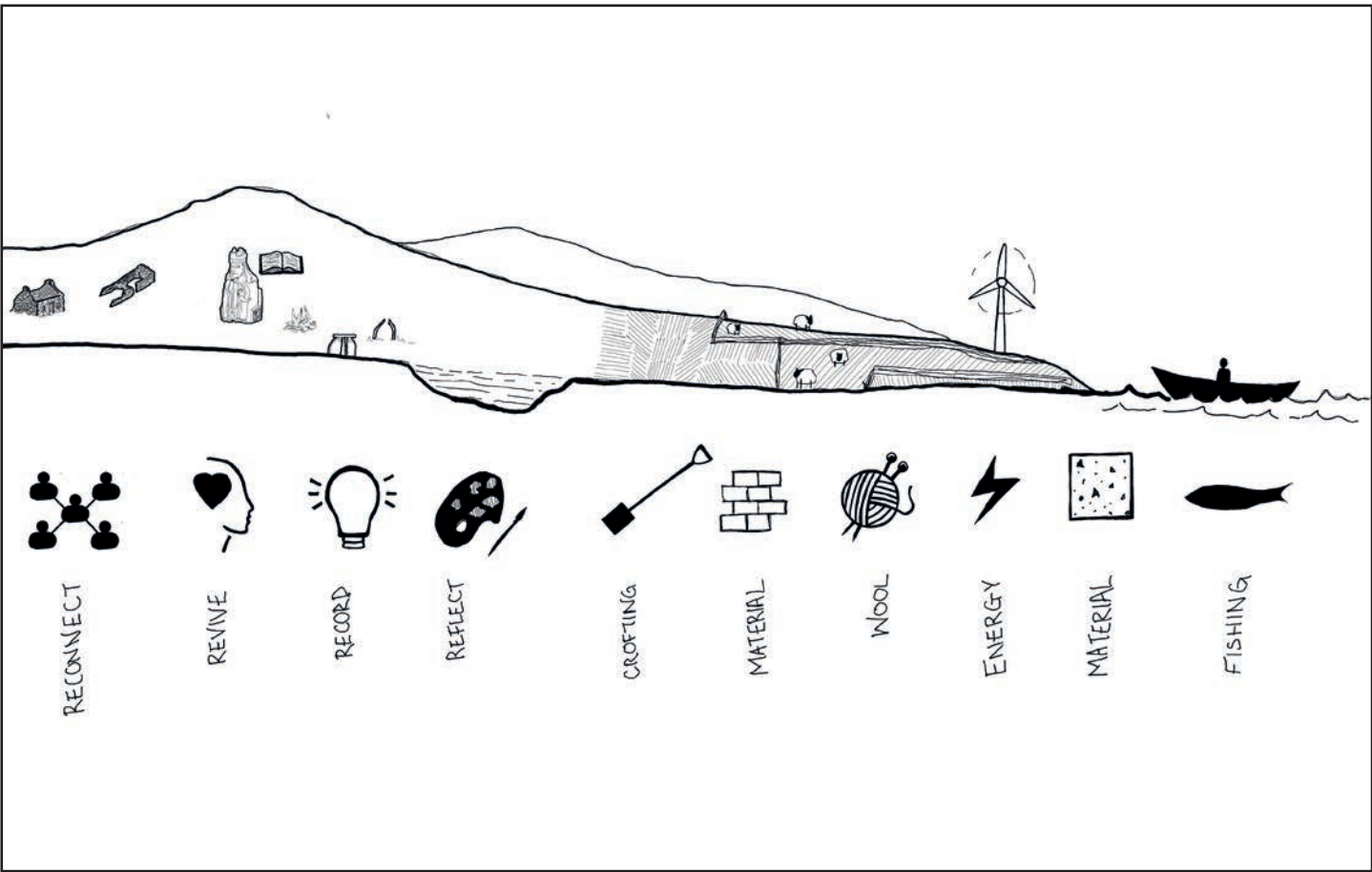


figure 16: proposed valley section.

coastal edge.

[A PLACE TO RECORD.]



Shawbost represents a landscape where land meets the Atlantic with force and permanence. Defined by rocky coastlines and vast open skies, it is a place where the natural elements have sculpted both the geography and the people. This site was selected not only for its raw physical beauty but because it holds personal significance tied to paternal lineage, heritage held within the rugged cliffs and salt-laden winds. Shawbost symbolises resilience, the need to endure in the face of constant exposure to the elements, an idea mirrored in the strong community ties that have historically sustained island life. Choosing Shawbost recognises the importance of heritage lived at the edge, where cultural memory and the wildness of place are inseparable.

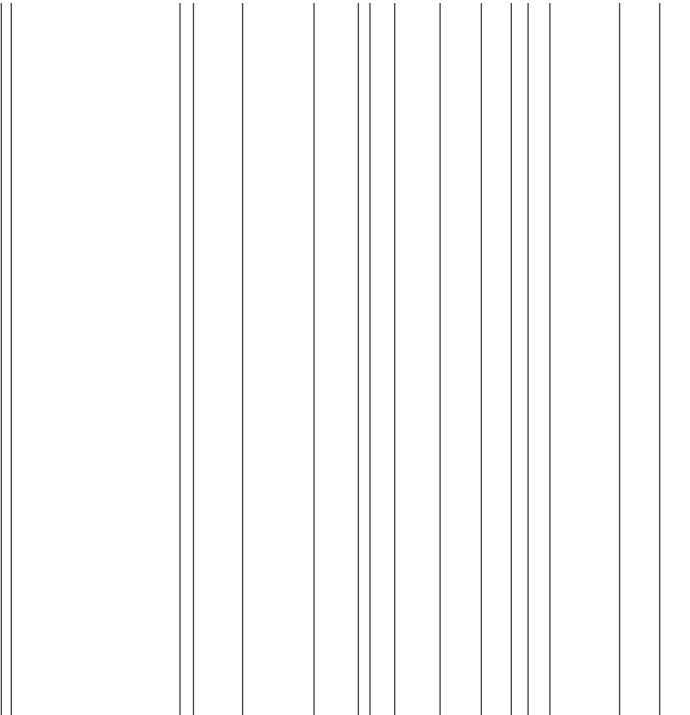


figure 17: shawbost land patterns, contours analysis.



figure 18: land patterns shawbost, contours.



figure 19: land patterns shawbost, crofts.



figure 20: shawbost, site within context.

shawbost.
58.3368119, -6.6972241

landscape identity: rugged coastline
colours: sea blues, sand and rugged stone coasts machair light grass.
character: edged dynamic and defiant.



lochside enclosure.



Set against a backdrop of rolling hills and centred around a serene loch, Tolsta Chaolais embodies a sheltered, intimate connection between people and land. The choice of this site is deeply rooted in personal heritage; my maternal lineage traces directly to this village. Here, the crofting way of life was intimately tied to the natural rhythms of the landscape, where land and community formed a mutually sustaining bond. The gently enclosed topography creates a sense of protection and belonging, which mirrors the collective memory of close-knit Gaelic communities. In choosing Tolsta Chaolais, the project honours this enduring relationship, seeking to revive the land as a living space of memory, resilience, and daily life.

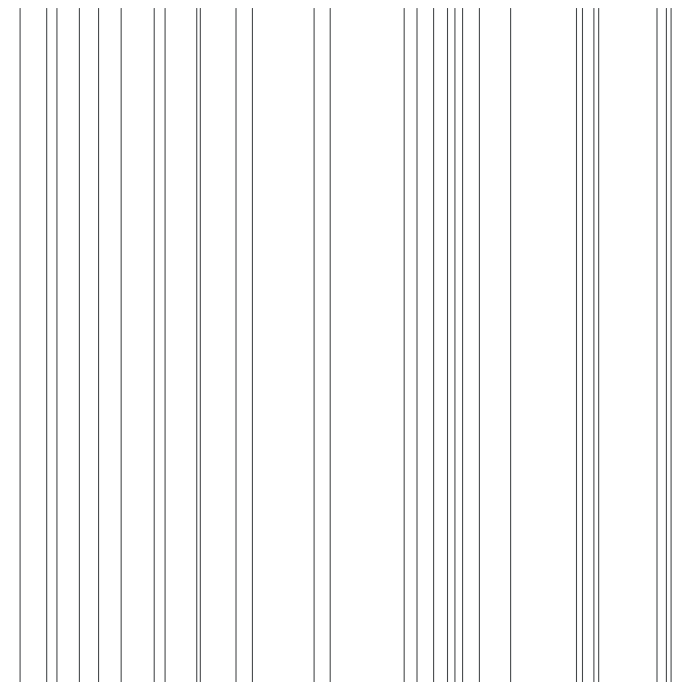


figure 21: tolsta chaolais land patterns, contours analysis.

[A PLACE TO REFLECT.]

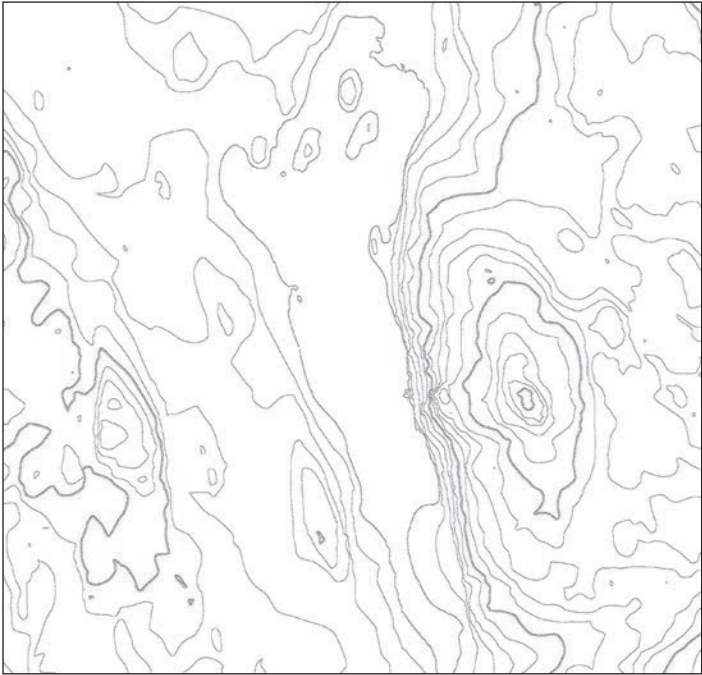


figure 22: land patterns tolsta chaolais, contours.



figure 23: land patterns tolsta chaolais, crofts.



figure 24: tolsta chaolais, site within context.

tolsta chaolais village.

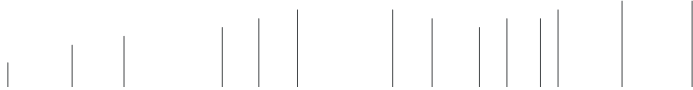
58.2385034, -6.7801282

landscape identity: loch side village encircled by rolling hills.
colours: deep loch blue, moss greens and yellow accent.
character: sheltered, introspective, storied.



moorland expanse.

[A PLACE TO REVIVE.]



Barvas Moor stretches outward with a profound openness, characterised by vast expanses of deep peatland and the muted tones of heather, moss, and stone. Unlike the enclosed intimacy of Tolsta Chaolais or the dramatic meeting of land and sea in Shawbost, Barvas embodies the elemental vastness of Lewis. This landscape type reflects a different form of memory: one that is wide, communal, and shared across distances, evoking the historical crofting practices that once flourished here. By choosing Barvas, the project acknowledges the understated but vital role that moorland has played in shaping Hebridean life, and the physical embodiment of memory within the peat banks; sustaining communities through grazing, peat cutting, and shared stewardship of the land. It is a landscape that demands a deep reading of place, patience, and mutual reliance.

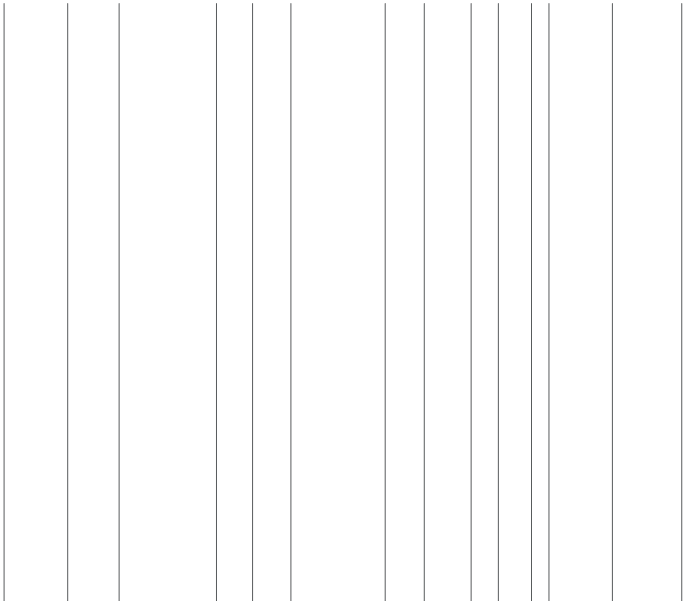


figure 25: barvas land patterns, contours analysis.

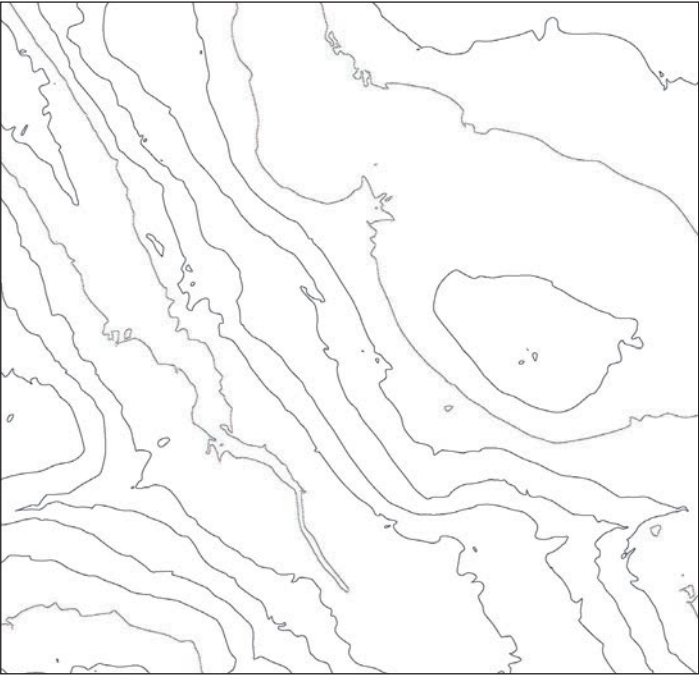


figure 26: land patterns barvas, contours.



figure 27: land patterns barvass, crofts.

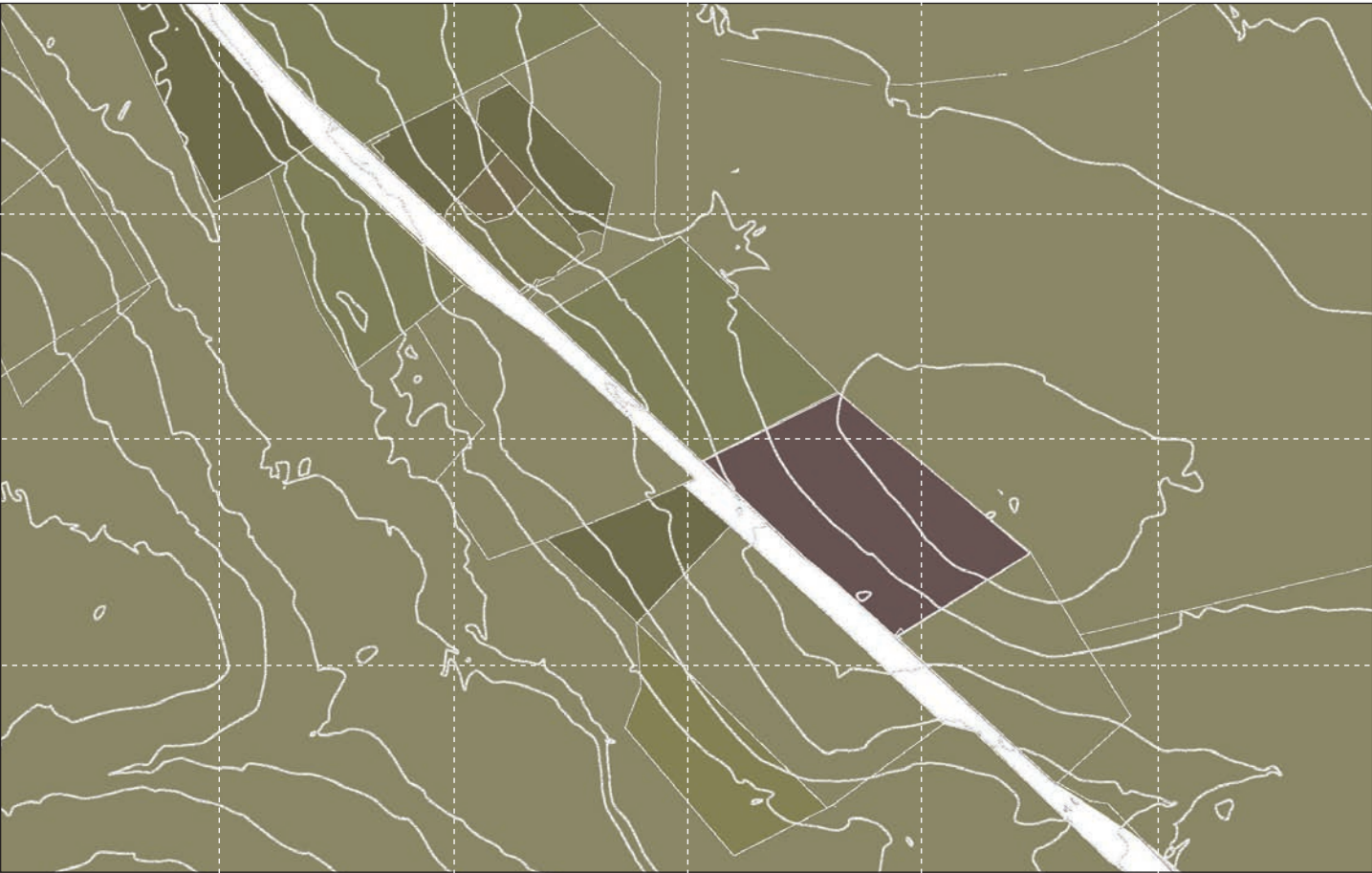


figure 28: barvas, site within context.

barvas moor.
58.3338983, -6.4824915

landscape identity: deep peatlands, vast moorland.
colours: heather infused greens and browns.
character: expansive, solitary, resilient.



heritage links.

