

P01 Woodland Expansion Project



Project Overview:

In the past much more of Assynt and Coigach was covered by natural woodland. Land Management decisions over the centuries have resulted in a significant reduction in the area of tree cover and, in places where it remains, it is declining.

This project aims to look at the CALLP area and using information pulled from old and recent surveys and other base information identify areas of opportunity for woodland expansion, thereby considering the ground without ownership boundaries. Primarily considering protecting existing woodland from declining in current condition, habitat network development, enhancement planting within existing woodlands and where appropriate native woodland expansion. The project then worked with landowners to assess what is possible in terms of the aspirational protection, enhancement and expansion elements on the ground. This work was initially focused on partner ground, but now includes non-partner ground within the CALLP area.

Project lead organisation and other organisations involved: Woodland Trust

Project Location: Coigach & Assynt

Project dates: Sep 2016 – Dec 2021

Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
Full time Woodland Manager Post	1	1	
Woodland brought into active management	250 ha	350 ha	6ha of native woodland enclosed and 5.5ha of mixed policy woodland enclosed. Little Assynt Biodiversity project has enclosed 600ha, of which approximately 400ha is planted, to protect it from Deer damage and enrichment planting is due winter 18. 100ha Nedd Common Grazing Fenced. Acheninver and Culnacraig planting schemes both have included existing native woodland (3ha and 2ha respectively) to help connect and expand this important habitat. See details in Appendix 1.
Native woodland planted	200 ha	295.1ha	100ha Druim Suardalain, 160ha Ledbeg, 8.1 ha Little Assynt, 12ha Acheninver, plus 15ha smaller schemes. See details in Appendix 1.
Designated woodlands in recovering condition	2	1	1 completed and 1 in progress. See details in Appendix 1.

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
Land managers / crofters engaged	20	45	45 owners and managers involved
volunteer days (please report detail in Volunteers tab)	100	54.7	54 volunteer days achieved. Sadly, covid has affected the volunteering opportunities available, but with the project now running up to December and with much still to do, we hope to increase the number of volunteer days

Scheme Outputs

How has the project contributed to the CALLP Scheme Outcomes:

Y	1. The key features of the Coigach and Assynt Landscape will better understood and restored with a fit for purpose system in place to ensure the benefits are sustained. Woodland expansion on 340ha and active woodland management of 350ha
Y	2. Where appropriate the connectivity and diversity of selected habitats will be mapped. Vegetation surveys covered 1200 ha of the area, some are still being developed into FGS plans to take forward after CALL, some have been used to protect and expand existing woodland during CALL.
	3. Increased awareness and understanding amongst all individuals and groups of what makes Coigach and Assynt special and the threats to the unique heritage.
Y	4. Important elements of the built, cultural and natural heritage will be recorded, improved, made publicly accessible and celebrated by the local community. Vegetation and archaeological surveys covered 1200 ha of area
Y	5. People will have gained new skills in researching, restoring and understanding their heritage. Landowners, land managers and contractors have increased skills and understanding of woodland management and expansion.
	6. Collected data, information and interpretation will be more accessible in the public domain including posting on appropriate websites.
Y	7. Local groups and individuals understand, enjoy, value and take action in the Coigach and Assynt area in ways they did not at the outset. Volunteer planting days including school pupils, volunteers planting on Isle Martin and volunteers planting at Little Assynt for Big Climate fightback
	8. Increased access infrastructure at key strategic locations enabling people to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of the area.
Y	9. Increased opportunities for informal recreation that promotes health and well-being benefits. Members of the community and visitors volunteered in woodland planting.

Reflecting on the last 5 years, what's the one thing that you're most proud of that has come from your project being part of CALLP?

8.5% increase to CALL Native Woodland

In conjunction with local land managers, the planting over 340ha of native tree the project has increased the area of native woodland by 8.5%. In a huge landscape where native woodland habitat has been in decline for years, the project has embraced the challenge of bringing into management and expanding native woodland in the appropriate areas of the CALL area for habitat, wildlife and environmental benefits

Similar amount of native woodland now in active mgmt. to protect from deer and stock browsing and encourage natural regeneration of woodland and understorey species which make up the overall woodland habitat, the aspirations to do more and not be considering ownership boundaries is important, but is inextricably linked to deer mgmt. and other land mgmt. and therefore a forum of land mgmt. use between CALL partners and other interested neighbours to progress discussion to balance off these competing objectives is planned.

What difference has this project made to the built, cultural and natural heritage of Coigach and Assynt?

The woodland project has tried to include existing native woodland and expand out from here, creating better connectivity. But even where that hasn't been possible, native woodland trees and shrubs have been planted to create shelter and increase bio-diversity, enhancing the existing natural heritage.

What difference has this project made to People?

The project has allowed the land managers (both large and small) to engage with woodland expansion where previously they lacked experience to utilize the Forestry Scotland grant schemes or other agricultural grants. Specifically, the project has supported the cost of investigating land suitability for woodland expansion at the conception stage of each planting. The involvement of volunteers, and over 50 land managers of small holdings indicates the extent to which the community has engaged with the project with the desire to make their landscape a more diverse habitat.

" One of the main reasons the community bought Glencanisp and Drumrunie in 2005 was to regenerate the health of the land with regard to its wildlife. The Woodland Trust Scotland through the CALL project has helped hugely in this regard by creating ? ha of newly planted native trees to expand the remnant woods. Elaine MacAskill has organised this brilliantly and it has been a pleasure watching it happening and seeing the resulting young forest and all that lives in it already." Claire Belshaw – Chair, Assynt Foundation

"[the impact of CALLP is] to be thinking around these issues in a more land development way about the future of woodland development and what will be the landscape of Assynt in 20, 30,

40 years' time because it is the actions taken now, is what people will be living with in that time frame." Nigel Goldie,

"It has always been a dream of mine to plant more than a few garden trees. Thanks to CALL this has become reality! Just walking through these young saplings and watching them grow brings joy and a sense of satisfaction - the insect life is amazing among the long grasses and plants that have appeared now the deer are excluded. Can't wait to watch the canopy close and the small woodland develop with all the birds and mammals it will support. It will continue to be a great place to share with the nursery children. A huge thank you to the CALL team for their help does not fully express the gratitude."

Jane Matheson, Lochinver pre-school teacher and Kirkton of Assynt field owner

Useful Links

www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

<https://www.coigach-assynt.org/project/woodland-expansion/>

<https://youtu.be/HqmNF1dBhfM> YouTube video showing footage of Woodland Expansion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FwFNj6T9To> Presentation of Woodland Expansion Project

Future Plans and Legacy

Throughout the CALL Woodland Project delivery phase, all the partners with Land-use based projects and interested, met regularly for a land-use sub-group meeting to discuss common issues and resolutions and to identify ways that projects could cross over/interact. With cohesive land management as a desired common objective, whilst maintaining the individual estates own objectives. It has been decided to continue with these meetings to work out ways of partnership working on projects be it woodland, moorland management, deer management, surveying etc.

As a result of involvement as a CALLP partner Woodland Trust have engaged the CALLP Woodland Manager as a permanent position and the Woodland Manager will be involved with future land use meetings with partners. Tentative targets for woodland expansion in the next 10 years are in the order of 1500 ha of native woodland.

Through the development of the woodland projects, many conversations have been had and opened up about general land management and a need for more joined up thinking across land management, including deer management and stock management – these have been important conversations to have and to continue.

Lessons Learned

What are the three positive lessons gained from the scheme:

Barriers to woodland expansion consisted of many factors amongst them lack of knowledge and the bureaucracy around woodland planting. What has helped overcome the barriers to woodland mgmt. and expansion in the CALL area were

1. We've been able to offer everything from initial project discussion, through to land registration, grant applications, tendering and offering of contracts for works, management of works on the ground, any associated paperwork including grant claims and subsequent maintenance and management of all of the financial side of the

works. This has really helped remove the burden for landowners unfamiliar with navigating the grant system.

2. Having excellent local deer fencing, tree planting and maintenance contractors, based in Lochinver; working with the local team who know the area and are able to come up with creative solutions.
3. being based in the area and able to get to know people

What are the three negative lessons gained from the scheme:

1. We shouldn't underestimate how much admin is involved and how scary FGS and Carbon contracts can be. It was a **major barrier** for our audience but having someone locally that can take land managers through what can appear to be a complex series of processes has made a real difference to the number of people entering into these agreements.
2. The project could have been better resourced from a staff point of view/ Once it got going the demand was large and time won't allow us to fully fulfil the large potential for future schemes. Projects like this always take a while to get their feet resulting in a last minute rush. Exacerbated in this case by the effect of Covid on staff time, material supply, contractor time and logistics.
3. To achieve greater results, deer management needs to be talked about more openly. Better science based evidence needs to be gathered, to help focus efforts more effectively, whilst trying to balance different landowners own objectives.