[FAMILIAL LINKS.]

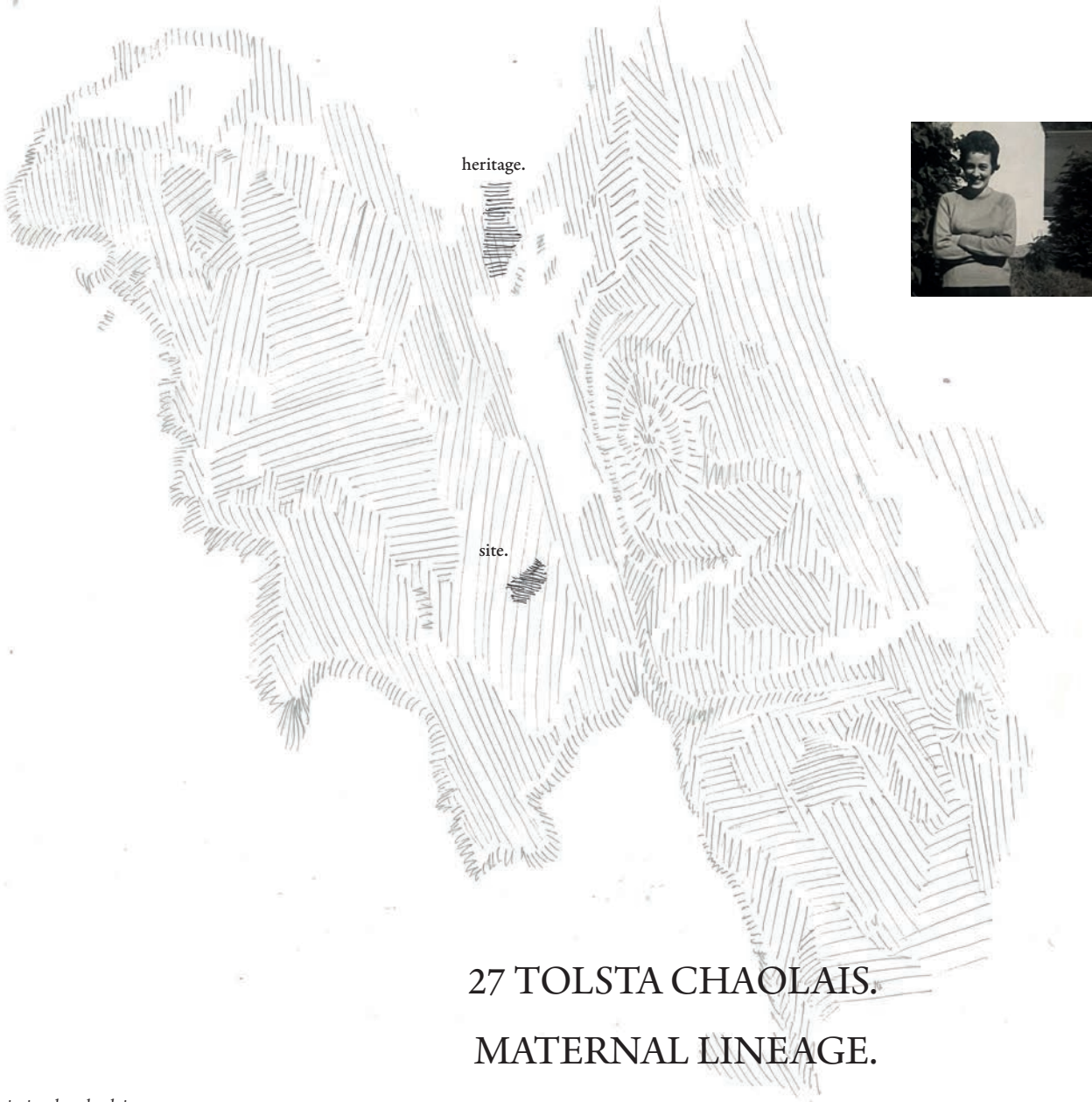


figure 29: heritage link to site in tolsta chaolais.



figure 30: heritage link to site in shawbost.

uisge.

n. masc.
/ʊfɡjə/
pl. -achan

[WATER.]

[UISGE FLOWS THROUGH THE HEBRIDES AS BOTH LIFEBLOOD AND METAPHOR — CARVING LAND, SUSTAINING LIFE, AND CONNECTING COMMUNITIES. IN THIS CHAPTER, WATER BECOMES A SYMBOL FOR NURTURING FORGOTTEN POTENTIAL: OF PEOPLE, PLACE, AND PRODUCTION. IT EXPLORES HOW SMALL-SCALE LAND USE — FROM HEMP CULTIVATION TO WOOL FARMING — CAN NOURISH BOTH ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY, RE-SEEDING SYSTEMS OF CARE. JUST AS UISGE SOFTENS AND SHAPES, SO TOO CAN THE ACT OF STEWARDSHIP SLOWLY RESHAPE THE FUTURE.]

clàraich cuimhne,
meòraich dearbh-
aithne, beòthaich
dualchas, is ceangail
daoine ris an
fhearann.

[TO RECORD MEMORY, REFLECT
IDENTITY, REVIVE TRADITION, AND
RECONNECT PEOPLE WITH PLACE.]

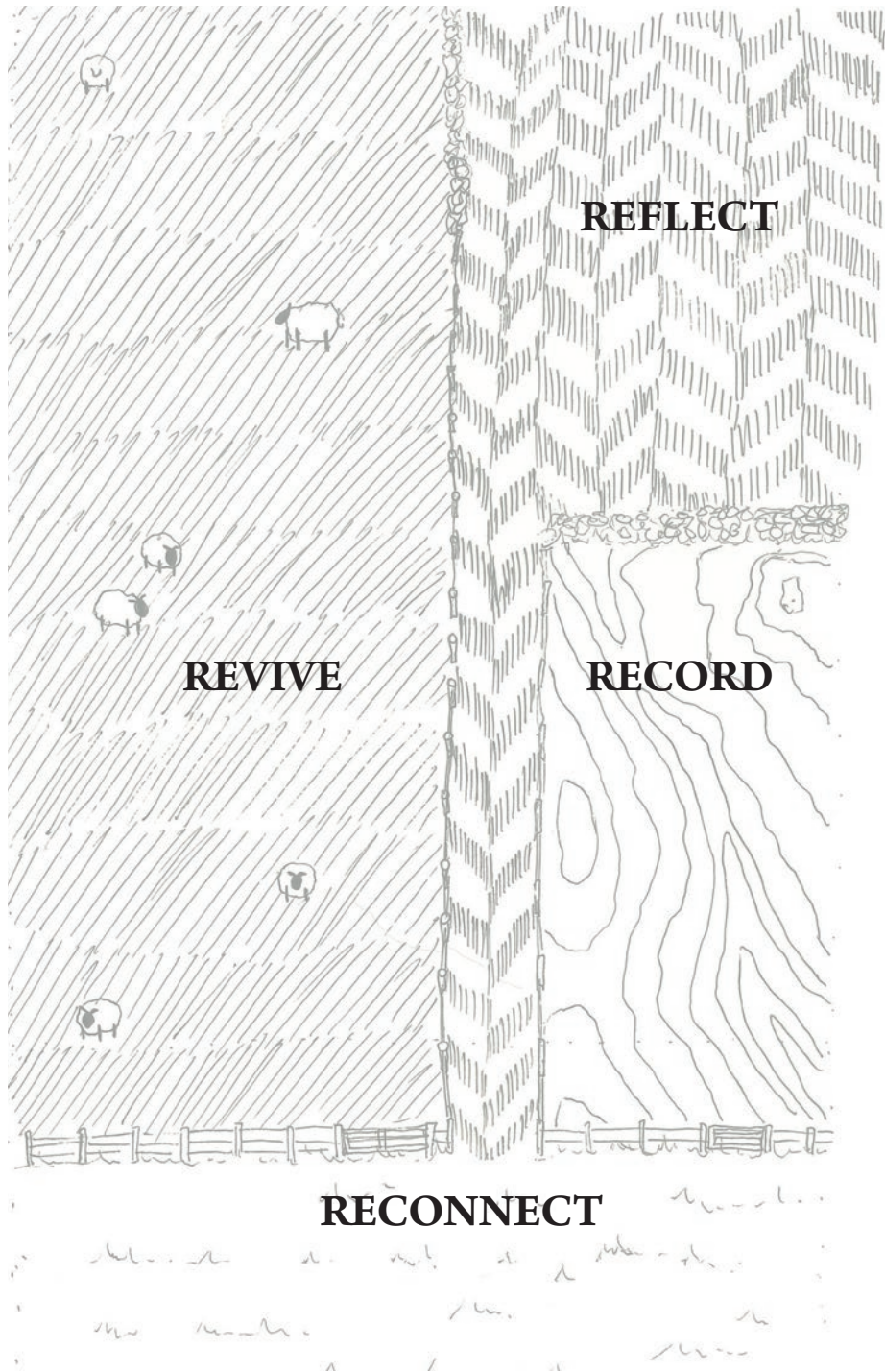


figure 31: theoretical framework diagram.

setting the scene.

[LAND REVIVAL.]

REVIVING THE LAND: HEMP AND WOOL AS REGENERATIVE CATALYSTS

A central strand of this project is the revival of the Hebridean landscape through material-based land use specifically, through the cultivation of hemp and the revival of native wool production. These two materials, deeply rooted in both ecological and cultural relevance, offer tangible opportunities for circular systems of making that re-engage the land while supporting architectural, economic, and heritage-based regeneration.

HEMP: RECLAIMING SOIL, RETHINKING STRUCTURES

Hemp (*Cannabis sativa*) is a fast-growing, low-impact crop known for its capacity to improve soil health, sequester carbon, and remediate land through phytoremediation. It requires relatively low inputs, thrives in temperate maritime climates like that of the Outer Hebrides, and matures within 90–120 days. According to research by the European Industrial Hemp Association, hemp requires well-drained, loamy soil with a pH between 6.0 and 7.5—conditions found in certain areas of the western isles with minimal intervention.

In this project, hemp becomes more than an agricultural crop, becoming a building material. Hempcrete, a bio-composite made by mixing the woody core of the hemp stalk with lime and water, offers thermal insulation, moisture regulation, and carbon-negative construction. Its use ties into the “Record” spatial typology of this project, using data to ascertain crop suitability within the region it is literally embedding land-based data into structure, turning each wall into a record of cultivation, composition, and care. It is an embodied archive of revived land, offering an environmentally responsible solution to rural building needs.

WOOL: FROM LAND TO LOOM TO LIVING HERITAGE

In parallel, native Hebridean sheep and their wool are re-centred in this strategy as both material and cultural capital. Once a vital component of local economies, wool production has seen steep decline, in part due to globalised textile industries and the undervaluing of native breeds. Yet, wool remains a durable, breathable, fire-resistant and renewable material—ideal not only for textiles, but also for insulation, soundproofing, and interior finishes within the Reflect and Revive buildings.

The reinvigoration of local crofts for dual-use land practices, grazing and fibre cultivation, connects material revival with local identity. Through workshops, apprenticeships, and intergenerational exchange in the Revive Land space and Reflect structures, weaving and natural dyeing practices are reintroduced as both craft and cultural resistance. Each woven piece becomes an act of continuity.



figure 32: disjointed land.

material importance.

[TO BE CRAFTED FROM LAND]

In this project, concrete is more than a pragmatic construction material it becomes a symbol of endurance, a medium of memory, and a tool for storytelling. Its use is deeply intentional, both practically and poetically rooted in the Hebridean landscape and culture.

Technically, the decision to use concrete stems from its potential for local sustainability. By sourcing aggregate and sand directly from the Hebridean environment, the project significantly reduces its material footprint. Only the cement binder is imported, making this approach both environmentally conscious and logistically feasible for the islands. In doing so, the built forms become an extension of the land itself, embedding the textures, colours, and geology of place into the very structure.

Yet beyond its sustainability, concrete is employed as a means of recording a material archive that captures the lived experiences of those who pass through and inhabit the space. Like the timeworn crofts and ancient ruins scattered across the islands, these buildings are imagined as future relics, designed to endure and to tell stories long after their builders have gone. They will wear over time, bearing traces of the people, gatherings, and rituals they once sheltered. In this sense, the structures function as an embodied memory, offering physical evidence of the values, traditions, and relationships that shape daily life in the Hebrides.

This gesture aligns with the Gaelic concept of dùthchas. Just as dry-stone walls and blackhouse remains speak silently of past generations, these concrete forms seek to honour the resilience of contemporary island communities while laying foundations for future ones. They are not sleek interventions but honest and grounded, weathering with the environment, refusing to detach from the rhythms and roughness of the place.

Concrete, then, becomes a medium that is at once ancient and forward-looking. It stands as a monument to continuity in a time of rapid cultural and environmental change. These structures physically hold space for Gaelic culture, offering a tactile, enduring reminder of what it means to live with and from the land.

In making use of the land to build, to record, and to last, the project positions architecture not as imposition, but as a respectful and resilient participant in the story of place, one that like the people it serves, endures, adapts, and remembers.

IN THIS WAY HOME IS LAND.

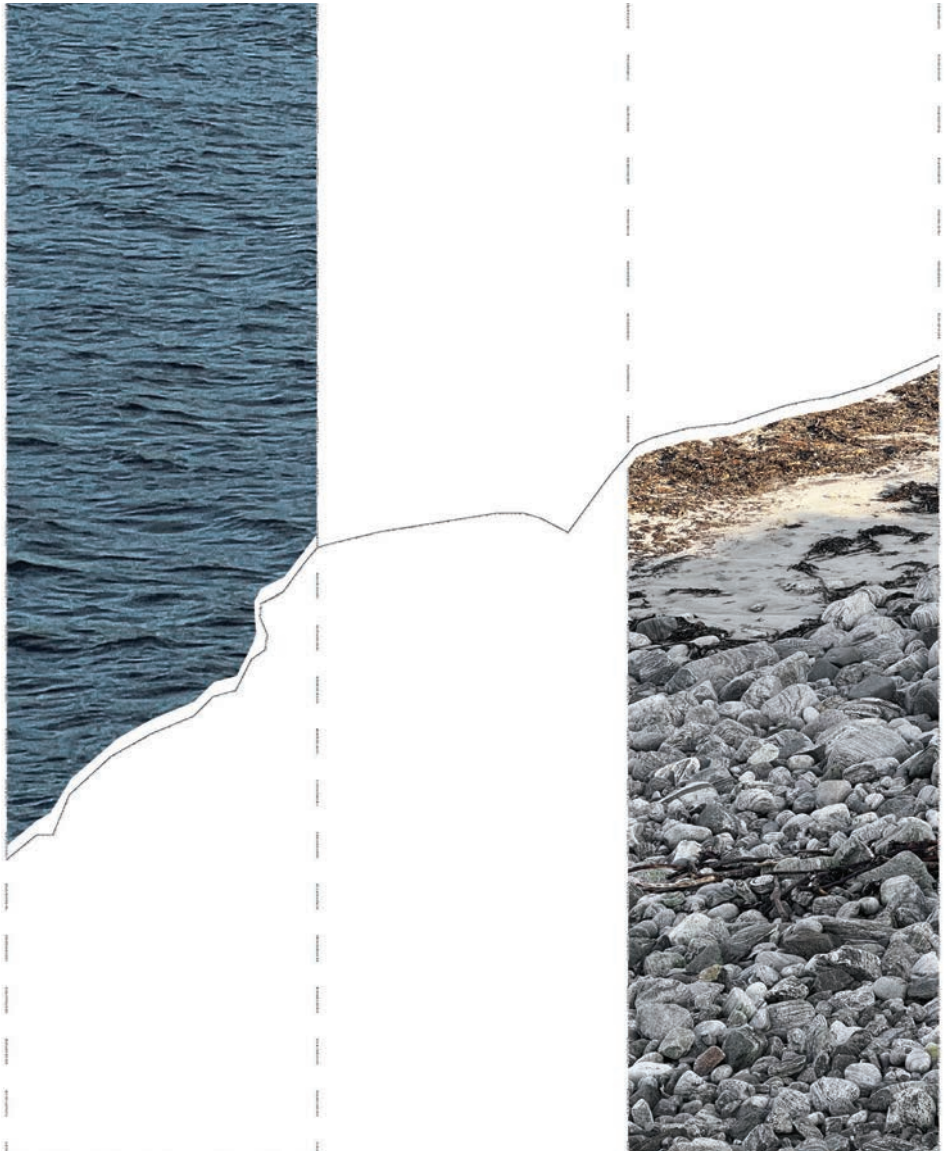


figure 33: texture and shore analysis.

phasing strategy.

[CONTINUOUS VIABILITY.]

PHASE 1: RESEARCH, TESTING, AND TRUST-BUILDING

objective: prove the value and feasibility of the ideas at small scale. build genuine community partnerships.

Pilot Material Trials:

- Small-scale hemp growing test plots in sheltered croft land areas to test viability.
- Experiment with hempcrete and local aggregate concrete in prototype structures.
- Trial small wool collection and processing initiatives tied to weaving workshops.

Community Workshops:

- Run open forums to explore ideas around dùthchas, land use, material making, and recording oral histories.
- Listen deeply: understand what residents truly value and want to prioritise.

First “Record” Prototype:

- Retrofit 1–2 bus stops to act as modest, visually striking recording stations for sound, landscape imagery, and weather.
- Very low budget. Highly visible. Immediate sense of impact.

DELIVERABLES: Material test reports, community engagement documentation, initial ‘Record’ installations

PHASE 2: ESTABLISH LOCAL CAPACITY AND SMALL NETWORKS

objective: enable self-driven growth and revival without overwhelming the community.

Expand the ‘Record’ Network:

Extend bus stop reinterpretations based on community feedback — maybe even allow locals to customise or curate their stops.

Small Revive Centres (Retrofit Airighs/Ruins):

- Target abandoned airighs first — places already part of people’s memory — for careful retrofit.
- Make each revive centre modest, flexible, and culturally specific (e.g., a weaving revival hub, storytelling centre, etc.).

Material Education:

- Set up small-scale craft schools/workshops (early Reflect projects) teaching sustainable building techniques: stonework, hempcrete use, wool weaving.

DELIVERABLES: 3–5 small revived cultural hubs, expanded network of recording structures, community-led training sessions

PHASE 3: BUILD ANCHORS FOR LONG-TERM REGENERATION

objective: root cultural, educational, and material cycles deeper into island life.

Build the first Reflect School:

- Modest arts and crafts centre using hempcrete, local stone, and aggregate concrete.
- Focus initially on serving locals — with tourism as a secondary outcome.

Launch a Material Guild:

- Cooperative models where farmers, weavers, builders share resources to grow hemp, produce textiles, and craft materials sustainably.

Develop Digital Record:

- Create a living digital archive — local oral history, craft techniques, changes to land use — linked back to bus stop recording points.

DELIVERABLES: Reflect Centre built, guilds operating, living heritage archive growing.

PHASE 4: ADAPTIVE GROWTH AND TRANSFERABILITY

objective: create a framework that can be shared globally with other marginalised rural communities.

Publish a Toolkit:

- How to “Record, Reflect, Revive” based on your model.
- Open-source methods for sustainable material building with local adaptations.

Cross-Island Collaboration:

- Expand to neighbouring islands (Harris, Uist, Barra) if locally desired.

Global Applications:

- Seek partnerships with other remote communities facing depopulation and cultural erosion (e.g., Sami regions, Canadian Indigenous communities, etc.)

DELIVERABLES: Toolkit publication, expanded networks across Hebrides and potential pilot in a new country

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gen. -aidh
pl. -aidhean

[HARVEST/RESULT.]

[TORADH MEANS BOTH HARVEST AND RESULT — IT MARKS THE
EMERGENCE OF DESIGN GROUNDED IN CARE, REFLECTION, AND REVIVAL.
THIS CHAPTER PRESENTS THE SPATIAL PROPOSALS THAT FORM THE
HEART OF THE PROJECT: THE REFLECT, RECORD, AND REVIVE NETWORKS,
ROOTED IN THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF DÙTHCHAS. THESE
ARCHITECTURAL INTERVENTIONS EMERGE NOT AS FOREIGN IMPOSITIONS,
BUT AS NATURAL EVOLUTIONS — FORMED FROM THE LANDSCAPE, SHAPED
BY THE PAST, AND MADE FOR A RESILIENT FUTURE.]

to record.

[A PLACE TO RECORD LAND AND MEMORY]

In the Hebrides, much of the land’s history remains undocumented preserved instead through fragile oral traditions and scattered memories. Today, there is a critical gap: a lack of formalised, community-led records that trace the evolving relationship between land, language, and livelihood. Record emerges to address this absence, establishing a permanent structure for gathering, archiving, and safeguarding knowledge from the soil beneath our feet to the stories carried on the wind.

Built with materials sourced almost entirely from the island stone, aggregate, and sand and anchored by minimally imported cement, Record is designed to be elemental and enduring. Thick Lewisian Gneiss walls and a west-facing lens-like window root the building in the land’s geological and cultural memory. It is a space not of spectacle but of stewardship: where the changing weather, oral histories, and ecological rhythms are recorded as living evidence of human and environmental continuity.

This project fills a vital gap in local infrastructure. It creates a physical land archive and research station dedicated to recording soil quality, biodiversity, language use, craft techniques, and material viability (such as hemp and wool for regenerative practices). Observation here is not abstracted science, but a way of continuing ancient stewardship traditions — where to know the land is to care for it.

In line with Tim Ingold’s idea of taskscape, where life unfolds through active engagement with land, Record proposes that the landscape itself becomes the syllabus: learning is lived, not taught. The building thus becomes a tool for everyday interaction, welcoming both structured research and casual, daily observation.

Extending from the main archive, a network of adapted brutalist bus shelters — the “Four Winds” structures — are retrofitted into recording stations. Equipped with simple instruments to capture wind, rain, sound, and atmospheric conditions, these modest interventions decentralise the act of recording. They offer small moments for locals and visitors alike to listen, to document, and to reflect.

Ultimately, Record offers an act of reclamation. It resists the history of landscapes narrated through colonial or romanticised lenses, and instead equips the community with the means to study, preserve, and celebrate their own living culture and environment. The archive grows not in glass vitrines, but through the textures of stone, the sweep of moorland, and the whispered testimonies of the Atlantic winds.

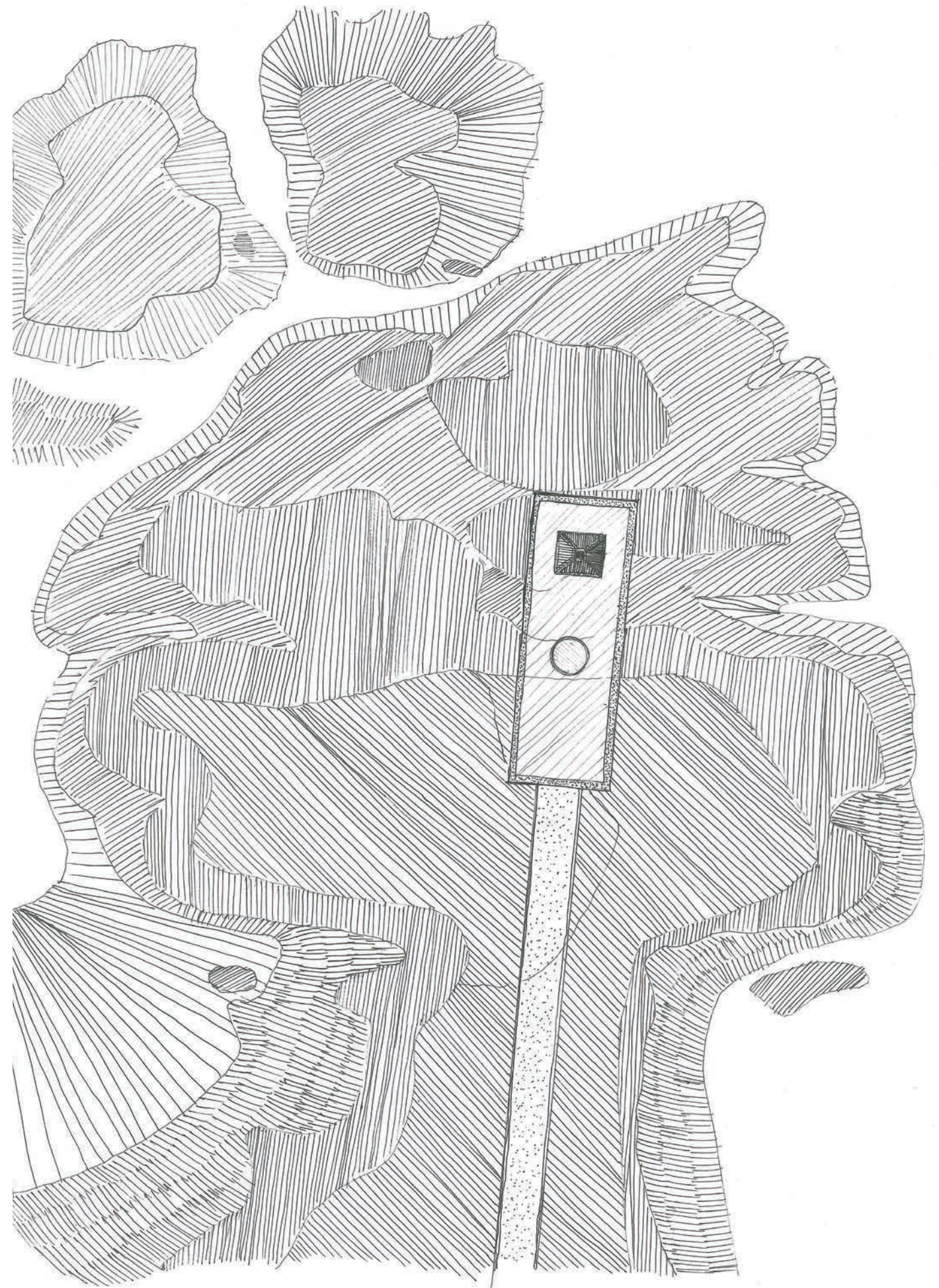
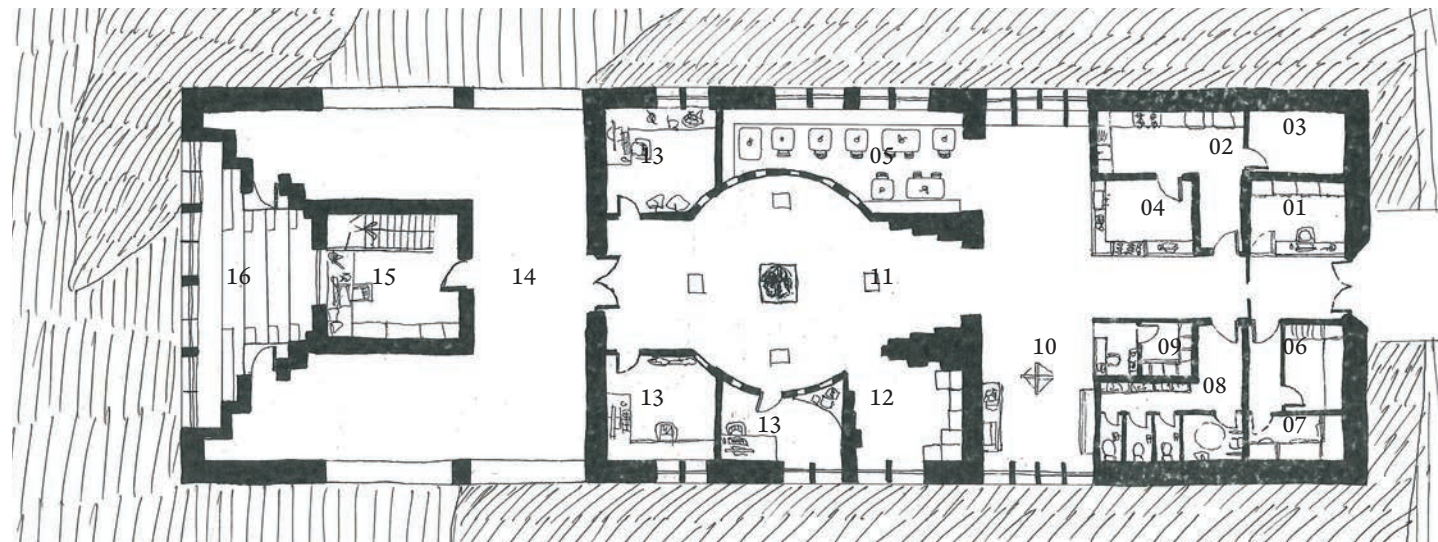


figure 34: shawbost site plan. 1:500.



[OBSERVATORY.]

- 01 reception
- 02 kitchen
- 03 BOH store
- 04 cafe
- 05 cafe seating
- 06 store
- 07 plant room
- 08 wc
- 09 store
- 10 shop
- 11 exhibition space
- 12 sample room
- 13 research rooms
- 14 immersive observation
- 15 telescope room
- 16 observation room

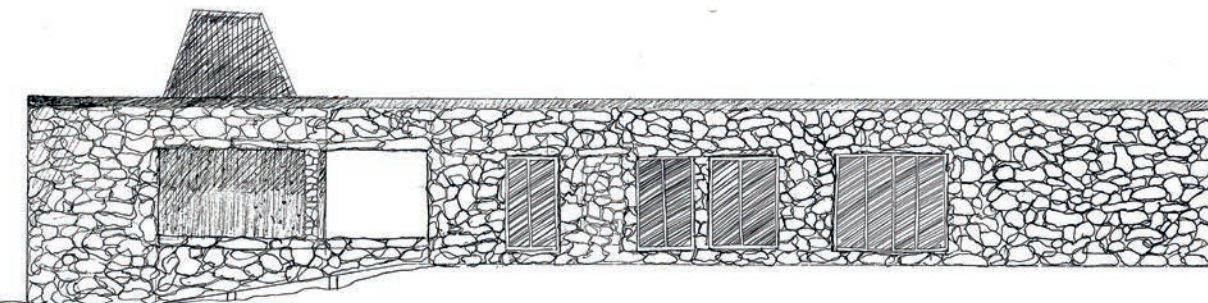
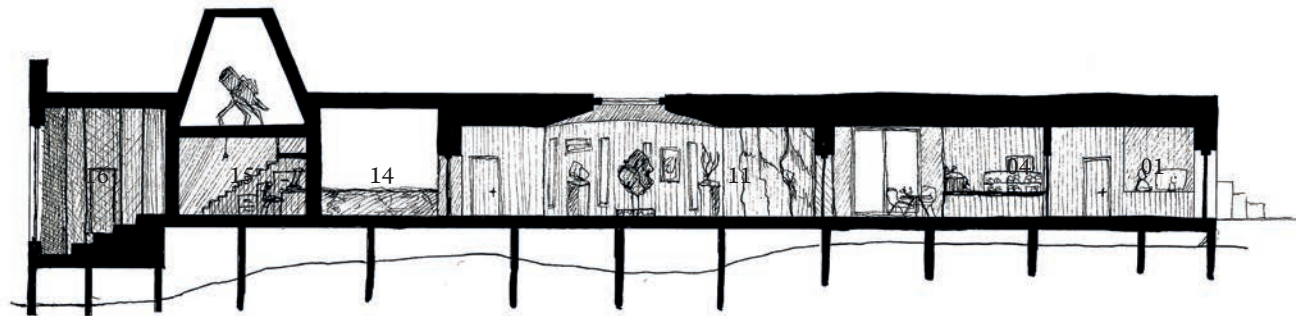


figure 35: shawbost orthogonal drawings. 1:200.



figure 36: shawbost. to enter.



figure 37: shawbost. overview.



figure 38: shawbost. interior.

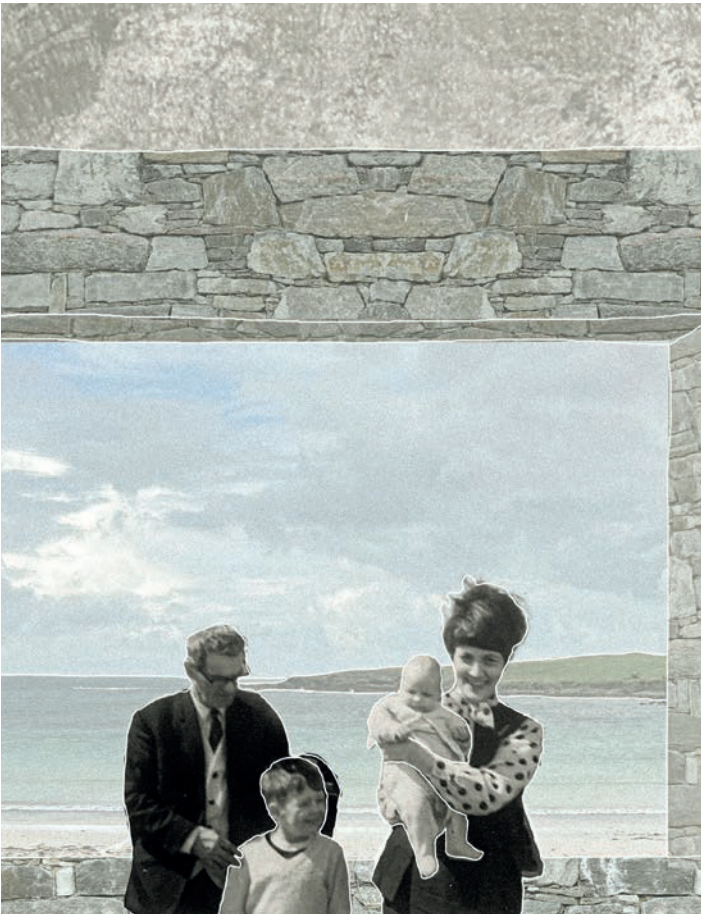


figure 49: shawbost. viewing deck.

to reflect.

[A PLACE TO REFLECT LOCAL INTERPRETATIONS]

For generations, the Outer Hebrides have often been depicted through the outsider's gaze, their landscapes romanticised, their communities misunderstood. Yet within the islands themselves, there remains a striking absence of formal spaces for nurturing local creative expression, especially among younger generations.

Reflect responds to this gap. It offers a place where learning, making, and cultural interpretation are rooted in the lived experiences of islanders themselves.

Designed as a small art and craft school, Reflect draws inspiration from the blackhouse typology, a modest, communal structure where everyday life was intimately bound to the land. Here, islanders shape their own artistic narrative, reclaiming the right to represent their culture not as static heritage but as a living, evolving practice.

This space addresses the fragility of intangible cultural heritage from weaving, carving, and storytelling to the oral traditions of the Gaelic language. Workshops led by locals for locals create an intergenerational platform where knowledge is passed not through silent preservation, but through active, tactile engagement. Tourists are welcomed too, not as consumers but as participants, learning within the culture rather than observing it from without.

The building itself embodies these values. Constructed from hempcrete and local aggregate, it evokes the warm, breathable character of historic dwellings. Internal spaces echo the hearth-centred life of the blackhouse, fostering warmth, collaboration, and community.