Funding Partners



Photographic Evidence



Tilethandoire Croft Planting © Chris Puddephatt



Natural regeneration encouraged by active woodland management at Little Assynt Estate © Culag Community Woodland Trust



Volunteer planting at Little Assynt Estate © Chris Puddephatt



School visit to Little Assynt Nursery to collect seedlings for planting by Lochinver Primary School © Chris Puddephatt

Site No.	Project	Comment	Native Woodland Planted (ha)	Enrichment Planting (ha)	SSSI Recovering (number)	Woodland Brought Into Active Mgmt (ha)	New Deer Fence (m)	New Stock Fence (m)	Upgrade Stock Fence to Deer Fence (m)	Upgrade Stock Fence to Deer Fence & Rabbit Netting (m)	Dismantled Fence (m)	Fence maintained (m)	Maintenance Agreement
7	Balchladdich 2 - NC035298	6 trees with substantial tree guards											Under Review
8	Druim Suardalain - NC123216 Figure 6	100ha planted to native woodland	100			7.8	7050				2000		Under Review
9	Inchnadamph I - NC251218 Figure 7		0.75				100						Under Review
10	Inchnadamph II - NC251219 Figure 7		0.75				420						Under Review
11	Inverkirkaig 1 - NC080198	Hedge planting	0.3										Under Review
12	Isle Martin 1 and 2 - NH095989 Figure 8	Planting with Volunteers to increase shelterbelt and bracken area by croft house	1.5										Under Review
13	Ledbeg - NC230143 Figure 9	160ha planted to native woodland	160				8000						Under Review

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14	CCWT - Little Assynt – WREN project - woodland restoration - NC158261 Figure 10	411ha brought back into active management. 12.4ha of enrichment planting scattered through. New internal deer fence to create deer proof enclosure, deer mgmt support and old fence maintenance works	12.4			411	4000					7000	Under Review
15	Nedd SSSI	Contribution to fencing of 100ha SSSI designated woodland			1	100							Under Review
16	Stoer 1 and 2 - NC044283 Figure 11		2.2										Under Review
17	Tanera - NB990085 Figure 12		2										Under Review
18	Achiltibuie 2 - NC035070 Figure 13	0.4ha of native woodland planted	0.4						345				Under Review

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19	Acheninver 1 - NC043055 Figure 14		12			6	1850	1250					Under Review
20	Achmelvich 1 - NC060248 Figure 15		2.5				320						Under Review
21	Lochinver School - wildlife garden - NC095218	Upgrade to deer fence to protect existing trees and plant some fruit trees	0.05				65						Under Review
22	CCWT - Culag Woods - NC090218	Long Term Forest Plan and Felling, on site milling, extraction by horse to woodmizer mill for further processing to allow for future planting around the dark pool. Assist with public access and native woodland mgmt grant funding too.	5			10	490					190	Under Review

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23	Culnacraig - NC065035 Figure 16	New Deer Fence, fence maint, new stock fencing, protection of existing woodland, encourage regen and some new planting	3.5			1.5	1590	730				125	Under Review
24	Inchnadamph 3 - NC248211 Figure 17	New Deer Fence, ground prep and planting of native woodland including fruit trees	0.4				255						Under Review
25	Inverkirkaig 2 - NC079195		0.05										Under Review
26	Tileathdoire - NC154055 Figure 18	New deer fencing, stock fencing, ground prep and native woodland planting	5.5				1425	355					Under Review
27	Blairbuie - NB970141 Figure 19	Upgrade stock to deer fence, add rabbit net, ground prep and plant new native woodland	2							790			Under Review

Site No.	Project	Comment	Native Woodland Planted (ha)	Enrichment Planting (ha)	SSSI Recovering (number)	Woodland Brought Into Active Mgmt (ha)	New Deer Fence (m)	New Stock Fence (m)	Upgrade Stock Fence to Deer Fence (m)	Upgrade Stock Fence to Deer Fence & Rabbit Netting (m)	Dismantled Fence (m)	Fence maintained (m)	Maintenance Agreement
28	Achiltibuie Garden - NC025080 Figure 20	Enrich shelterbelts		1.51									Under Review
29	Clachtoll 1 - NC044280 Figure 21	hedge	0.15										Under Review
Total			320.95	1.51	1	538	28105	2335	345	935	2000	7315	