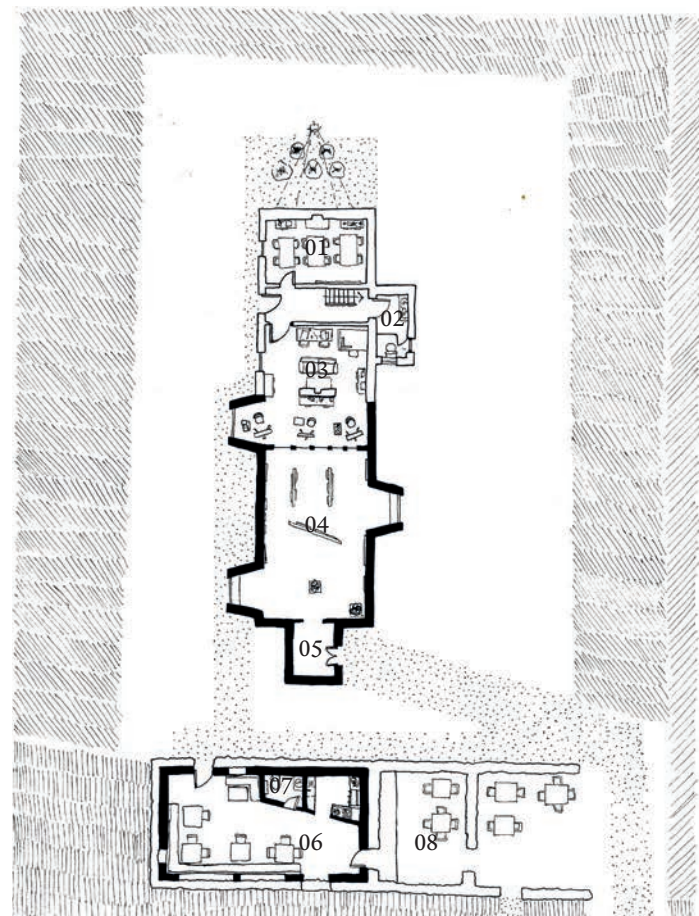
In this way, Reflect becomes both a classroom and a ceremony, a place where tradition is not frozen in time but invited to evolve. It recognises that dùthchas, the deep-rooted bond between land, people, and heritage, is not only lived, but deeply felt, and that creativity is one of its strongest expressions.

Tucked into the folds of the landscape, Reflect acts as a quiet cradle for imagination. Young hands learn the weight of stone, the weave of wool, and the cadence of forgotten words, carrying their culture forward not through nostalgia, but through renewal.

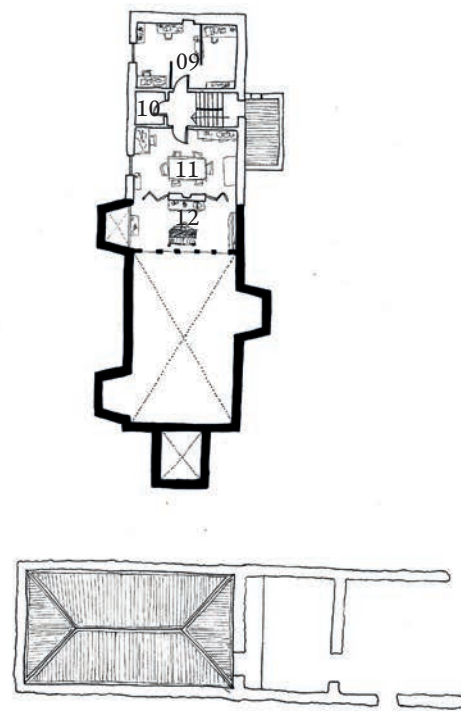
Reflect asserts that the true creative voice of the islands belongs to its own people, offering a space where art, identity, and memory are continuously reinterpreted in response to the land itself.



figure 40: tolsta chaolais. site plan 1:500.



- 01 learning space
- 02 wc
- 03 studio
- 04 exhibition space
- 05 vestibule
- 06 cafe
- 07 wc
- 08 outdoor seating



- 09 resident space
- 10 store
- 11 waulking room
- 12 weaving room



figure 41: tolsta chaolais. orthogonal drawings. 1:200

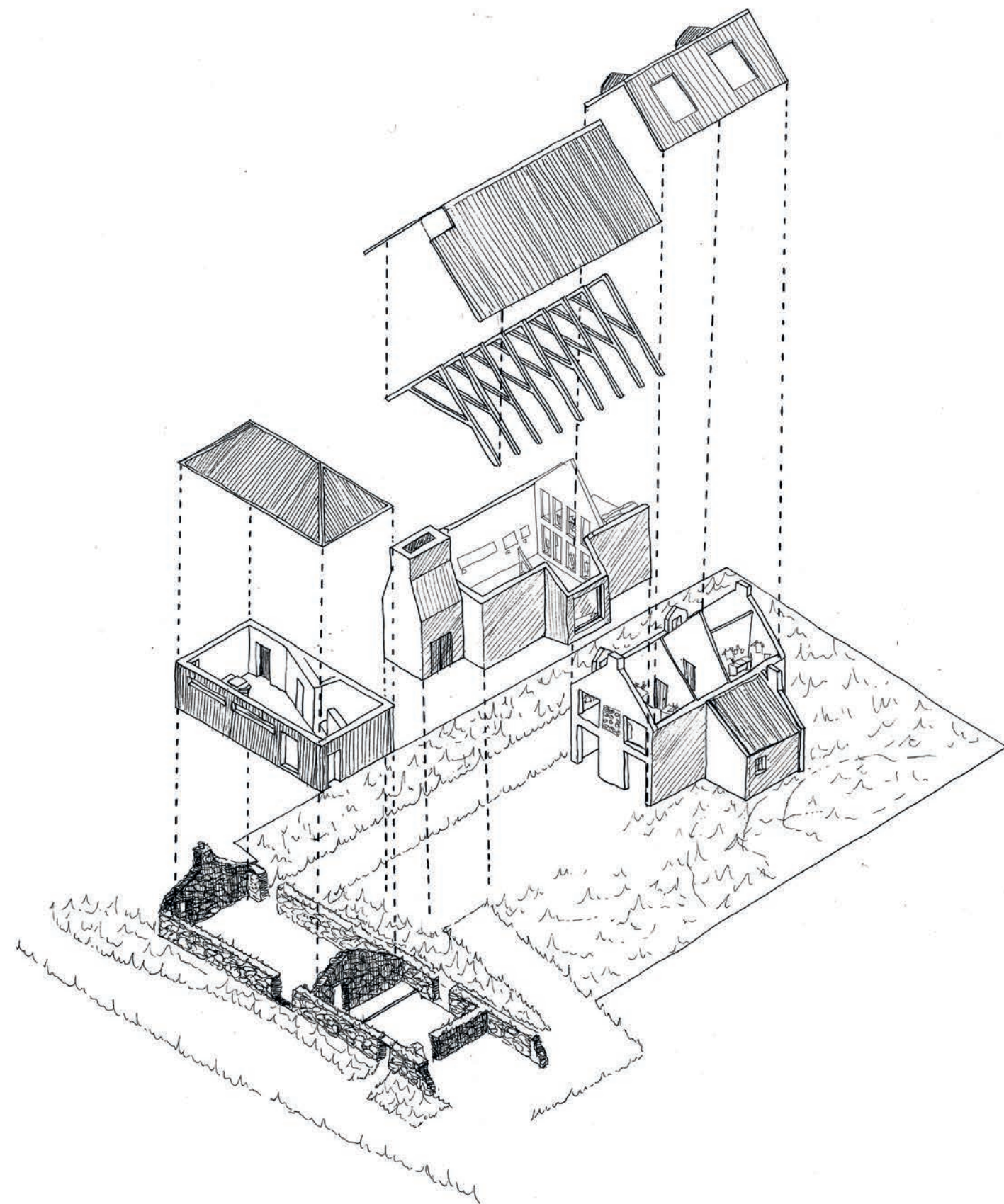


figure 42: tolsta chaolais. exploded axonometric.

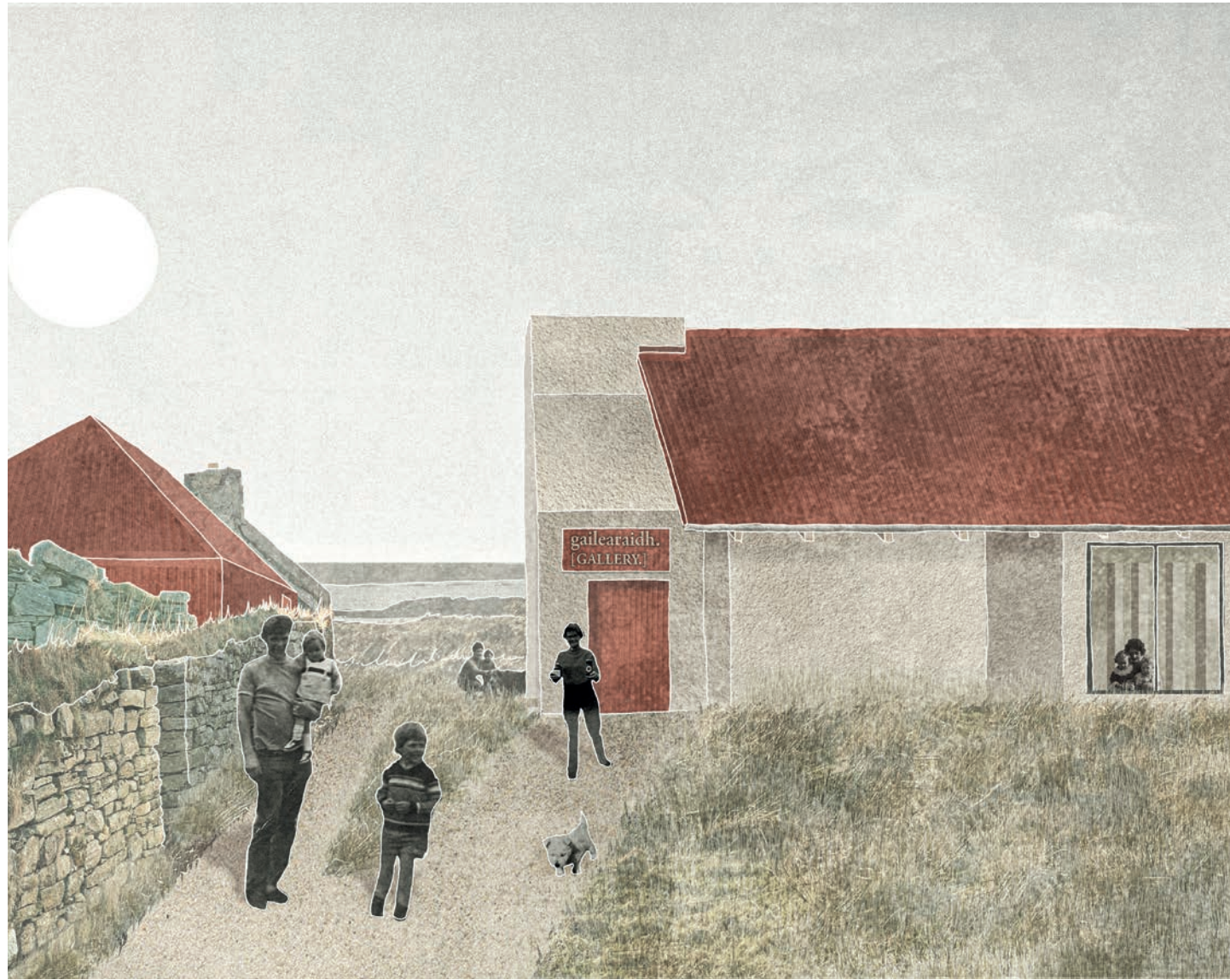


figure 43: tolsta chaolais. approach.

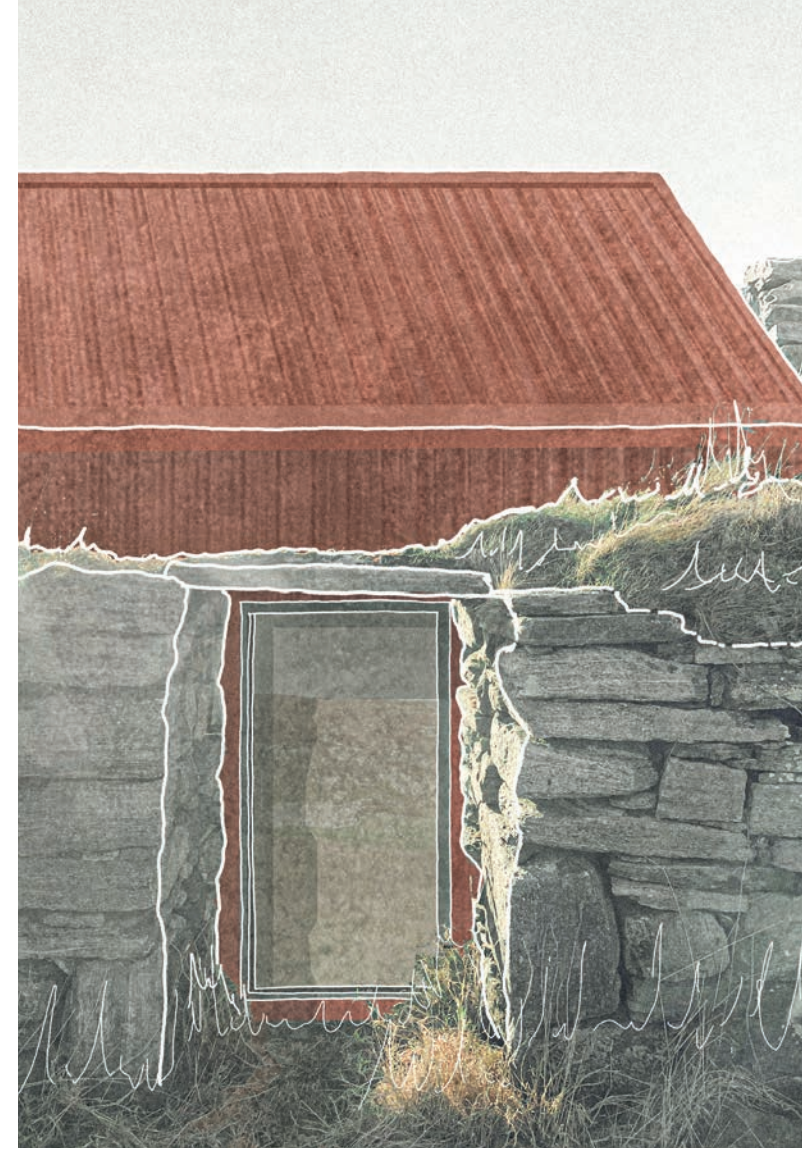


figure 44: tolsta chaolais. layers of interaction.



figure 45: tolsta chaolais.to exhibit and observe.



figure 46: tolsta chaolais. to view land and art.

to revive.

[A PLACE TO REVIVE CULTURE.]

Across the Outer Hebrides, a growing grassroots movement is calling for the revival of traditional practices, crofting, weaving, Gaelic language, and communal celebration, that have been endangered by modern economic pressures. Revive emerges as a direct response to this call: a centre for cultural renewal, reconnection, and continuity.

Where once traditions risked fading into memory, Revive offers a place where they are actively sustained, adapted, and celebrated. It provides a public space designed not for nostalgia but for living culture, a place rooted firmly in the future as much as the past.

The building's form draws from the deep vernacular memory of the islands. Its permanent stone-like walls, reminiscent of ancient standing stones and crofting ruins, stand as monolithic markers within the landscape. These enduring forms create a resilient framework, while the spaces between them remain intentionally adaptable, to be infilled and shaped by the evolving needs of the local community. Workshops, exhibitions, gatherings, and language exchanges, the building flexes to what the people require, resisting fixity and embracing continuous renewal.

Revive acts as a catalyst for intergenerational learning. It hosts workshops in traditional crafts and skills, from peat cutting to storytelling, creating spaces where knowledge is passed directly between generations. It strengthens the bond between land, language, and labour, reinforcing cultural resilience and offering young islanders a vision of a viable, vibrant future on their own terms.

The centre's programme is seasonally activated: ceilidhs, harvest festivals, food markets, and forums on land rights and local agency bring life to its spaces. In this way, Revive asserts that preservation is not enough, it is through celebration and activation that culture survives. This space acknowledges the pressures of depopulation and extraction, and instead, offers rootedness, continuity, and hope.

Revive also redefines the role of visitors: not as consumers of culture but as respectful witnesses. The emphasis remains firmly on local agency, expression, and collective ownership.

Over decades, as the needs of the community change, the Revive structure itself will evolve. In time, the stone walls may weather into the landscape, becoming new ruins, not as monuments to loss, but as quiet testaments to renewal. A future generation may find these stones and see in them the story of a people who chose to stay, to revive, and to belong

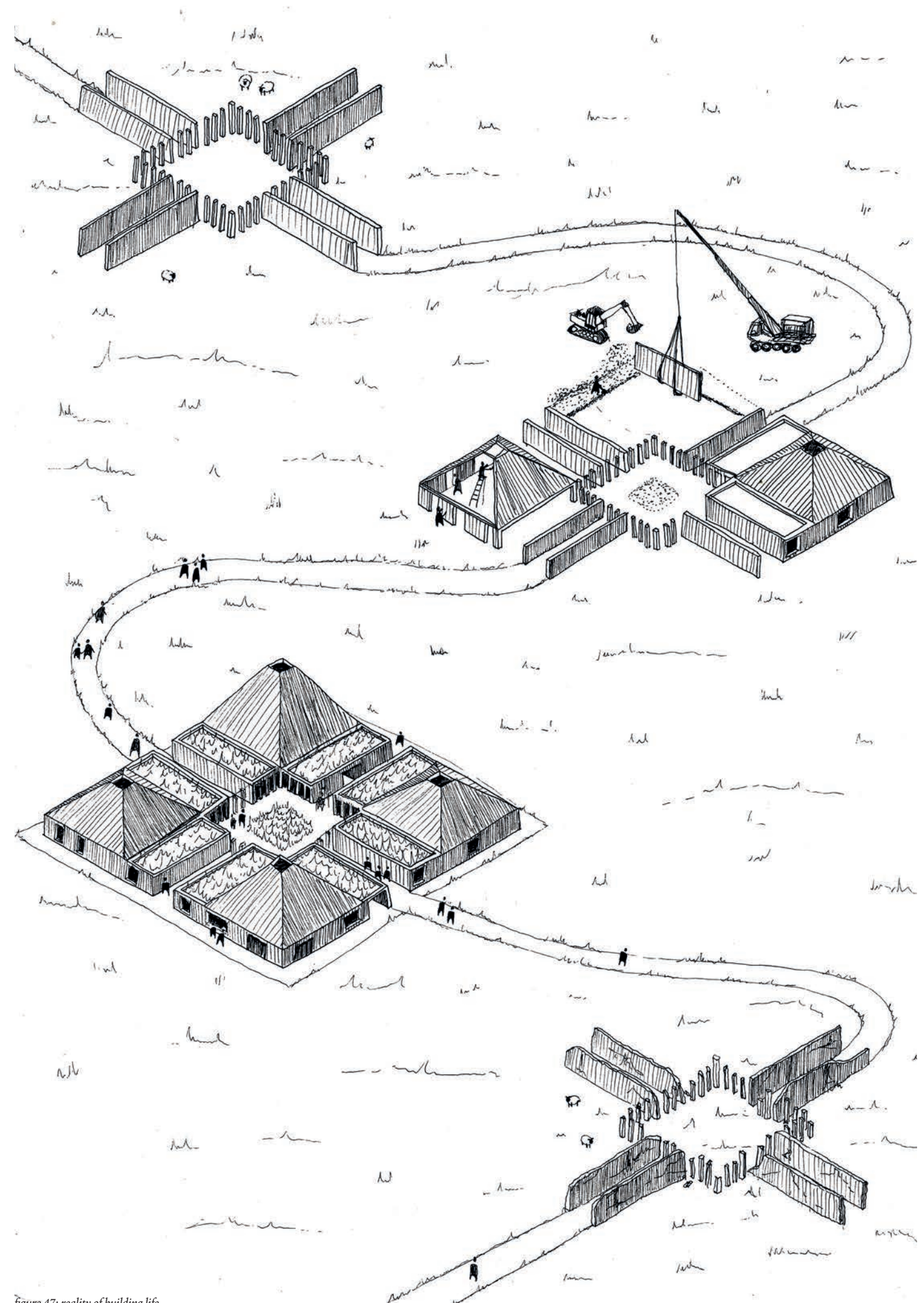


Figure 47: reality of building life.