Figure 1. Native Woodland Planting Achduart 1

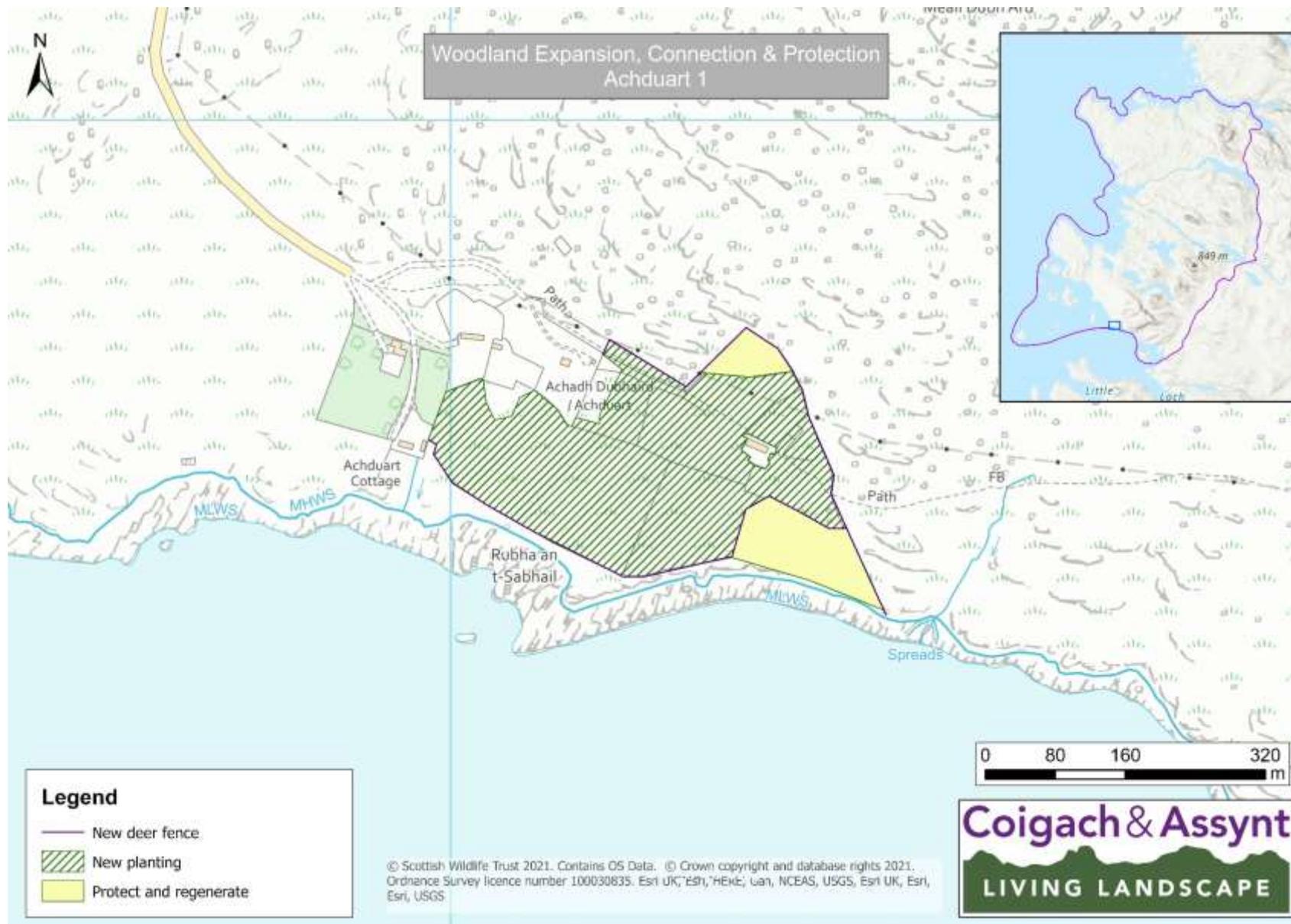


Figure 2. Native Woodland Planting Achiltibuie 1

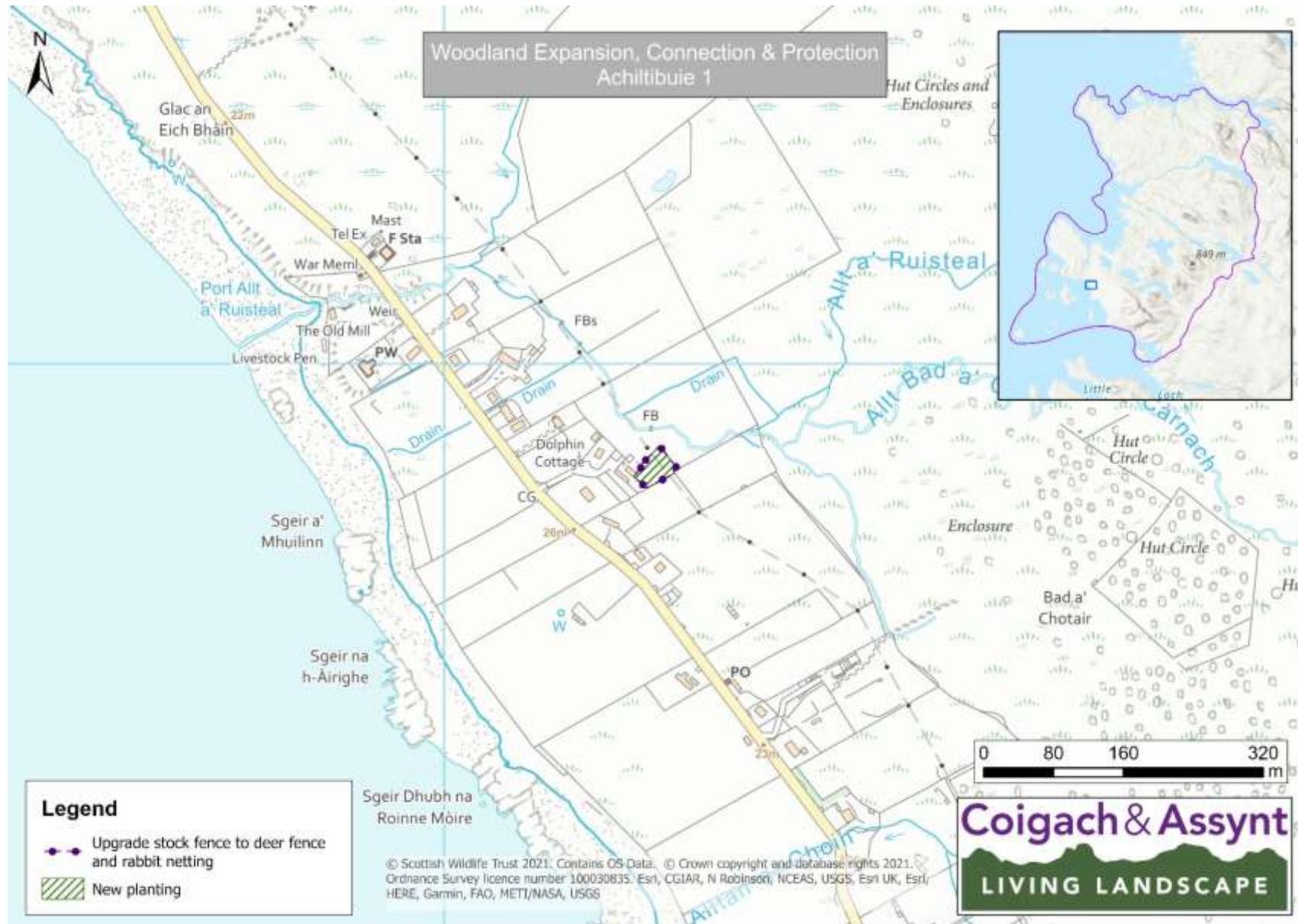


Figure 3. Native Woodland Planting Achnacairnin 1

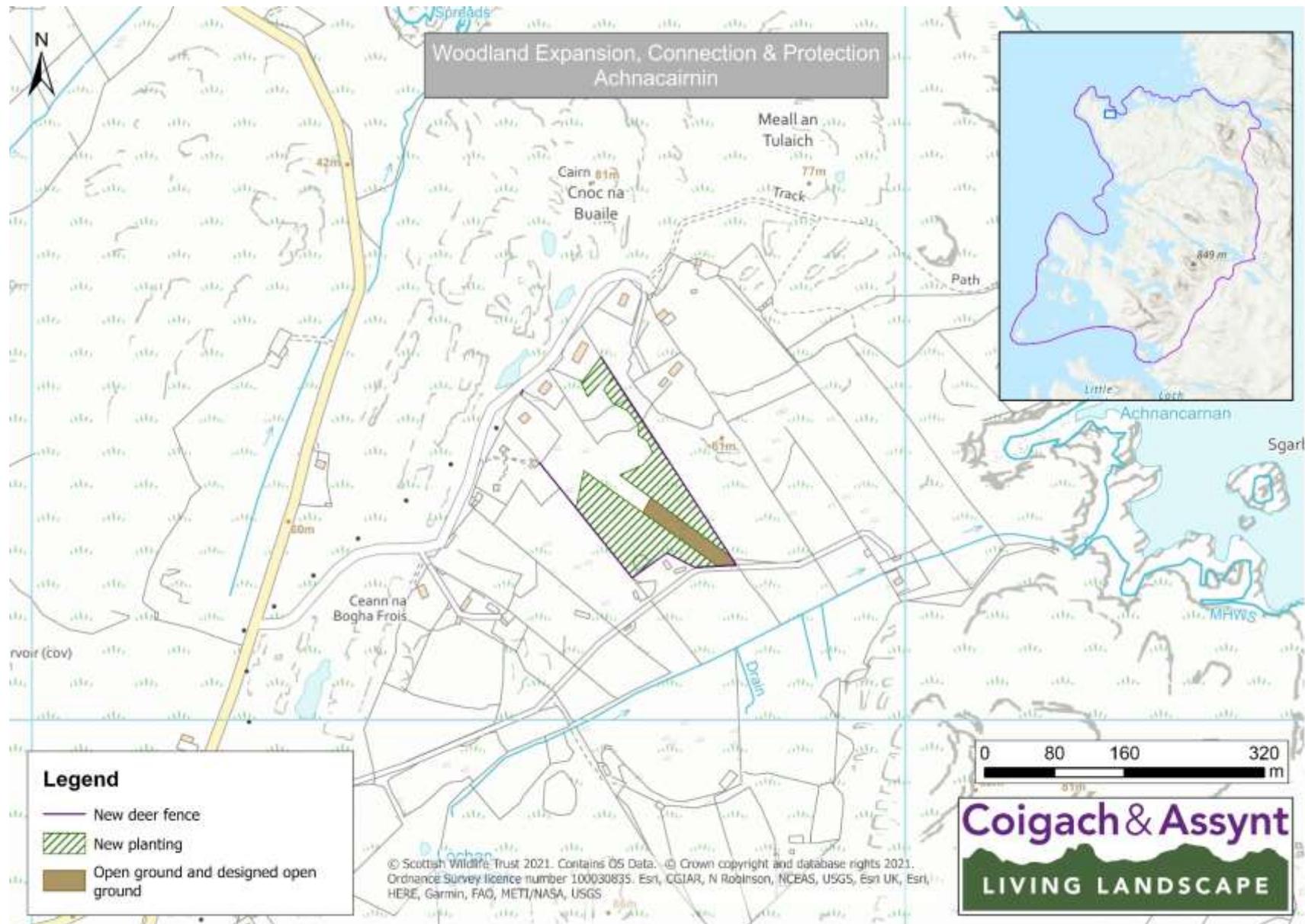