[LAND.]

- 01 archive
- 02 tool library
- 03 store
- 04 workshop
- 05 wc
- 06 education area
- 07 peat store

[FOOD.]

- 01 indoor seating
- 02 wc
- 03 bar area
- 04 kitchen
- 05 food store
- 06 outdoor seating

[LANGUAGE.]

- 00 link
- 01 conversation rooms
- 02 office
- 03 wc
- 04 store
- 05 library
- 06 flexible learning space
- 07 informal learning area
- 08 recording studio

[STORYTELLING.]

- 00 link
- 01 storytelling hearth
- 02 office
- 03 store
- 04 green room
- 05 wc
- 06 story room
- 07 story room

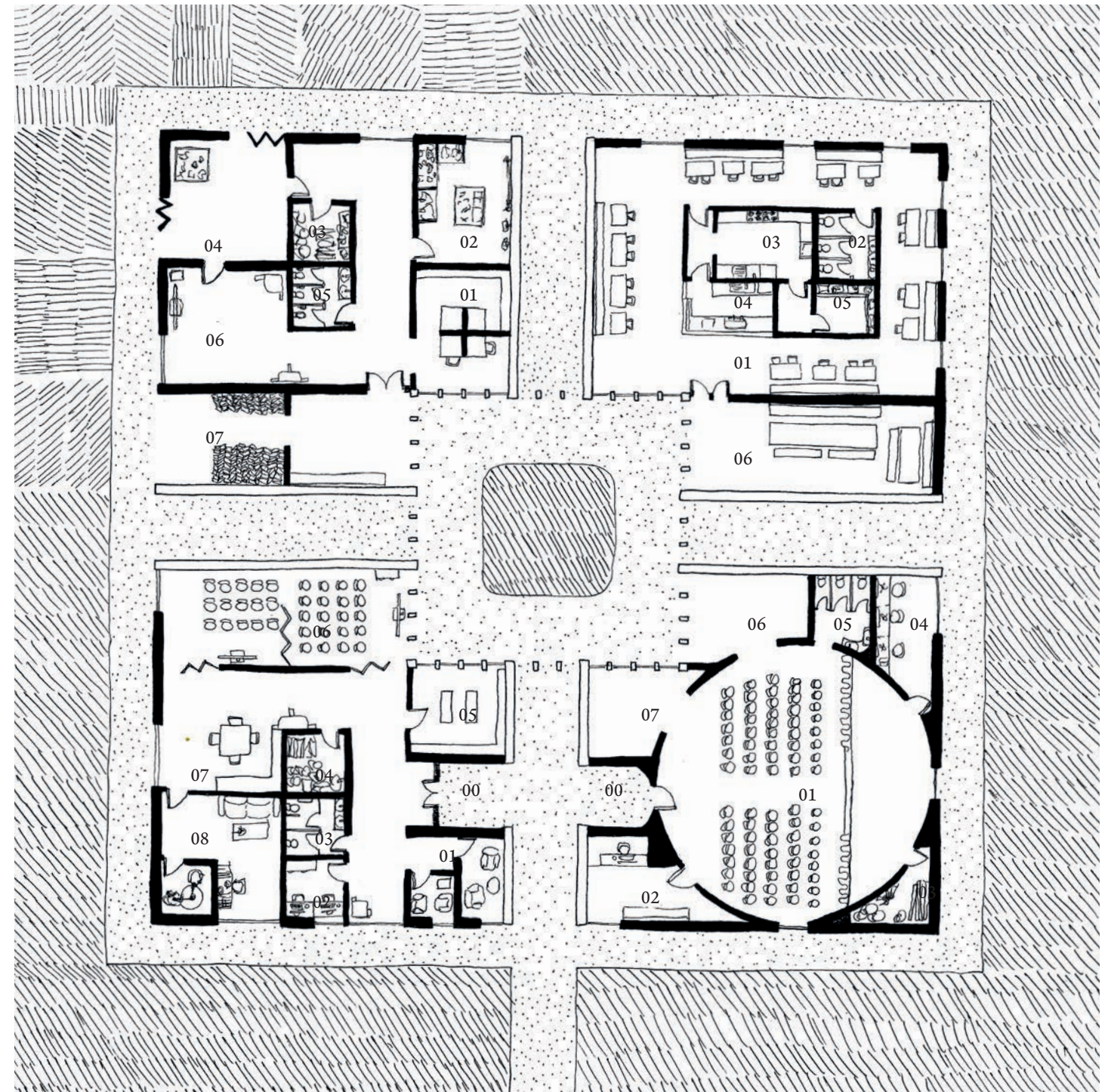
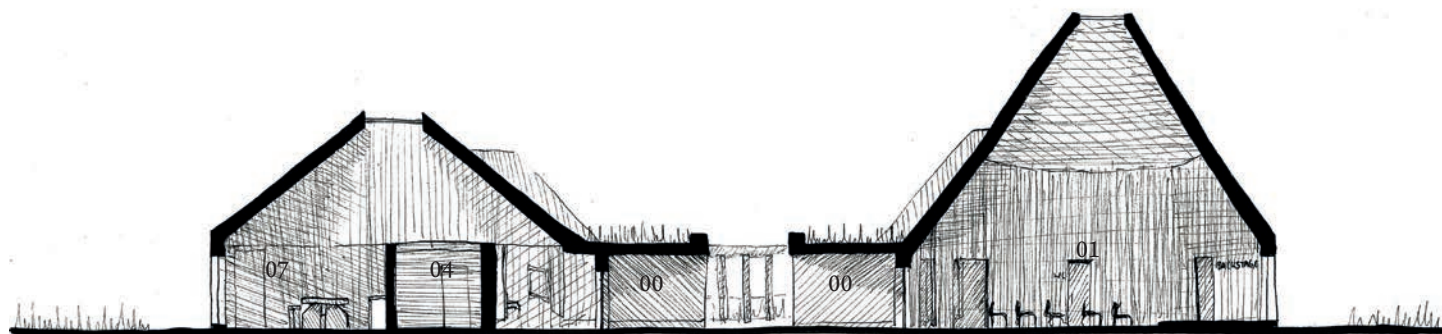


figure 48: barvas orthogonal drawings. 1:200.



figure 49: the hearth.



figure 50: language centre, connection to hearth.



figure 51: to gather and share within the restaurant.

site elevations.

[TO SIT WITHIN CONTEXT.]

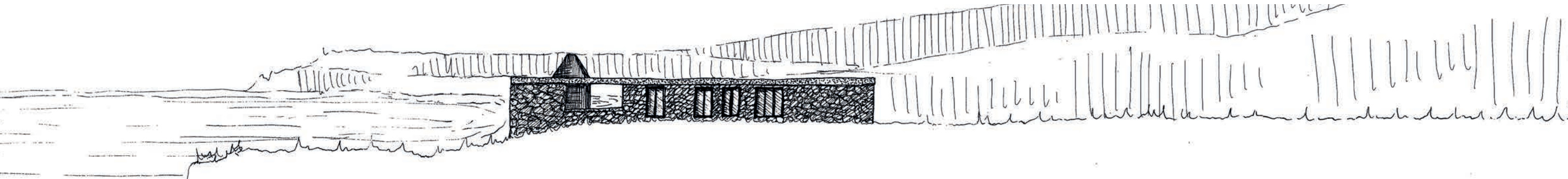


figure 52: to record within the landscape.

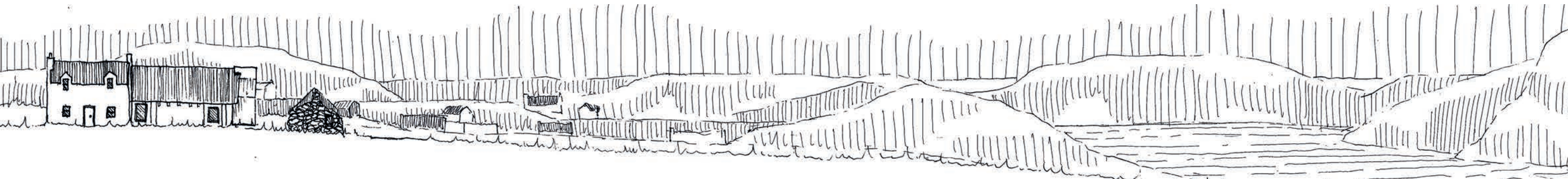


figure 53: to reflect with authenticity.

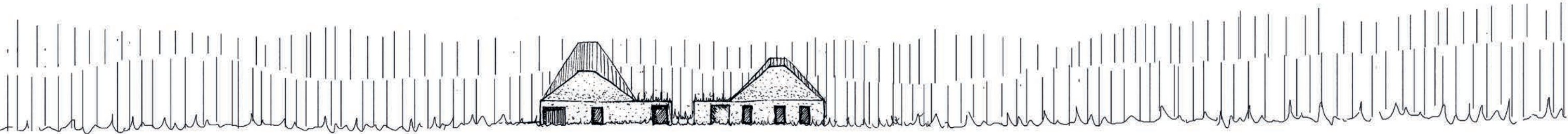


figure 54: to revive for resilience.

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[TO CONNECT.]

[IN A LANDSCAPE AS DISPERSED AS THE ISLE OF LEWIS, CONNECTION IS A NECESSITY. COMMUNITIES ARE SPREAD THINLY ACROSS SCATTERED SETTLEMENTS, SEPARATED BY MOORLAND AND LONG STRETCHES OF SINGLE-TRACK ROADS. A SINGLE CENTRALISED INTERVENTION WOULD RISK ALIENATING THE VERY PEOPLE IT SEEKS TO SUPPORT. CEANGAIL RECOGNISES THAT RESILIENCE IN RURAL AREAS DEPENDS ON A NETWORKED APPROACH: A CONSTELLATION OF SMALLER, LOCALLY-ROOTED STRUCTURES LINKED BY SHARED PURPOSE AND MUTUAL SUPPORT. THROUGH ESTABLISHING A NETWORK RATHER THAN AN ISOLATED CENTRE, ACCESS IS WIDENED, CULTURAL RENEWAL BECOMES MORE VISIBLE IN DAILY LIFE.]

to record.

[TO REPURPOSE.]

The unique island bus shelter, often overlooked and underused, becomes a site of quiet documentation. Through the Record Network, these everyday nodes are transformed into micro-archives of place, reimagined as tools for gathering environmental data, weather patterns, images, sound, and oral testimonies from locals and travellers alike.

Digitally enhanced yet materially grounded, these shelters become interfaces between people and place, capturing the present to better understand and care for the future. Their structure reflects the traditional forms of shelter found across the isles built to withstand wind, framed in local aggregate concrete, and additional recording structure reach out to gather information from these forms.

The attached structures take their form from the distinctive angled legs of existing bus stops, adapting and refining them for contemporary use. These frames are repurposed to create subtle interventions in the landscape spaces that invite pause, observation, and documentation. Acting as both markers and tools, they offer a moment to reflect on the land, to compare changes, and to engage with place in a meaningful way.

The resulting silhouette also draws inspiration from a unique local landmark: the whalebone arch in Bragar. Formed from two vast jawbones rising from the earth to frame a garden entrance, this emblem of local identity is echoed in the new structures. Through this reference, the interventions foster a sense of cultural continuity and belonging, embedding memory and recognition into even the smallest acts of design.

Each becomes a time capsule in motion, recording the evolving dialogue between climate, culture, and community, a method of recording both human and more-than-human presence within the Hebridean ecosystem.

The Record Network does not archive the past; but listens to the present allowing the land to be heard in its own terms.

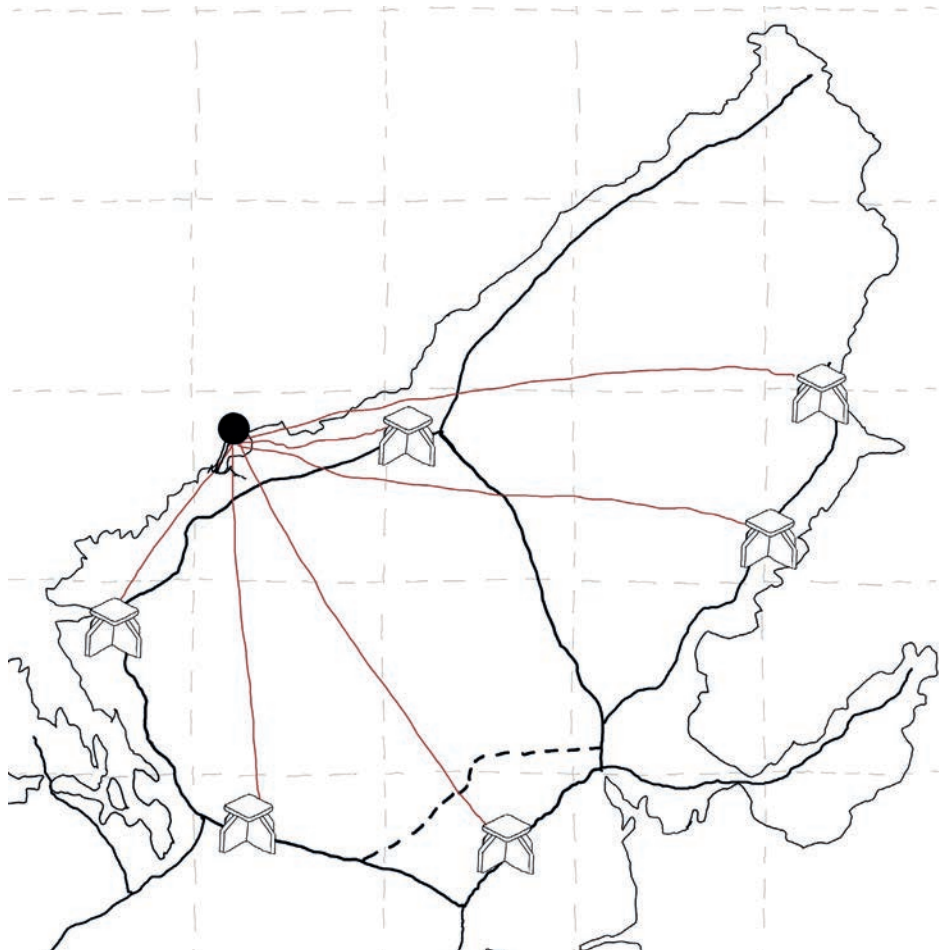


figure 56: mapping the record network.



figure 55: active interaction.



to reflect.

[A RE-INTERPRETATION.]

At the core of this component is the Art Àirigh a series of temporary, modest structures inspired by the traditional shielings once dotted across the moorlands. These satellite studios are sited carefully within the landscape, acting as both retreat and point of engagement. They allow artists, writers, and makers to be in the land to sit with it, listen to it, and reflect it back through craft, photography, oral history, and more.

These structures are deliberately flexible and small in scale, designed to shift with the seasons. Within them, the land is not a subject to be captured, but a collaborator. The Art Àirighs challenge the commodification of landscape imagery by replacing it with authentic, site-rooted creation — reinforcing identity, belonging, and stewardship.

The reflect network draws inspiration from the traditional airigh, temporary summer shelters used during transhumance, and reimagines them as ephemeral creative structures nestled across the landscape. Each space is designed to host artistic reflection, sketching, sculpture, small exhibitions, musical collaboration, or quiet writing.

These interventions are light on the land, using modular forms and crafted from tin as seen in traditional forms these structures allow for seasonal movement and spontaneous activation. Their placement responds to sacred sites, view corridors, or moments of spatial tension, creating places where creative expression is in direct dialogue with natural rhythms.

Functioning as both studio and sanctuary, each reflect shelter becomes a mirror for place, encouraging islanders to not only observe, but contribute meaningfully to the living cultural landscape.

The reflect network is not about capturing beauty it’s about understanding and authenticity. Through creativity, we remember how to see again.

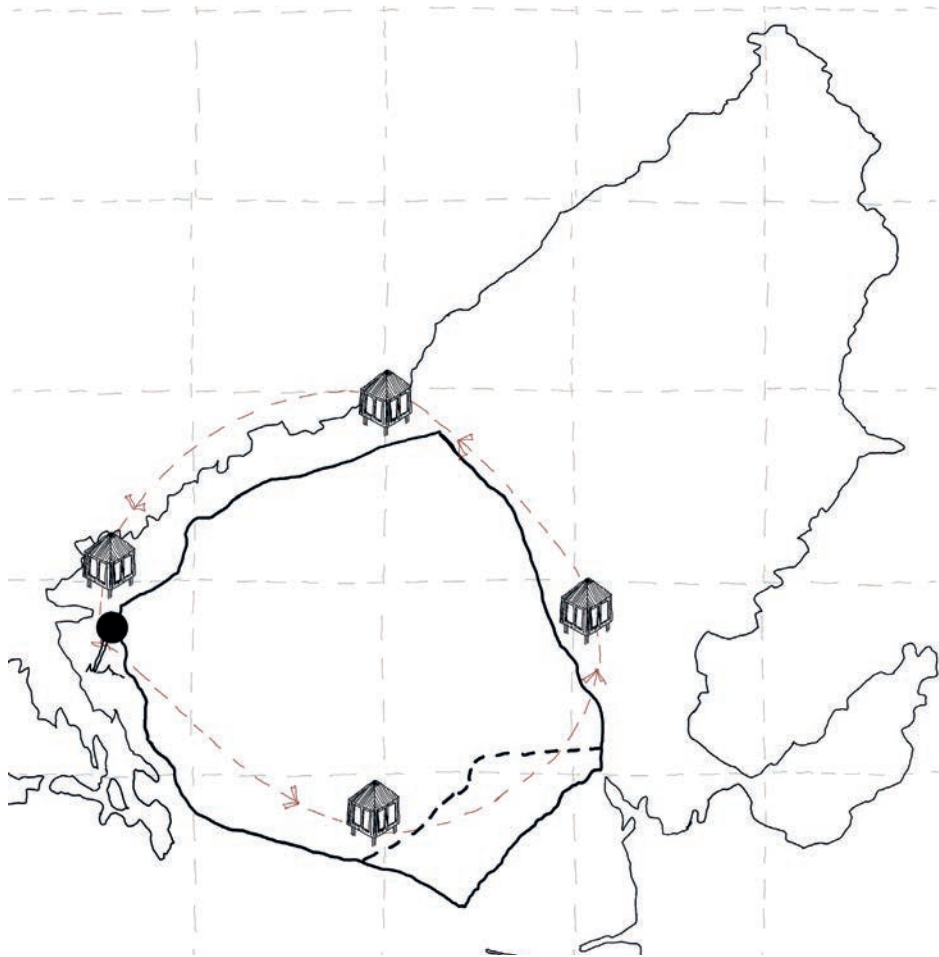


figure 57: mapping the reflect network.

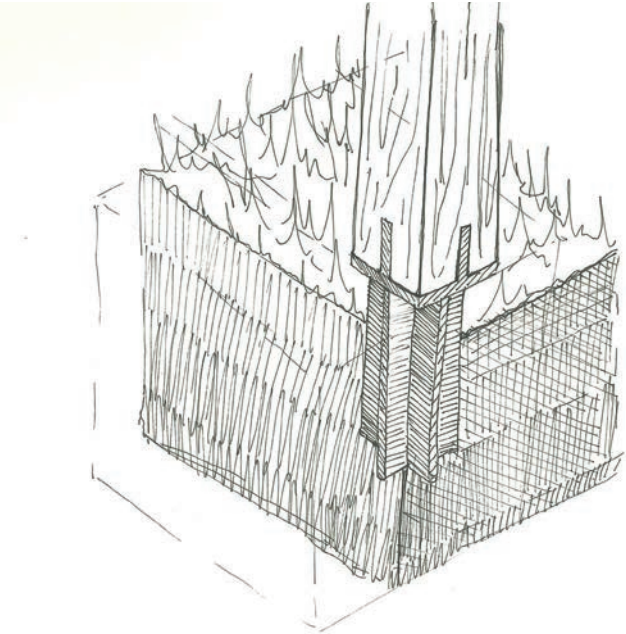


figure 58: designed to avoid disruption.

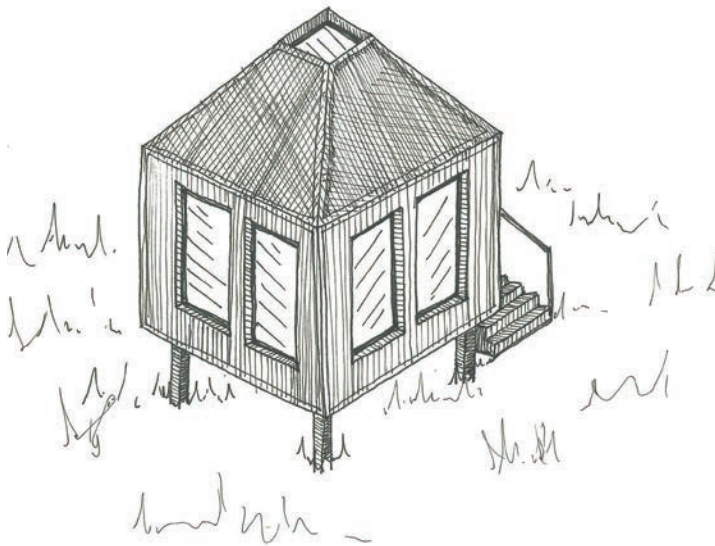


figure 59:modest size within the land.

to revive.

Scattered across the landscape, the crumbling shells of airighean and long-abandoned croft houses are not signs of failure — they are living palimpsests. The Revive Network transforms these ruins into modest beacons of cultural rediscovery. Sensitive retrofit turns abandonment into potential, layering meaning onto existing stone walls to create spaces of education, celebration, and shared memory.

Each site becomes a portal to the past and future, offering shelter for workshops, storytelling, Gaelic language classes, or weaving demonstrations. They are neither museums nor tourist centres, but living fragments of community life, stitched back into the land through use. Built from locally sourced wool, stone and hempcrete, these interventions are as much about re-connection as they are about resilience.

This network ensures the song is not lost — but reshaped, revoiced, and revived through the structures that once held it.

As part of the wider Revive network, an abandoned croft house at Callanish is transformed into a small, community-led restaurant. Rooted in Hebridean hospitality, it becomes a place where food, informal storytelling, and Gaelic language naturally intertwine. It fosters everyday language use and cultural exchange, recognising that stories and traditions are best shared around the table.

A unifying feature across the Revive network is the use of red corrugated roofs, referencing island vernacular architecture. At Callanish, this detail ties the restaurant visibly to the wider initiative, acting as a quiet marker of continuity, resilience, and welcome.

By retaining the croft’s modest character and embracing its history, the site supports not only economic sustainability but also cultural revival, allowing memory, language, and belonging to flourish through everyday acts of gathering.



figure 60: emblem of red.

[REDISCOVER RUINS.]

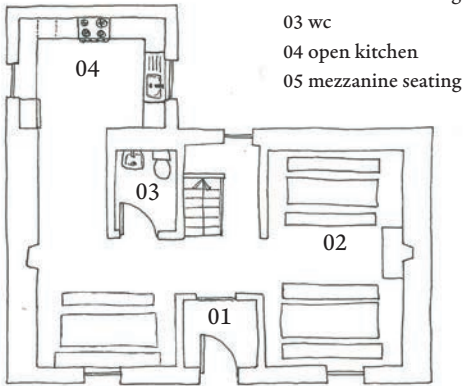
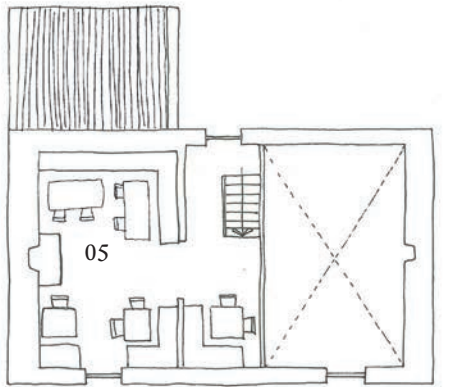


figure 61: proposed informal storytelling, through food.

- 01 threshold
- 02 communal seating.
- 03 wc
- 04 open kitchen
- 05 mezzanine seating



figure 62: proposed site of intervention.

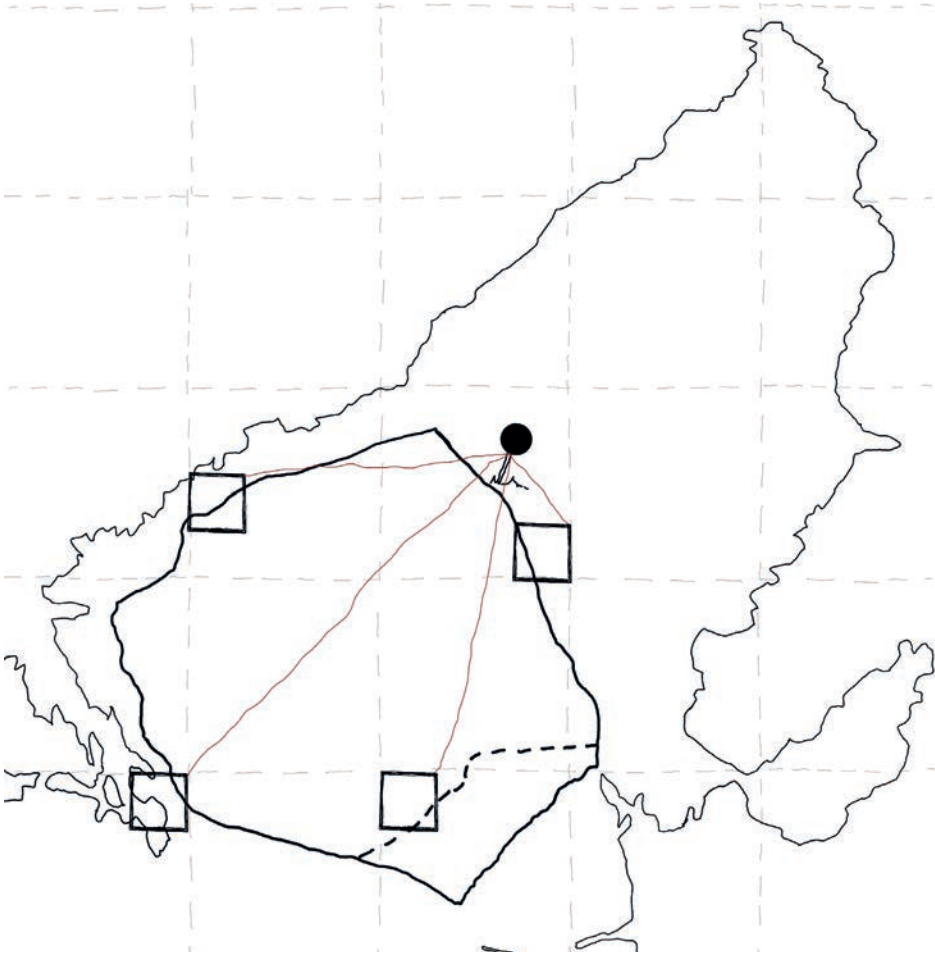


figure 63: mapping the revive network.



figure 64: link to historical storytelling elements.

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[TO HEAL]

[HEALING IS NOT A RETURN TO WHAT ONCE WAS, BUT A MOVEMENT TOWARDS WHAT COULD BE. SLÀNAICH SETS OUT THE WAYS IN WHICH LAND, LANGUAGE, AND PEOPLE ARE HEALED THROUGH ACTIVE, EVOLVING ENGAGEMENT. THIS CHAPTER PRESENTS A FRAMEWORK FOR WIDER APPLICATION — ONE ROOTED IN LISTENING TO LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, REACTIVATING TRADITIONAL PRACTICES, AND EMBEDDING ADAPTABILITY AT THE HEART OF DESIGN. THE THEORY EXTENDS BEYOND LEWIS, OFFERING A MODEL FOR OTHER RURAL COMMUNITIES SEEKING TO HEAL BOTH LAND AND IDENTITY.]

to heal.

[GAIN WHAT HAS BEEN LOST.]

This project proposes a path toward healing, both for the land and for the people who call it home. By drawing upon the Gaelic principle of *dùthchas* as the inextricable bond between community, culture, and place the design strategy of Reflect, Record, and Revive works to reawaken a sense of belonging that has been eroded by generations of displacement, underuse, and disconnection.

Through careful recognition of local materials, landscapes, and lived histories, and by nurturing new sustainable practices like hemp cultivation and wool production, the land is positioned once again as a source of life and identity. In parallel, the community is empowered to reclaim its voice, traditions, and agency in shaping the future.

This integrated method of spatial intervention and cultural reconnection offers not just a model for regeneration, but an act of remembering, allowing the past, present, and future to coexist within the land itself. It is a quiet but enduring attempt to stitch together a fractured landscape and a resilient people, honouring what has been while building what might yet be.

The answers to rural resilience lie not in invention, but in recognition. A framework for wider application does not prescribe form, but unlocks memory, craft, and place to shape form meaningfully. Through the rhythms of land, the voices of elders, and the labour of local hands, we seek to ensure that the rural is not romanticised or abandoned, but regenerated, as a living archive for generations to come.



figure 65: to heal the land.

a wider application.

[CREATING A FRAMEWORK.]

This project proposes a model for cultural and ecological regeneration that is site-specific yet adaptable to other remote, fragile, or culturally eroded landscapes. The methodology focuses on principles of reconnection, resilience, and rooted agency, offering a practical framework for application elsewhere.

1. CONTEXTUAL LISTENING AND IMMERSION

Before any intervention, a deep period of immersion is necessary walking the land, speaking to local people, and understanding existing rhythms. This ensures that design grows from place-specific needs, not imposed assumptions. Historical land use, language, ecological patterns, and cultural narratives must be mapped and honoured.

Actionable step:
Conduct participatory fieldwork, oral history gathering, and ecological surveying to establish a living knowledge base.

2. IDENTIFYING GAPS AND GRASSROOTS DESIRES

Rather than imposing solutions, the project identifies gaps absences in knowledge, infrastructure, or opportunity and responds to the stated desires of the local community, such as needs for learning spaces, cultural exchange, or economic self-sufficiency.

Actionable step:
Hold open workshops and informal gatherings to allow local voices to guide project priorities.

3. MATERIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL AUTONOMY

Local material sourcing is a non-negotiable principle. Building methods must be based on what the land itself can provide sustainably, enhancing resilience and minimising dependency on external resources.

Actionable step:
Audit local resources (stone, hemp, wool, aggregates, flora) and design material systems that are low-impact, durable, and familiar to the community.

4. ANCHORING THROUGH VERNACULAR RESONANCE

Architectural language must draw from vernacular forms, not by direct imitation, but by translating spatial, social, and material principles into new contexts. Buildings should feel both new and deeply familiar, avoiding pastiche while fostering belonging.

Actionable step:
Study local building traditions (such as the blackhouse in the Hebrides) and integrate lessons of form, scale, and communal use into new designs.

5. PROCESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE LAND

Movement through the landscape should be embedded into the project’s physical experience. Exposure to the elements, geography, and weather is part of reconnecting to place.

Actionable step:
Design approach routes and public spaces that require embodied engagement with the environment before reaching sheltered structures.

6. FLEXIBLE, PHASED DEVELOPMENT

Projects should be designed to grow organically over time rather than arriving as a finished whole. The community must retain the ability to adapt, infill, or re-purpose structures as needs evolve.

Actionable step:
Use permanent structural anchors (e.g., stone walls) and lightweight, changeable infill to allow growth and change without major reconstruction.

CONCLUSION:

This framework offers a transferable, resilient model for site-specific regeneration that reconnects people and land. It recognises that memory, identity, and environment are not static but dynamic and that true revival emerges through deep listening, material honesty, vernacular intelligence, and community ownership

7. PRIORITISING AUTHENTICITY OVER SPECTACLE

Projects must resist the urge to romanticise or aestheticise local culture for external consumption. Instead, they must prioritise authentic, lived practices, enabling communities to define their own narratives.

Actionable step:
Integrate community-led curation and governance models into project management and programming.

8. HOLISTIC REGENERATION: LAND AND PEOPLE

Healing cultural identity is inseparable from ecological healing. Reviving land practices such as small-scale farming, craft, and sustainable resource management must go hand-in-hand with cultural regeneration.

Actionable step:
Embed environmental stewardship from soil health to biodiversity into cultural programming and land-use planning.

references.

[CREDIBILITY IN ANALYSIS]

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Visit Outer Hebrides (n.d.) <https://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk/see-and-do/butt-of-lewis-rubha-rohanais-p523611>

figures list.

[NUMBERS AND NAMES.]

- figure 01: 27 tolsta chaolais.

figure 02: heritage links to land through generations.

figure 03: heritage links on both sides of family.

figure 04: exploratory collage section through 27 tolsta chaolais.

figure 05: locating the isle of lewis.

figure 06: a geographical barrier.

figure 07: depopulation issues.

figure 08: language loss.

figure 09: land underuse.

figure 10: erosion.

figure 11: site selection.

figure 12: field trip visual log.

figure 13: “heart” of lewis.

figure 14: mapping the loop.

figure 15: locality of materials.

figure 16: proposed valley section.

figure 17: shawbost land patterns, contours analysis.

figure 18: land patterns shawbost, contours.

figure 19: land patterns shawbost, crofts.

figure 20: shawbost, site within context.

figure 21: tolsta chaolais land patterns, contours analysis.

figure 22: land patterns tolsta chaolais., contours.

figure 23: land patterns tolsta chaolais., crofts.

figure 24: tolsta chaolais., site within context.

figure 25: barvas land patterns, contours analysis.

figure 26: land patterns barvas, contours.

figure 27: land patterns barvas, crofts.

figure 28: barvas, site within context.

figure 29: heritage link to site in tolsta chaolais.

figure 30: heritage link to site in shawbost.

figure 31: theoretical framework diagram.

figure 32: disjointed land.
- figure 33: texture and shore analysis.

figure 34: shawbost site plan. 1:500.

figure 35: shawbost orthogonal drawings. 1:200.

figure 36: shawbost. to enter.

figure 37: shawbost. overview.

figure 38: shawbost. interior.

figure 39: shawbost. viewing deck.

figure 40: tolsta chaolais. site plan 1:500.

figure 41: tolsta chaolais. orthogonal drawings. 1:200

figure 42: tolsta chaolais. exploded axonometric.

figure 43: tolsta chaolais. approach.

figure 44: tolsta chaolais. layers of interaction.

figure 45: tolsta chaolais.to exhibit and observe.

figure 46: tolsta chaolais. to view land and art.

figure 47: reality of building life.

figure 48: barvas orthogonal drawings. 1:200.

figure 49: the hearth.

figure 50: language centre, connection to hearth

figure 51: to gather and share within the restaurant.

figure 52: to record within the landscape.

figure 53: to reflect with authenticity.

figure 54: to revive for resilience.

figure 55: active interaction.

figure 56: mapping the record network.

figure 57: mapping the reflect network.

figure 58: designed to avoid disruption.

figure 59:modest size within the land.

figure 60: emblem of red

figure 61: proposed informal storytelling.

figure 62: proposed site of intervention.

figure 63: mapping of revive network.

figure 64: link to historical storytelling elements.

figure 65: to heal the land.

collages are created with site photos and archival images linking heritage.
all images are my own unless otherwise stated.

pàipear-
taic.