Figure 4. Native Woodland Planting Achvraie 1

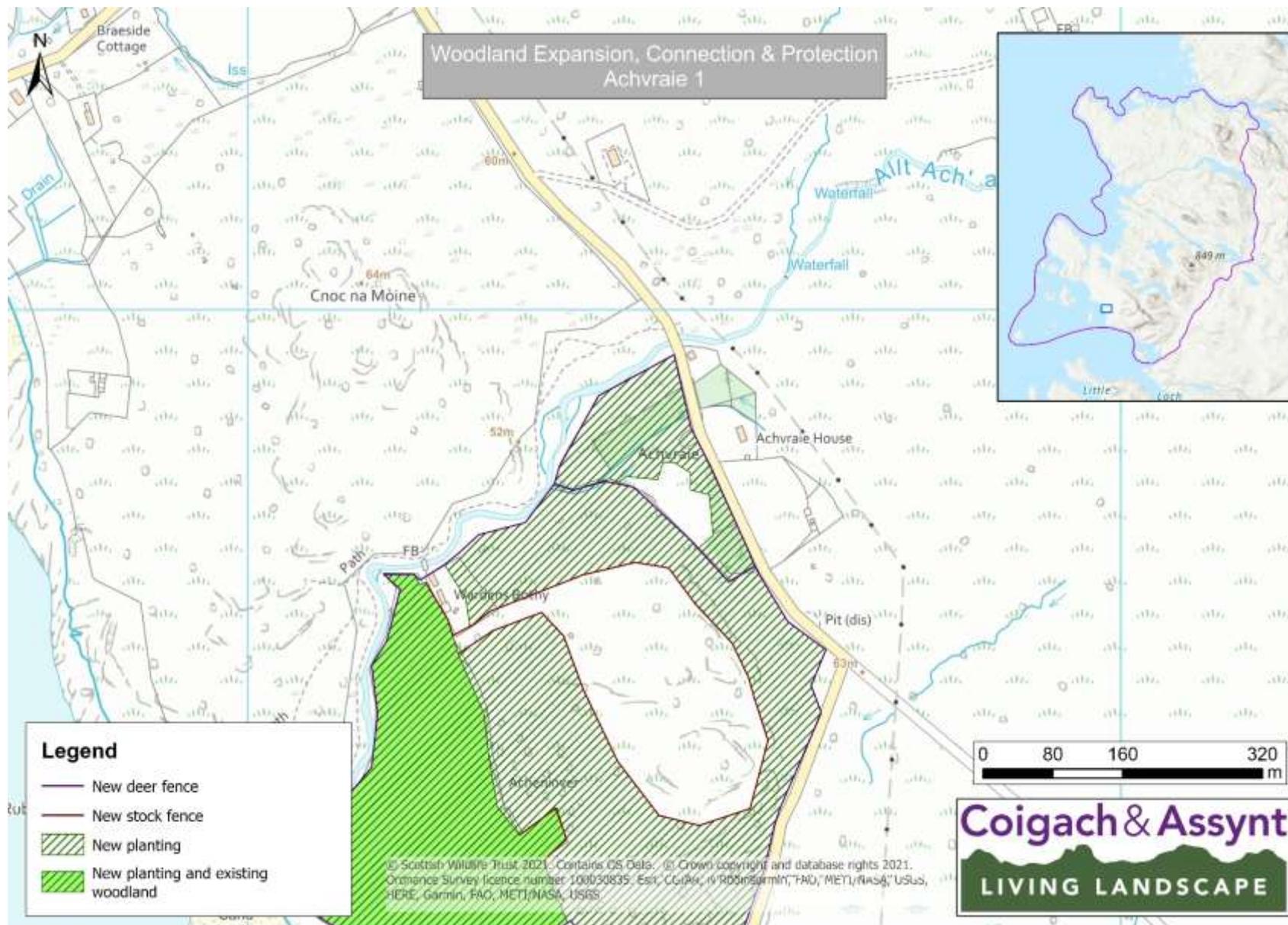


Figure 5. Native Woodland Planting Balchladdich 1

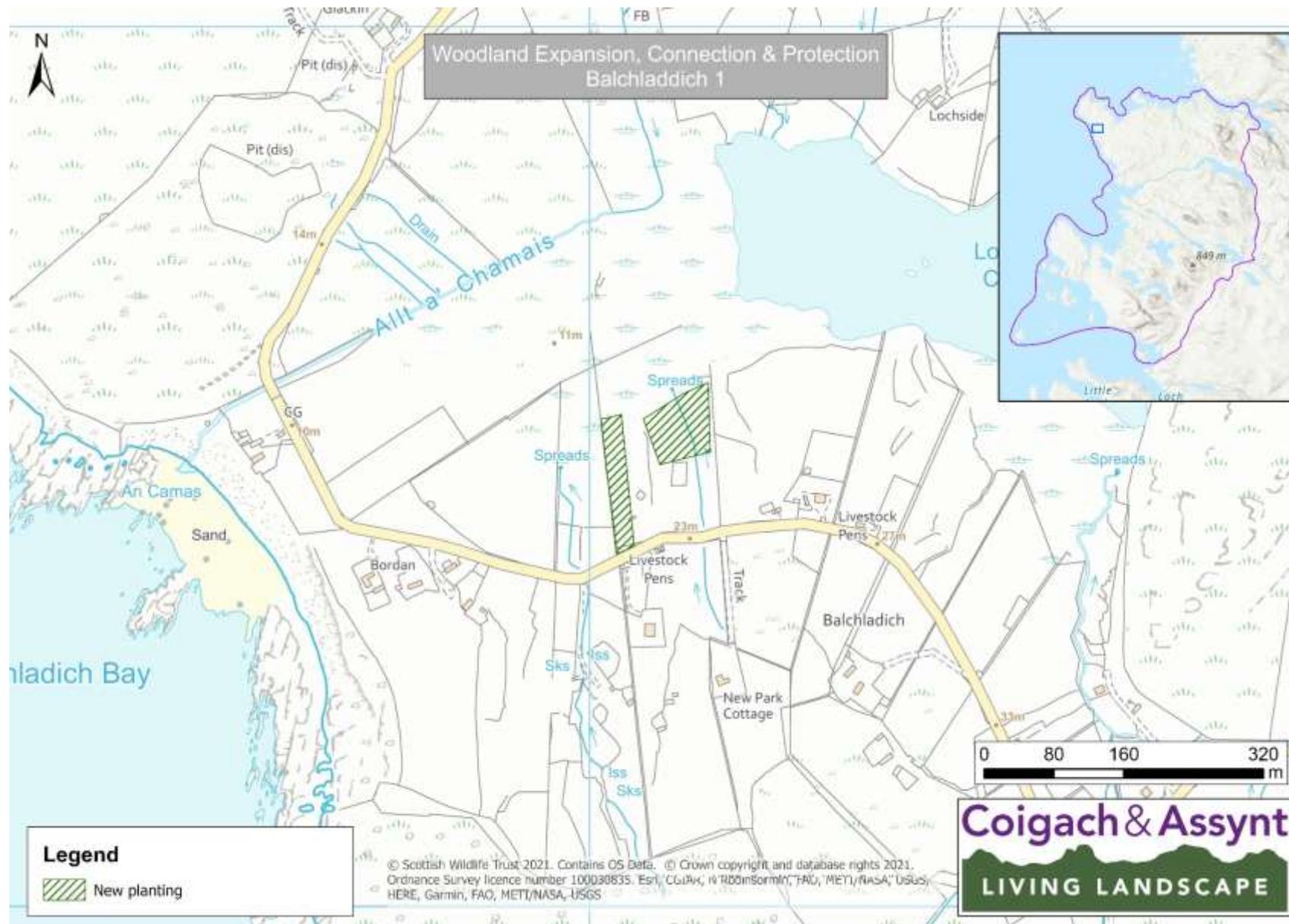


Figure 6. Native Woodland Planting Druum Suardalain

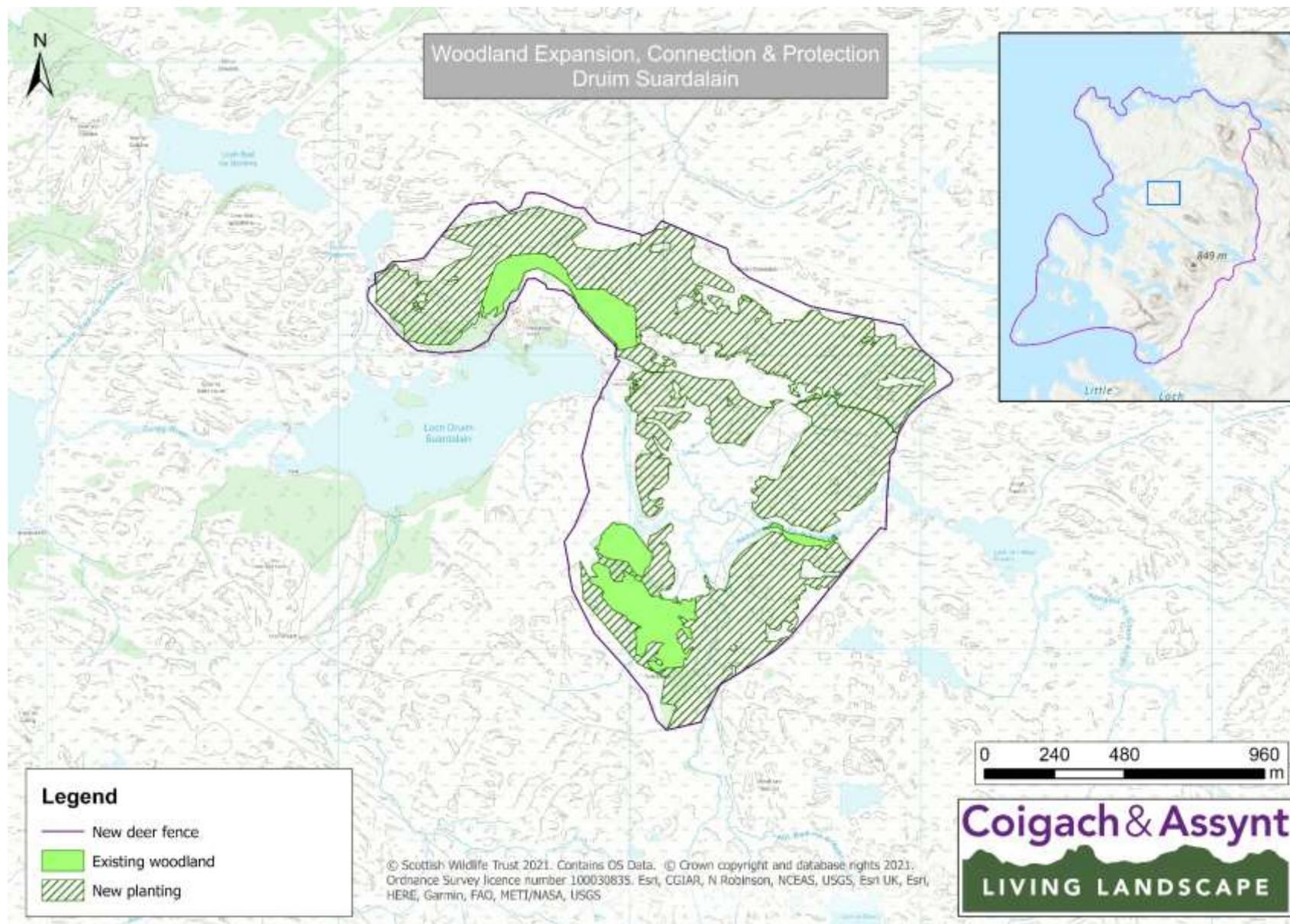