[APPENDIX]

proverbs.

[TRANSLATION AND BONDS.]

TM MACDONALD 1926 GAELIC PROVERBS COLLECTION

530. Am fear a tha na thàmh,
Tha e na leth-trom air an fhearain

[HE WHO IS IDLE IS A BURDEN ON THE LAND.]

541. Cha bhi toradh gun saothair.

[THERE WILL BE NO PRODUCE WITHOUT LABOUR.]

645. Theid dùthchas an aghaidh na’n creag.

[KINSHIP WILL WITHSTAND THE ROCKS.]

551. Feumaidh an t-ìalamh a chuid fhèin.

[THE LAND MUST RECEIVE ITS OWN PORTION.]

523. Breac a linne, slat a coille, Is fiadh a fireach,
Meirle anns nach do ghabh Gaidheal riamh
nàire.

[A FISH FROM THE RIVER, A WAND FROM THE WOOD, AND A

DEER FROM THE MOUNTAIN, ACTIONS NO GAEL WAS AT ANY

TIME ASHAMED OF.]

525. Am fear is fhearr a chuireas, ’Se is fhearr a
bhuaineas.

[HE WHO SOWETH BEST REAPETH BEST]

depopulation.

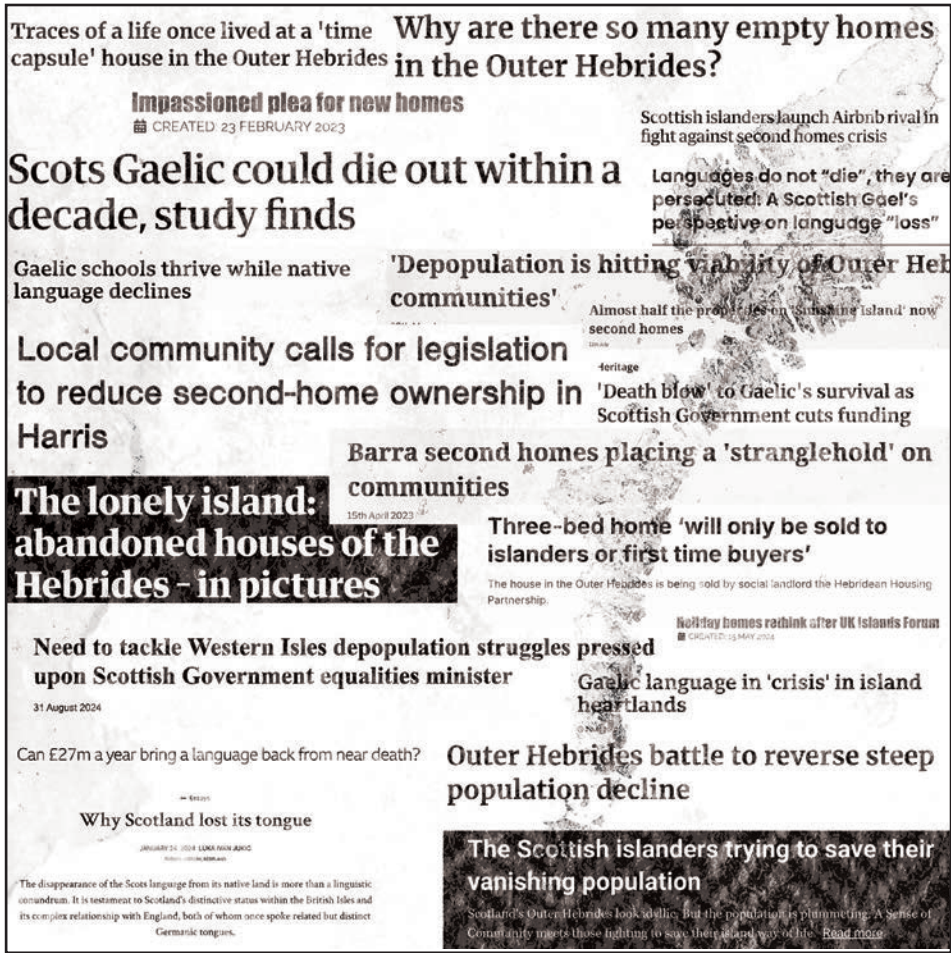
[A PERSONAL APPROACH.]



diagrammatic representation of depopulation within my own family.
the squares outlined are those who live within the hebrides.

issues in writing.

[MAKING HEADLINES.]



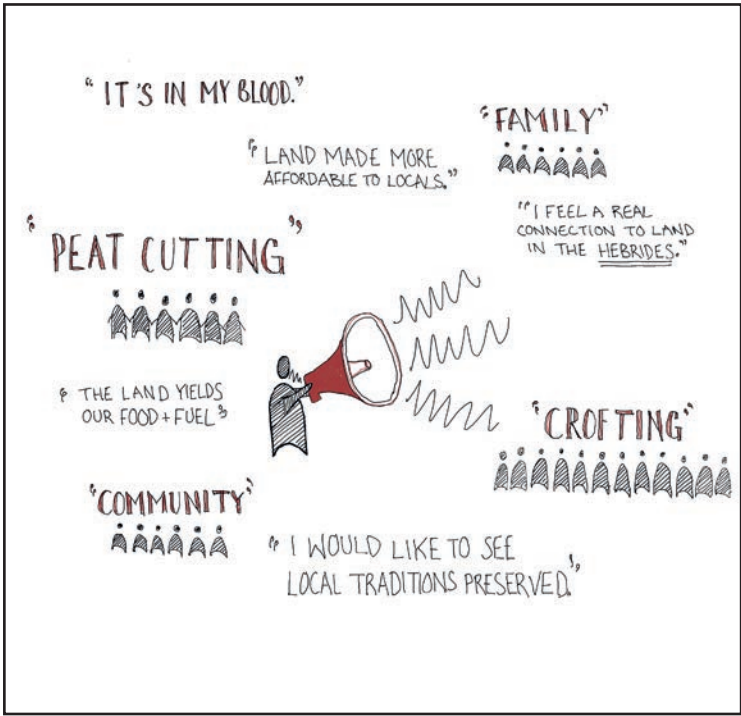
Several recent headlines, studies, and media pieces highlight the urgency and relevance of the issues this project addresses

These headlines demonstrate that the issues this project tackles — language erosion, depopulation, loss of traditional practices, tourist-driven economies, ecological degradation — are not isolated, but recognised and pressing challenges.

They provide further external validation that a holistic, community-rooted approach like Record, Reflect, and Revive is not just relevant but urgently needed.

the peoples voice.

[ENSURING AUTHENTICITY.]



Throughout last semester, extensive informal conversations, and surveys were conducted with local residents and family members. Common themes emerged consistently:

Desire for Return to Traditional Practices:
A clear call to reconnect with crofting, fishing, weaving, and traditional land stewardship, seen not as a regression but as a way to anchor identity in modern life.

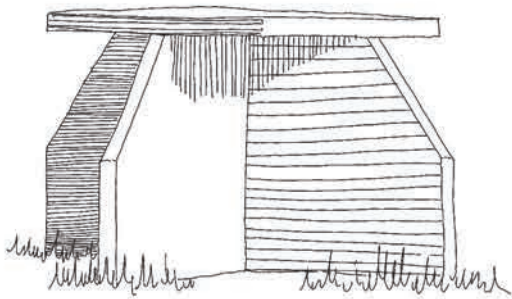
Need for Spaces to Gather and Learn:
A major gap identified was the lack of welcoming spaces for intergenerational learning, communal celebration, and creative exchange that are driven by local needs, not visitor economies.

Frustration with External Narratives:
Many expressed frustration at how the islands are depicted in tourism, media, and academia often romanticised or misunderstood by outsiders. There was a strong appetite for locals to control their own cultural narratives.

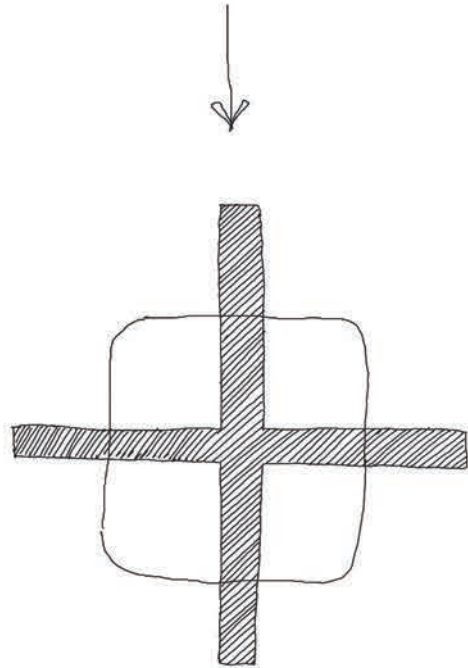
Fear of Cultural Erosion:
Gaelic language loss, disappearing land knowledge, and depopulation were repeatedly mentioned as interconnected issues threatening future resilience.

Skepticism about Top-Down Development:
Large external projects often failed to resonate with community needs. Support was shown for projects that build slowly, with community input and flexibility at their core.

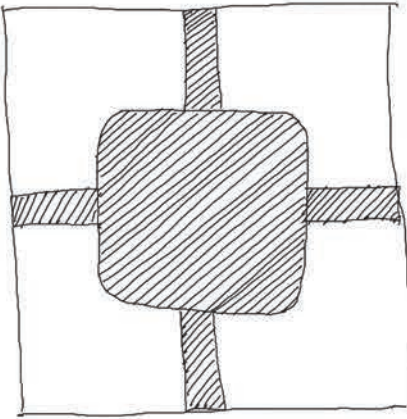
These voices shaped the methodology and objectives of Record, Reflect, and Revive, grounding the project firmly in community priorities rather than external assumptions.



“FOUR WINDS”
BUS SHELTERS
↳ UNIQUE TO HEBRIDES
↳ PRACTICAL
↳ LASTS IN TOUGH WEATHER.



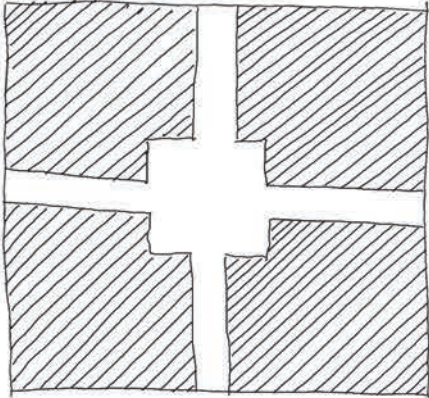
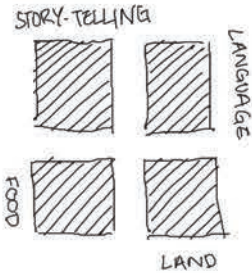
PLAN



SOLIDS

INVERT

4 ELEMENTS OF
RE-VIVAL



processional route.

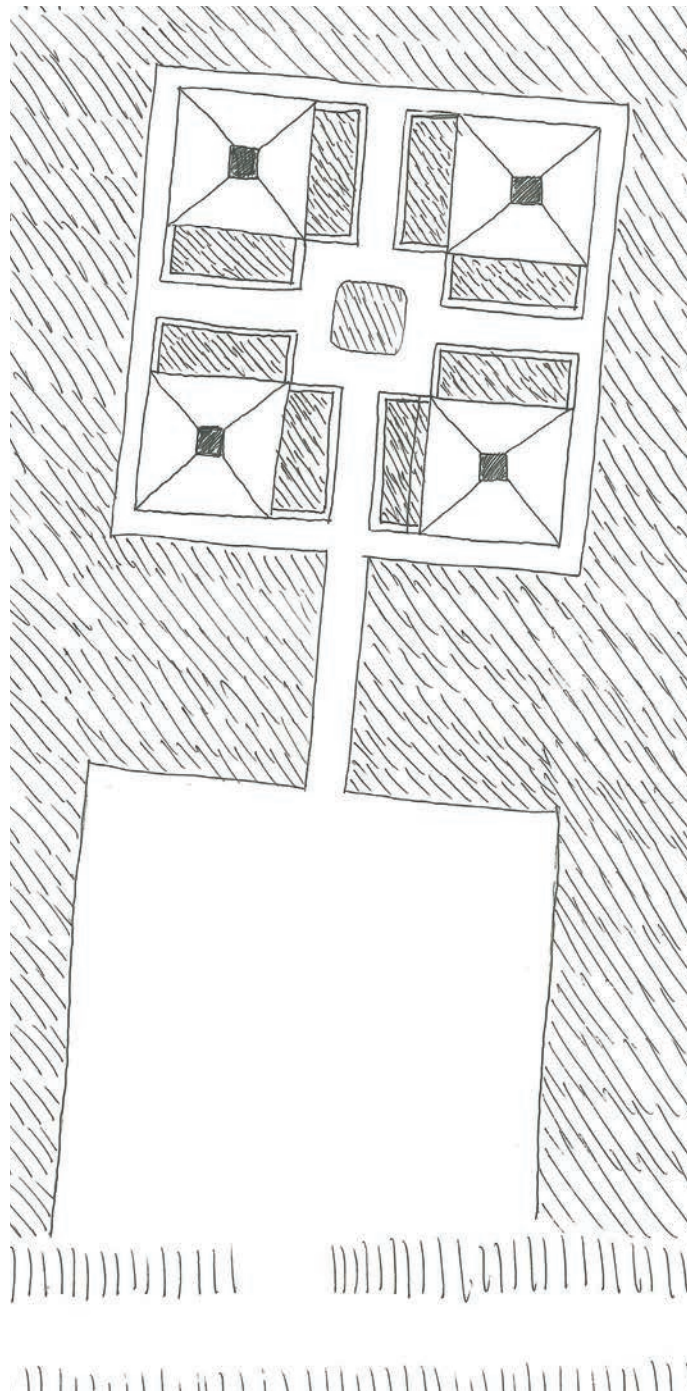
[EXPERIENCE THE ELEMENTS.]

A key principle embedded within the project is the deliberate use of processional routes — paths that guide visitors through the raw landscape before reaching the sheltered interiors of the Record and Revive buildings. These routes are not incidental but intentional: they require those arriving to move through wind, rain, sea-salt air, and the rough textures of the land itself.

This design approach reinforces the belief that to truly understand and reconnect with the Hebridean environment, one must experience it physically, not merely observe it from within protected walls. The weather, the terrain, the sounds and smells of the land are not obstacles to be avoided but essential aspects of the cultural and ecological fabric of the islands.

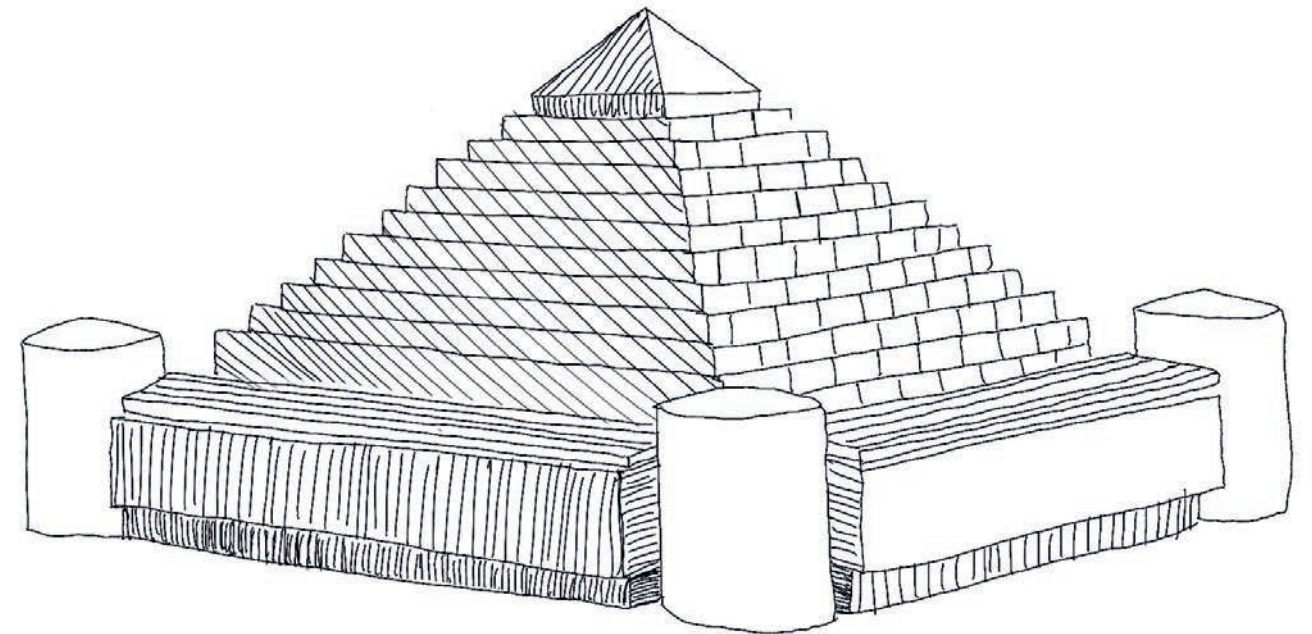
By walking these routes — across moor, rock, and grass — individuals are reminded of their smallness in the face of nature’s forces, a humility deeply embedded in island life and identity. Arrival at the shelter of Record or Revive is then made all the more meaningful; the architecture offers refuge not by isolating from the land, but by embracing it after encounter.