Figure 7. Native Woodland Planting for Inchnadamph 1 and 2



Figure 8. Native Woodland Planting Isle Martin



Figure 9. Native Woodland Planting Ledbeg

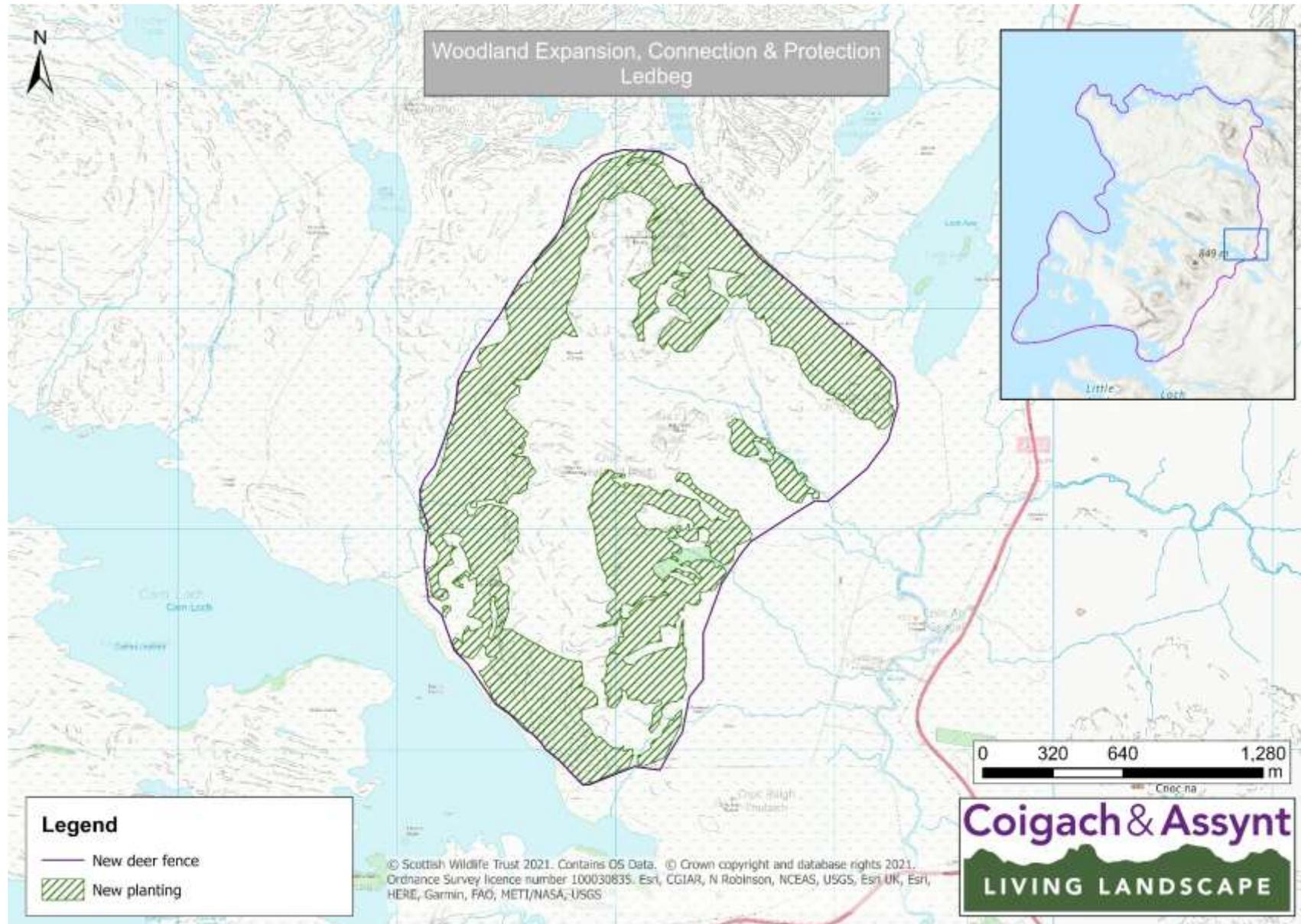


Figure 10. Native Woodland Planting Little Assynt