This sequence echoes the traditional movements through crofting landscapes, pilgrimage paths, and even the ritual routes taken between dispersed dwellings and communal spaces. In re-establishing these rhythms, the project fosters a deeper bodily knowledge of place, ensuring that memory and connection are built through movement, sensation, and resilience.



pyramid form.

[NICHE LOCAL REFERENCE.]



The architectural form of the Revive building draws inspiration from the local vernacular while subtly embedding collective memory into its very silhouette. Composed of a series of hipped roofs, the structure presents itself almost like a constellation of low-lying pyramids emerging from the landscape. This decision is rooted both in tradition and in local memory.

The hipped roof, a feature of traditional Hebridean blackhouses, lends the building a sense of familiarity and resilience, essential for withstanding the island’s relentless winds. However, the pyramidal massing also resonates with a more recent and unique piece of local heritage: the pyramid sculpture that once stood outside Woolworths in Stornoway. Installed in the 1990s and lasting into the early 2000s, this structure was more than just a piece of public art; it became an informal gathering point, a cultural marker woven into the daily lives and memories of islanders.

By subtly referencing this collective memory, the form of the Revive building taps into layers of belonging and place-making, blending the deep roots of ancient vernacular with the remembered spaces of recent community life. In doing so, it bridges generational experiences, creating a new meeting point for cultural revival — a place both timeless and familiar, rooted in the landscape and the memory of those who inhabit it.

vernacular influence.

[SUBTLETY IN LINKS.]

REVIVE CENTRE

The Revive Centre draws directly from the form and spirit of the traditional blackhouse. The structure’s low, sheltering silhouette echoes the hipped, thatched roofs of the original dwellings, designed to resist the brutal Atlantic winds. Grass ledges and planted sections on the roof reference the blackhouse’s living roofscape, where vegetation naturally settled over time, blending the building seamlessly into the land. In this new form, the Revive Centre honours the blackhouse’s quiet resilience — becoming not only a space for cultural gathering but a continuation of the island’s architectural DNA, rooted in environmental adaptability and deep respect for the land

REFLECT SCHOOL

The Reflect School reinterprets the blackhouse’s intimate, communal atmosphere. Traditionally, blackhouses sheltered both people and livestock under one roof, a spatial arrangement born of necessity but rich in symbolism: an acknowledgement of the deep interdependence between human and animal life. In the Reflect School, small artist studios are clustered much like livestock stalls, fostering a close, supportive creative community. This echoes the spirit of shared survival and togetherness once found in blackhouse interiors, where multiple generations and species coexisted in warmth and proximity. The internal layout thus becomes a modern homage to the value of collective resilience and learning.

RECORD ARCHIVE

The Record Archive takes its cues from the massive, load-bearing stone walls of the blackhouse. These walls, built from local stone without mortar, speak of permanence, shelter, and a rootedness in place. Similarly, the Record Archive is anchored by thick stone walls, using locally sourced material, intended to feel both ancient and enduring. The walls are designed to endure long after the lighter interventions have faded, slowly weathering into the landscape and recording the presence of life — much like the blackhouse ruins that now quietly mark old settlements. Here, stone becomes both literal and metaphorical archive: memory embedded in material.

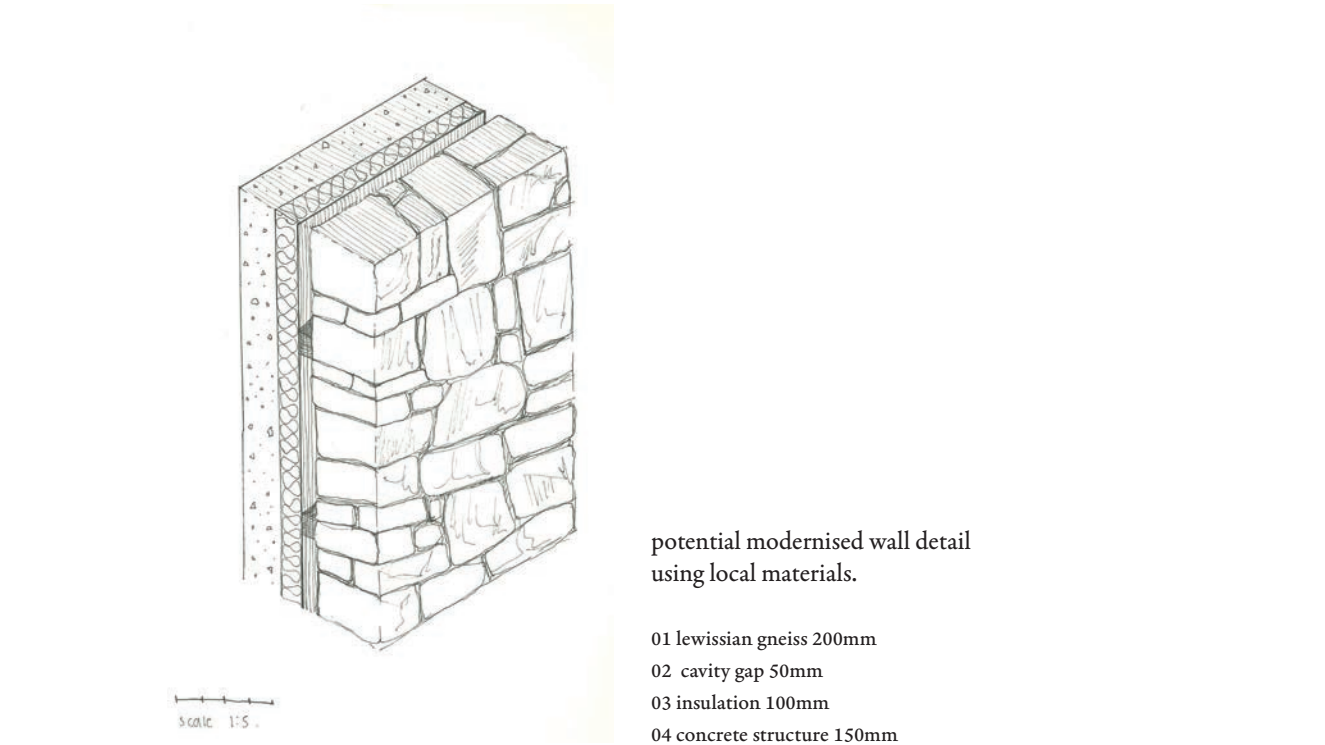
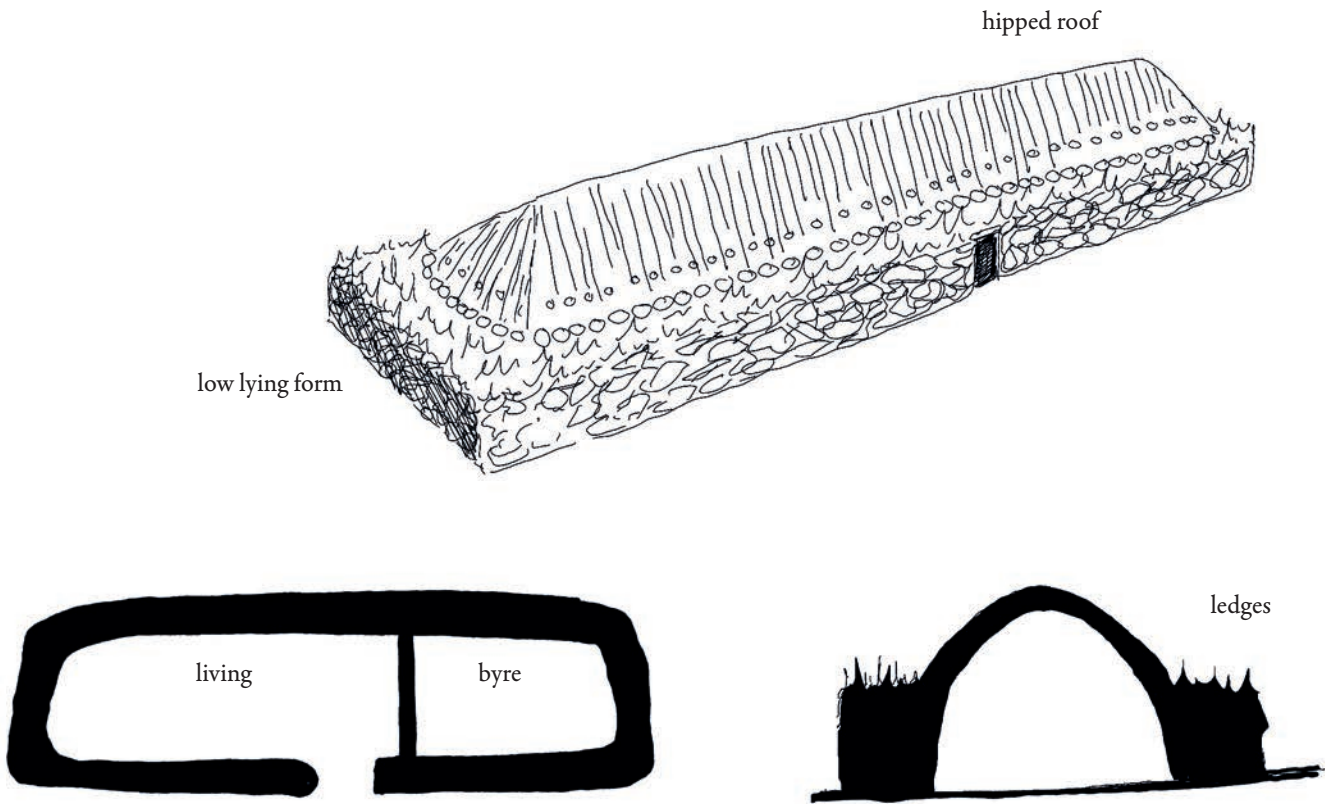
ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS LINKING TO BLACKHOUSES:

Low Ground-Hugging Form: All structures stay low to the ground, in direct response to the way blackhouses were built to merge with, not dominate, the land — a philosophy of humility before nature.

Material Honesty: The commitment to using local stone, aggregate, and land-grown materials (like hemp and wool) directly parallels the blackhouse ethos of using what the land provides.

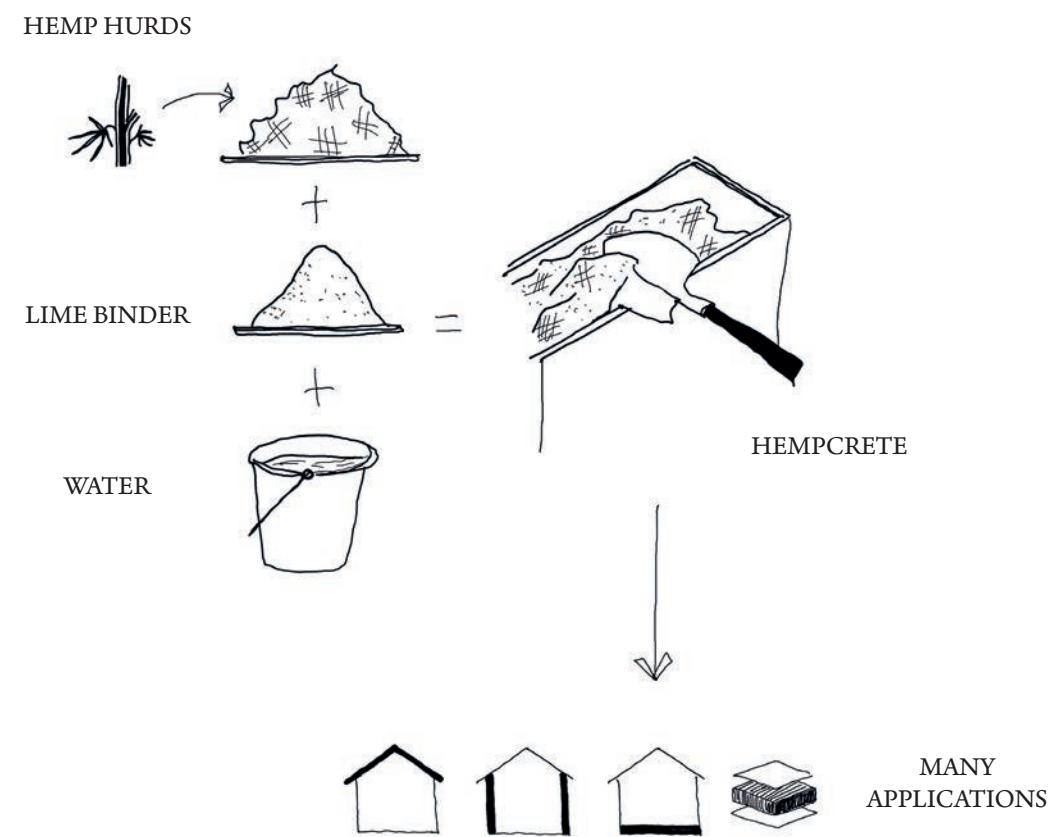
Thermal Mass and Shelter: Like blackhouses with thick walls that retained warmth, these structures aim for environmental resilience and sustainability through thermal mass, reducing dependency on external energy sources.

Weathering and Ruination: All structures are designed to age gracefully, acknowledging that over time, weathering will record human presence just as the blackhouses now tell the story of past lives.



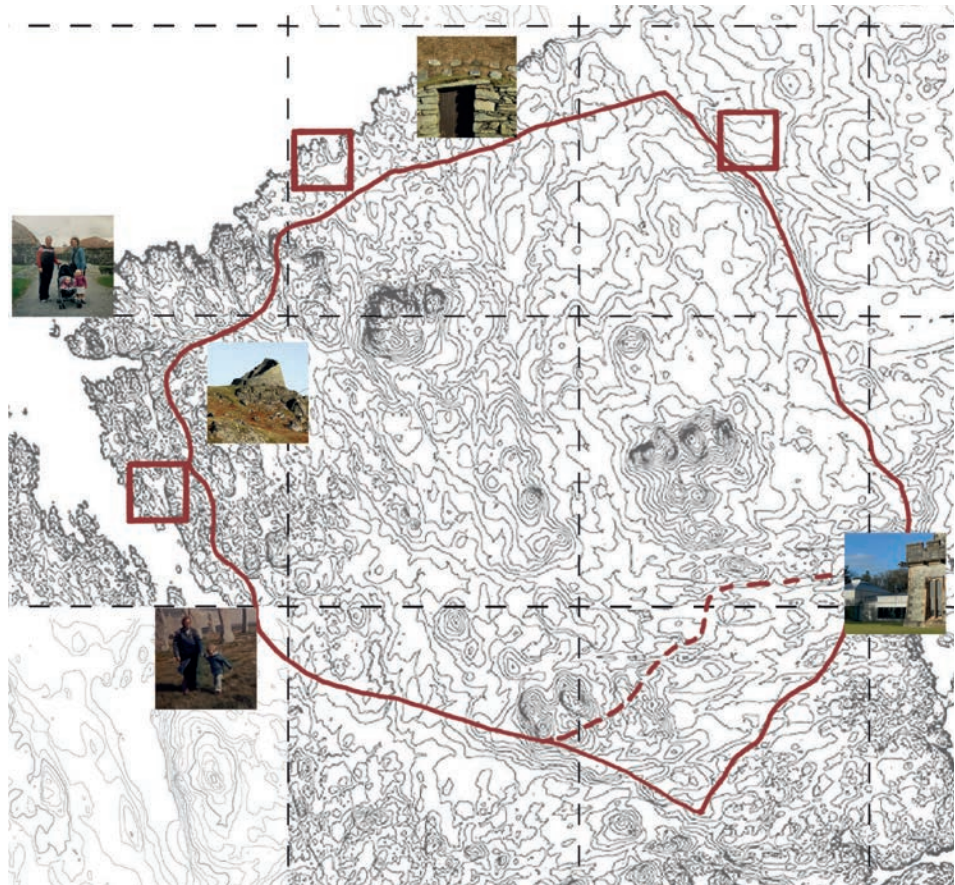
hempcrete.

[HOW IS IT MADE?]



links to the past.

[CULTURAL ICONS.]



The proposed loop of Record, Reflect, and Revive is intentionally positioned in proximity to existing tourist attractions, key routes, and well-visited landscapes across the Outer Hebrides. This strategic siting serves several purposes:

VISIBILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY: The locations allow for ease of access without compromising the sense of remoteness crucial to the project's ethos. Visitors are naturally drawn into the experience without needing heavy marketing or signage that would disrupt the landscape character.

REFRAMING VISITOR ENGAGEMENT: By integrating the structures along familiar routes, tourists are gently invited into deeper, more respectful modes of engagement — moving away from consumption towards participation, learning, and witnessing.

ECONOMIC SUPPORT FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY: By linking new cultural and educational infrastructure with tourist footfall, the project enhances the potential for small-scale, community-run initiatives (craft markets, guided workshops, storytelling events) that provide economic resilience without compromising authenticity.

DISPERSAL AND SOFT FOOTFALL: Spacing structures across a loop helps manage visitor pressure, preventing overconcentration at any one site and encouraging slow, mindful movement through varied landscapes.

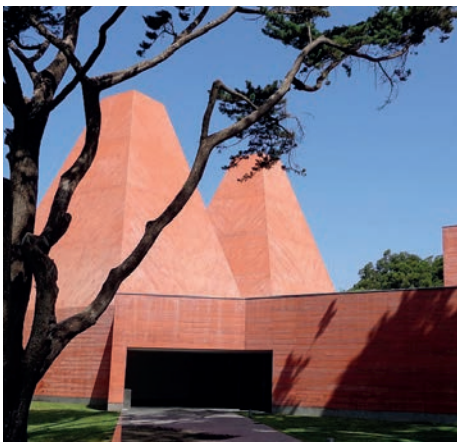
This careful alignment ensures that tourism, while not the primary aim, becomes a supportive and regenerative force rather than a disruptive one.

precedents.

[DRAWING INSPIRATION.]

[CAOCHAN NA CREIGE.]

harris
Izat Arundell.



[CASA DAS HISTÓRIAS PAULA REGO.]

cascais.
Eduardo Souto de Moura.

image source: arch daily



[IORRAM.]

plockton.
Baillie Baillie.

[KIELDER OBSERVATORY.]

kielder.
Charles Barclay.

image source: northern architectural association