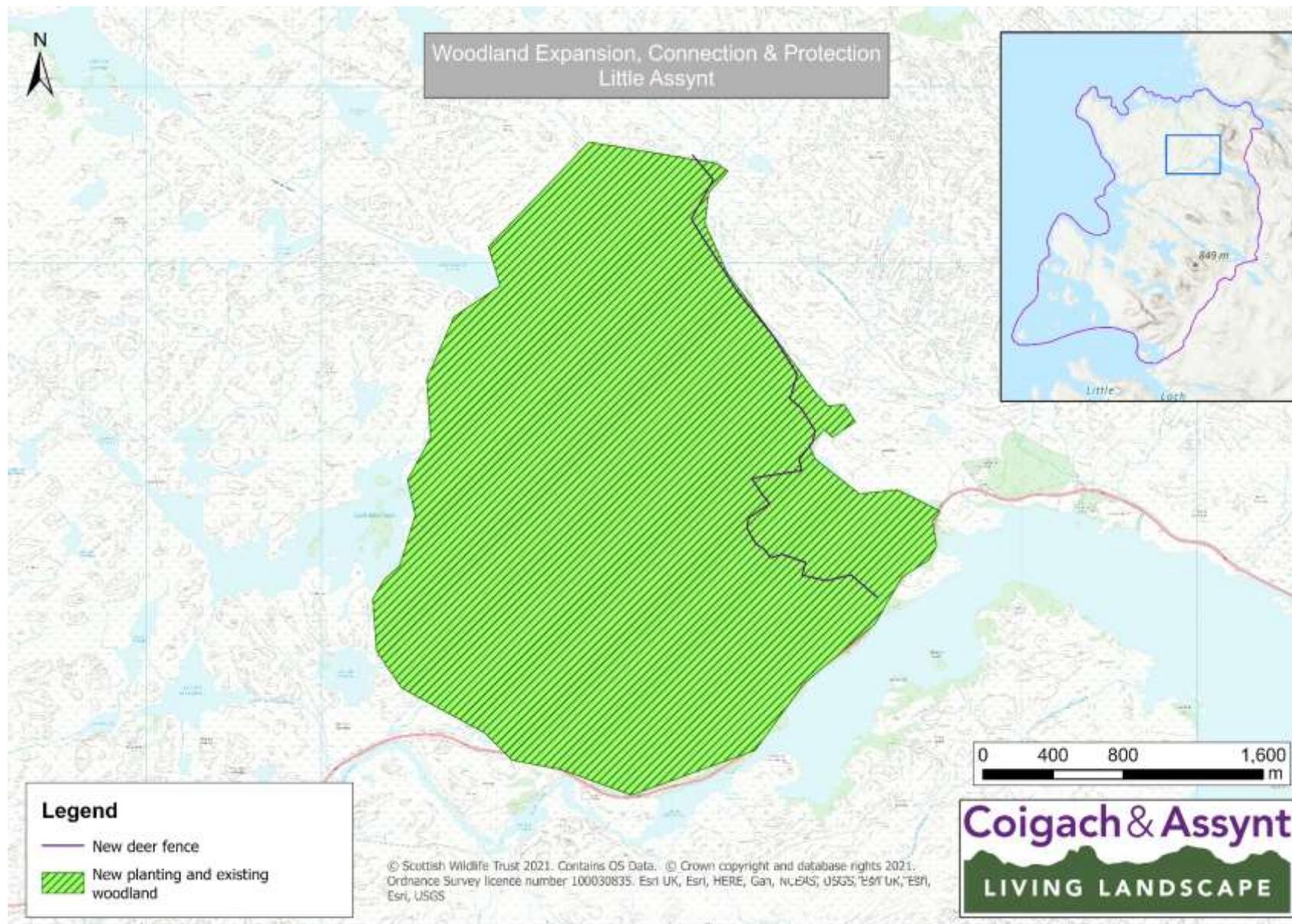


Figure 11. Native Woodland Planting Stoer 1 & 2

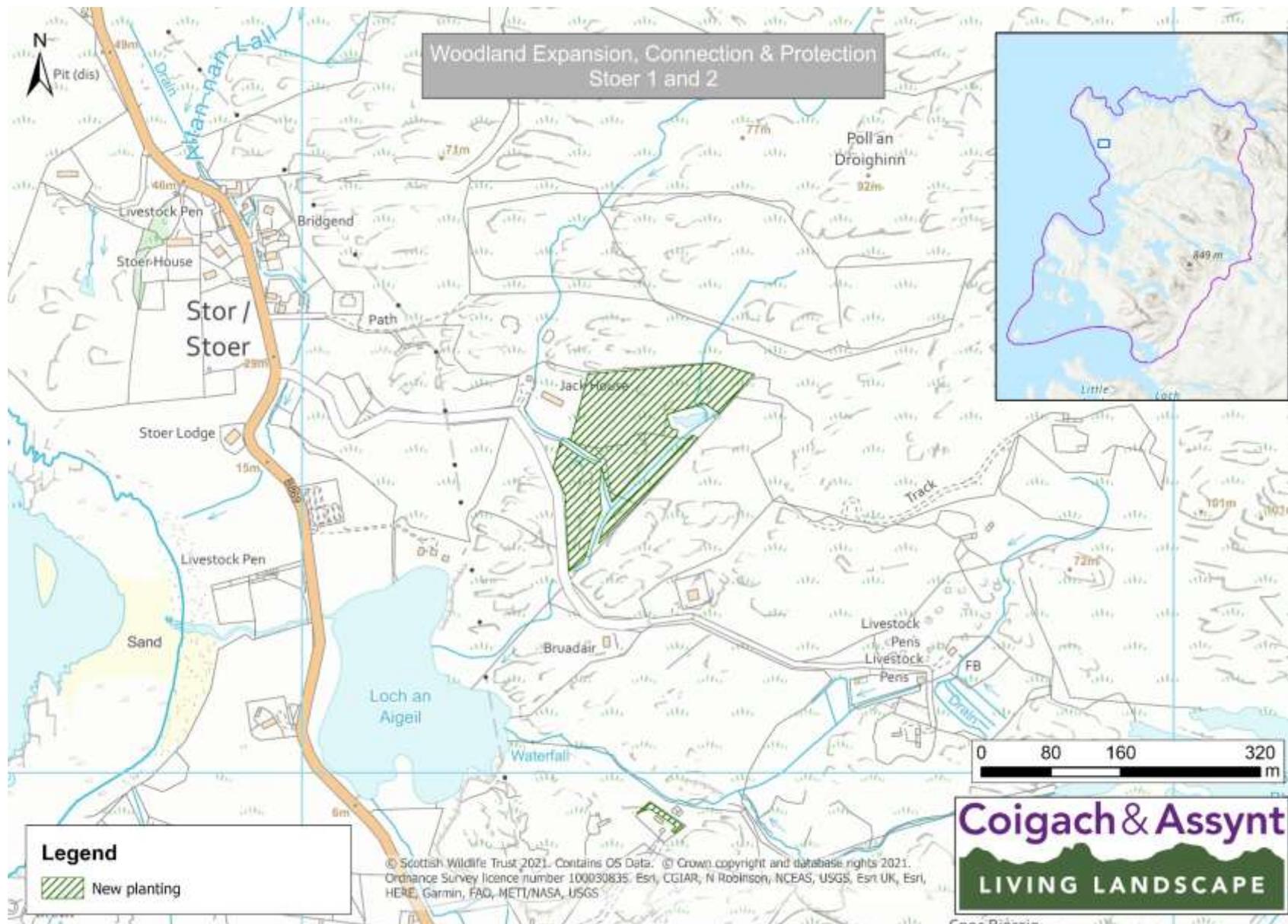


Figure 12. Native Woodland Planting *Tanera Mor*

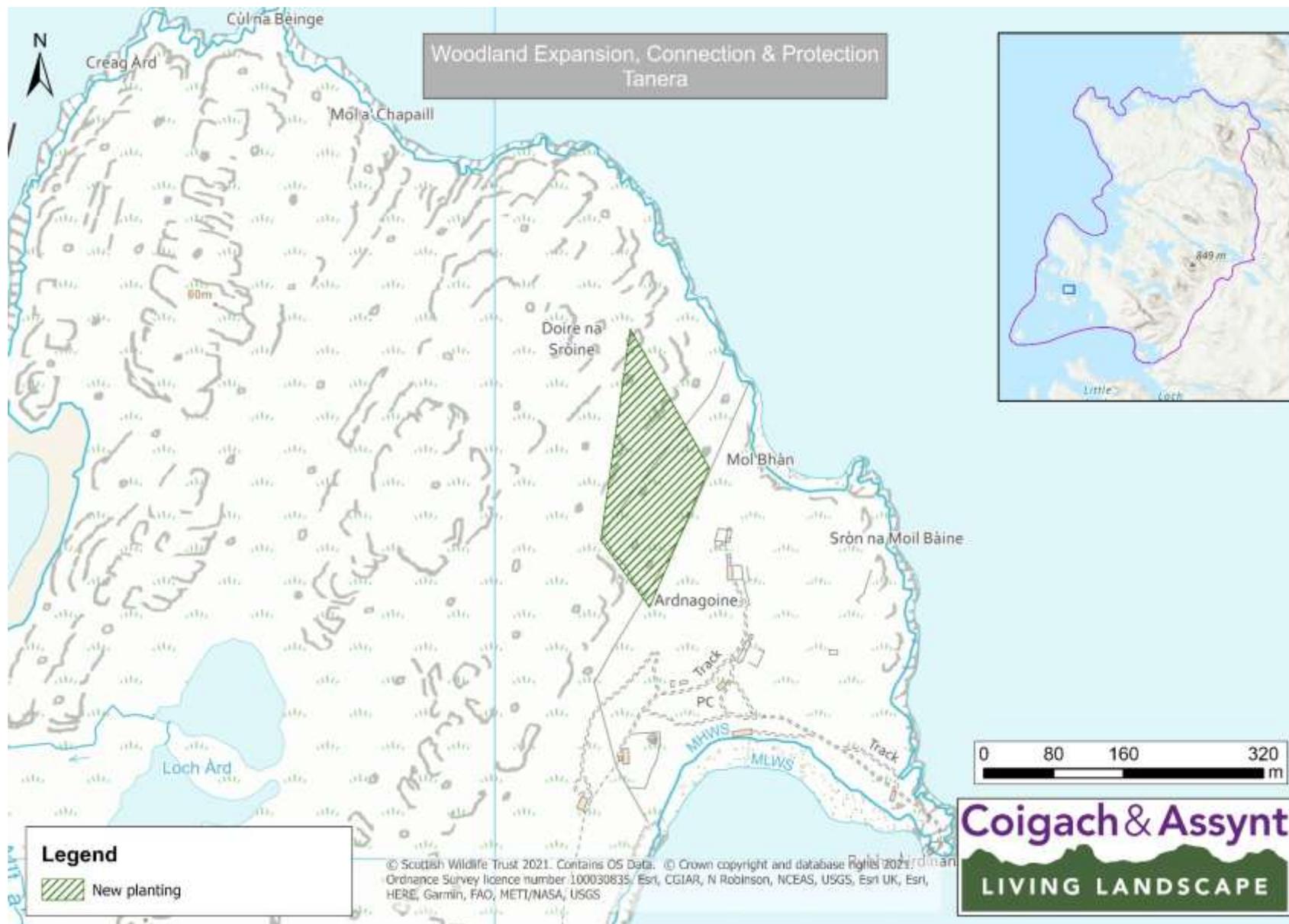


Figure 13. Native Woodland Planting Achiltibuie 2

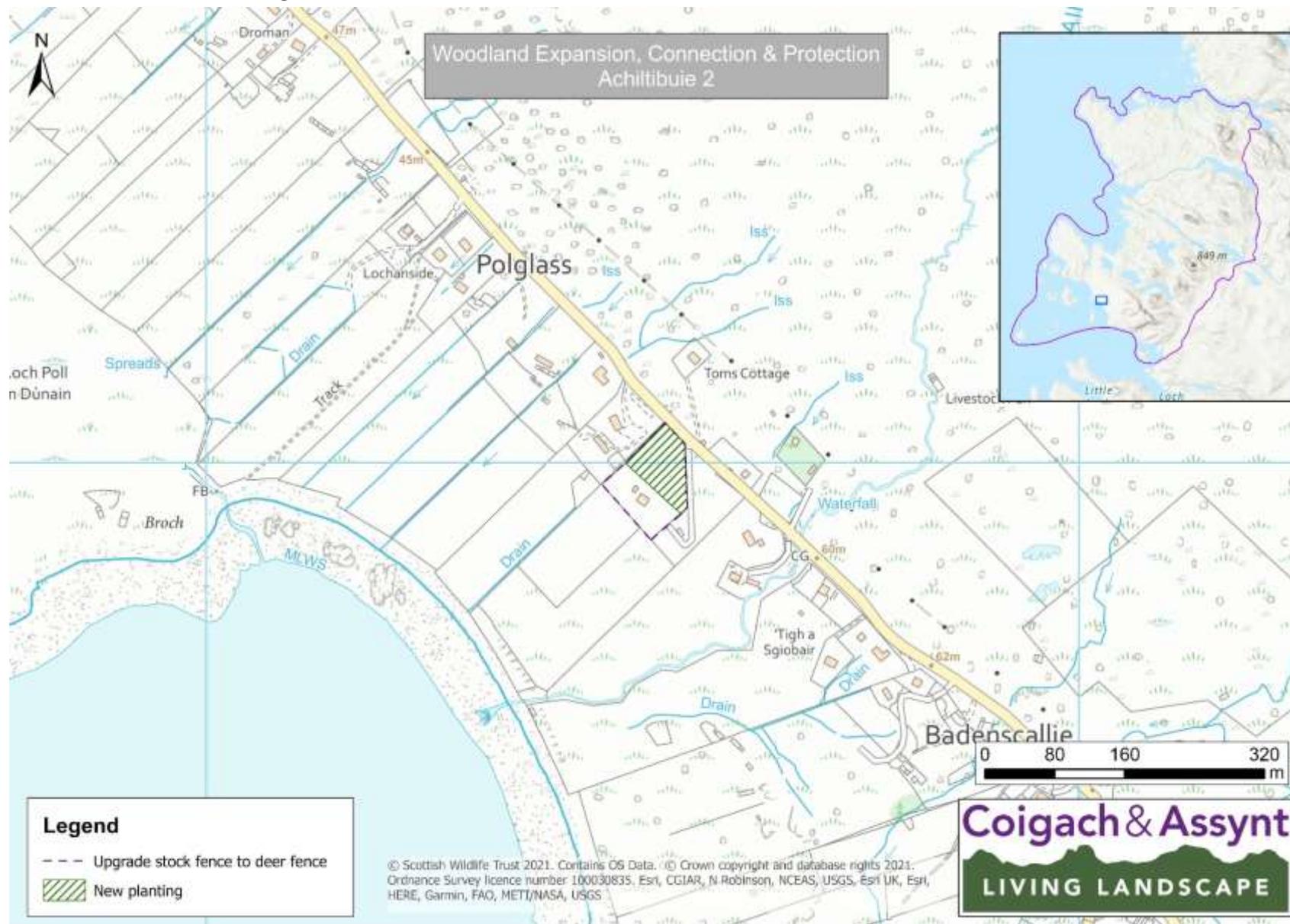


Figure 14. Native Woodland Planting Acheninver 1

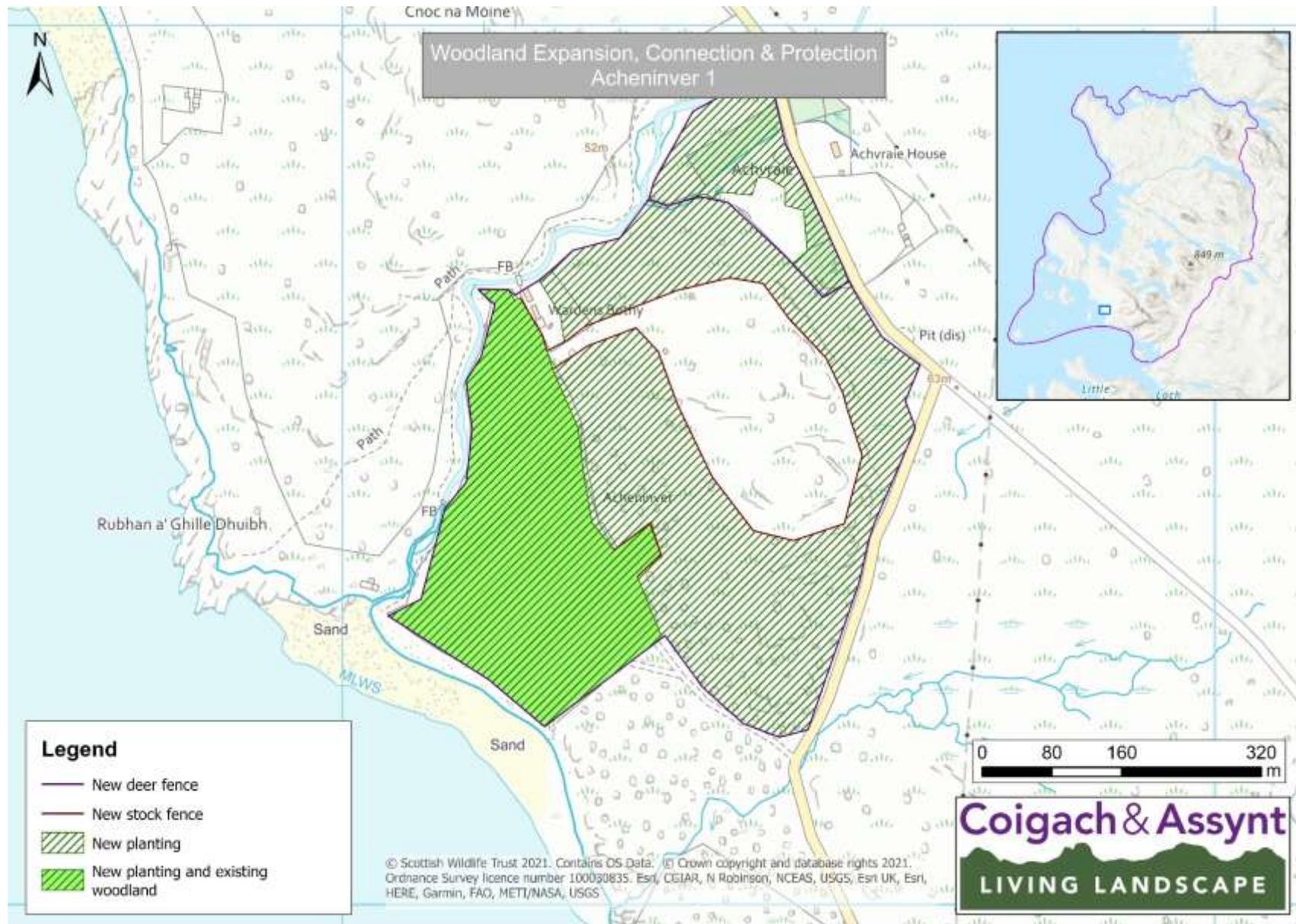


Figure 15. Native Woodland Planting Achmelvich 1

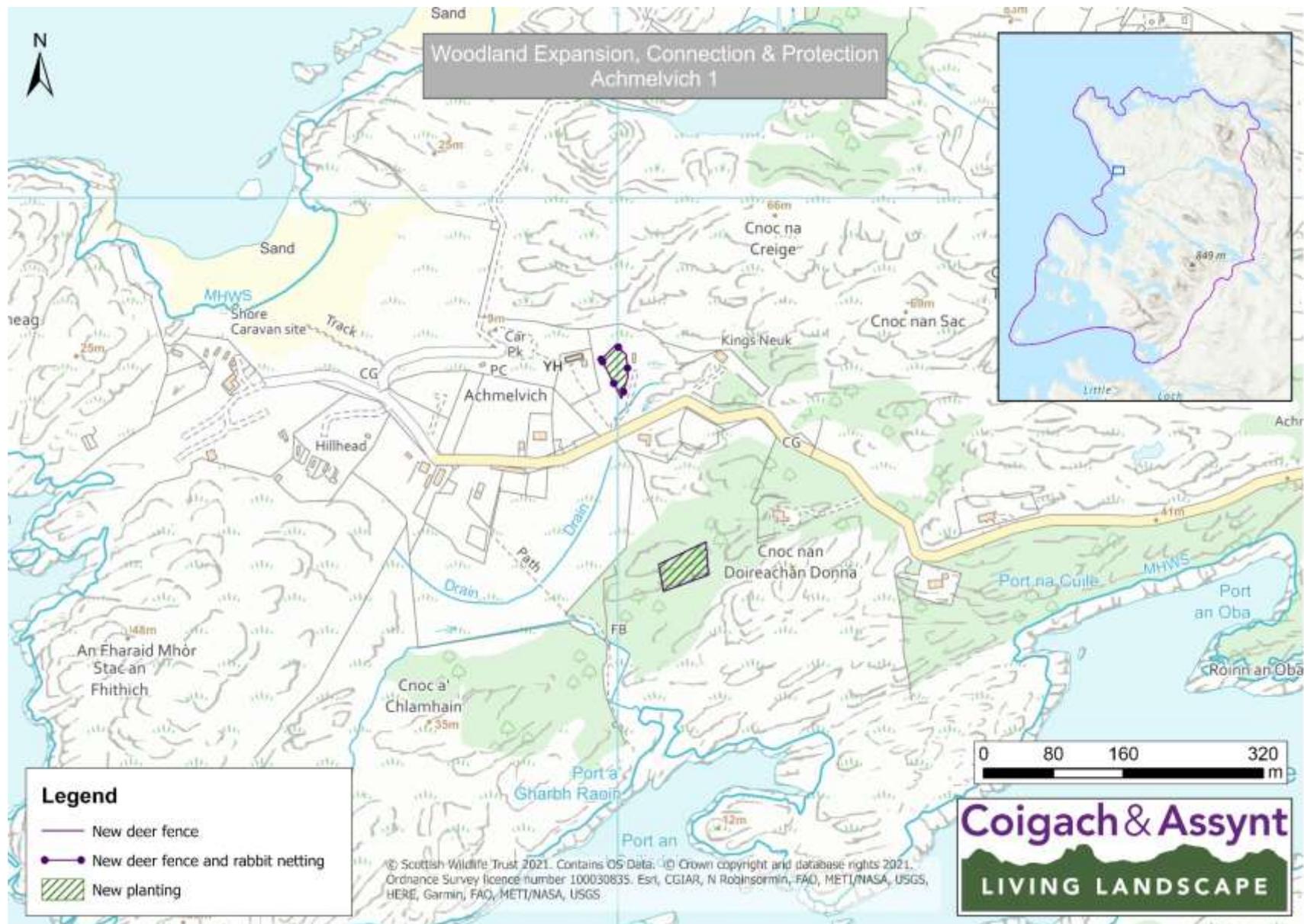


Figure 16. Native Woodland Planting Culnacraig

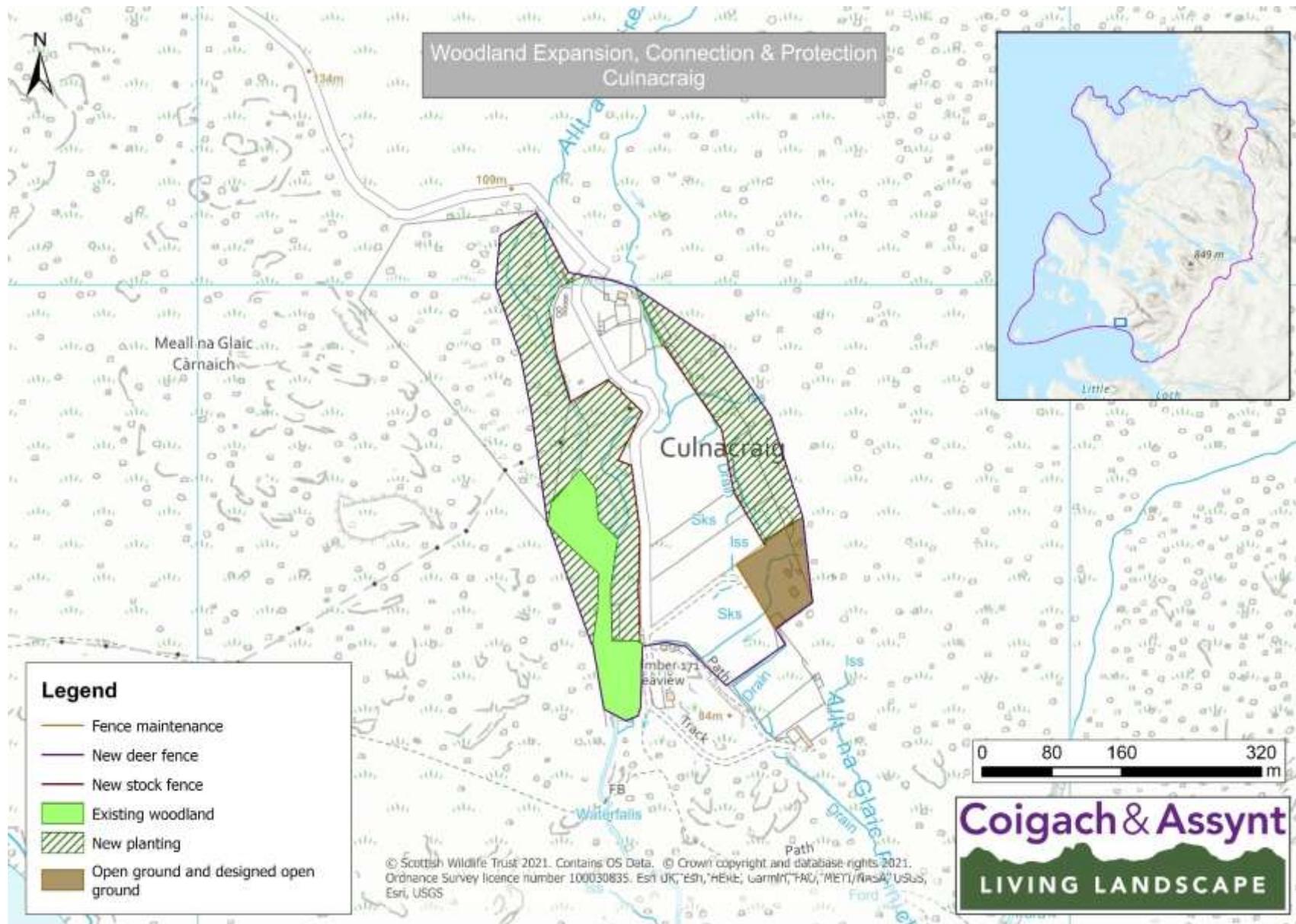


Figure 17. Native Woodland Planting Inchnadamph 3

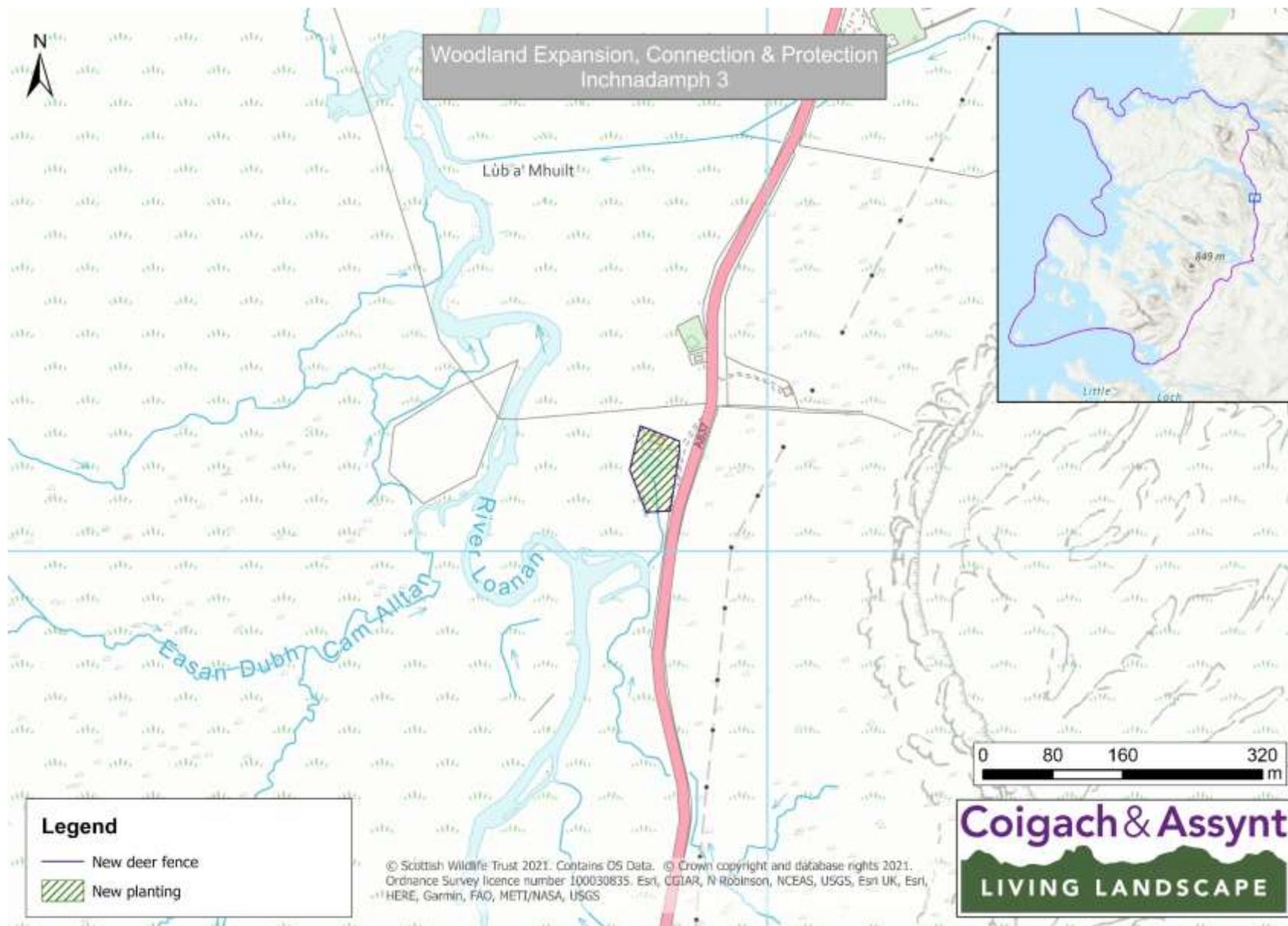


Figure 18. Native Woodland Planting Tileathdoire

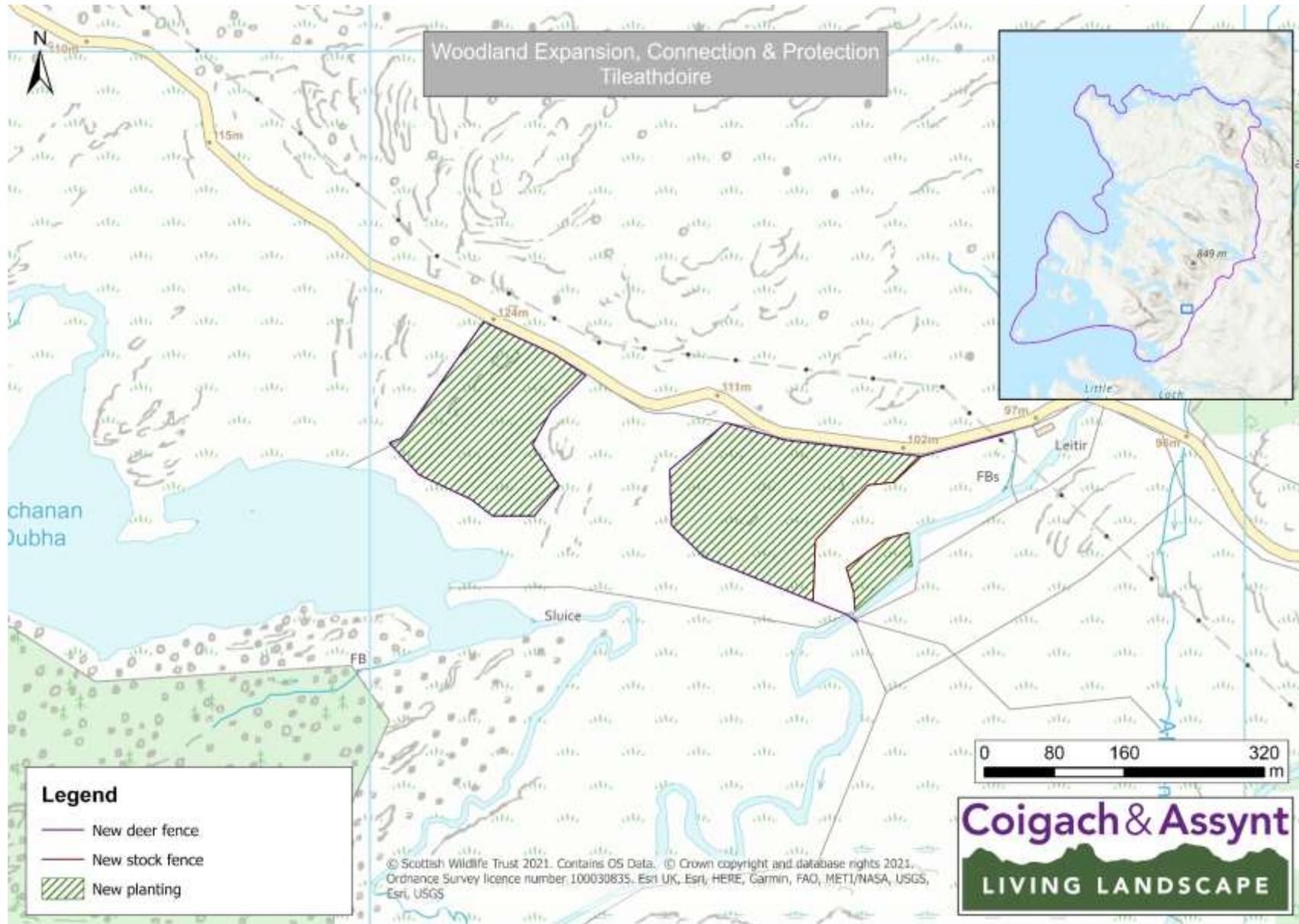


Figure 19. Native Woodland Planting Blairbuie

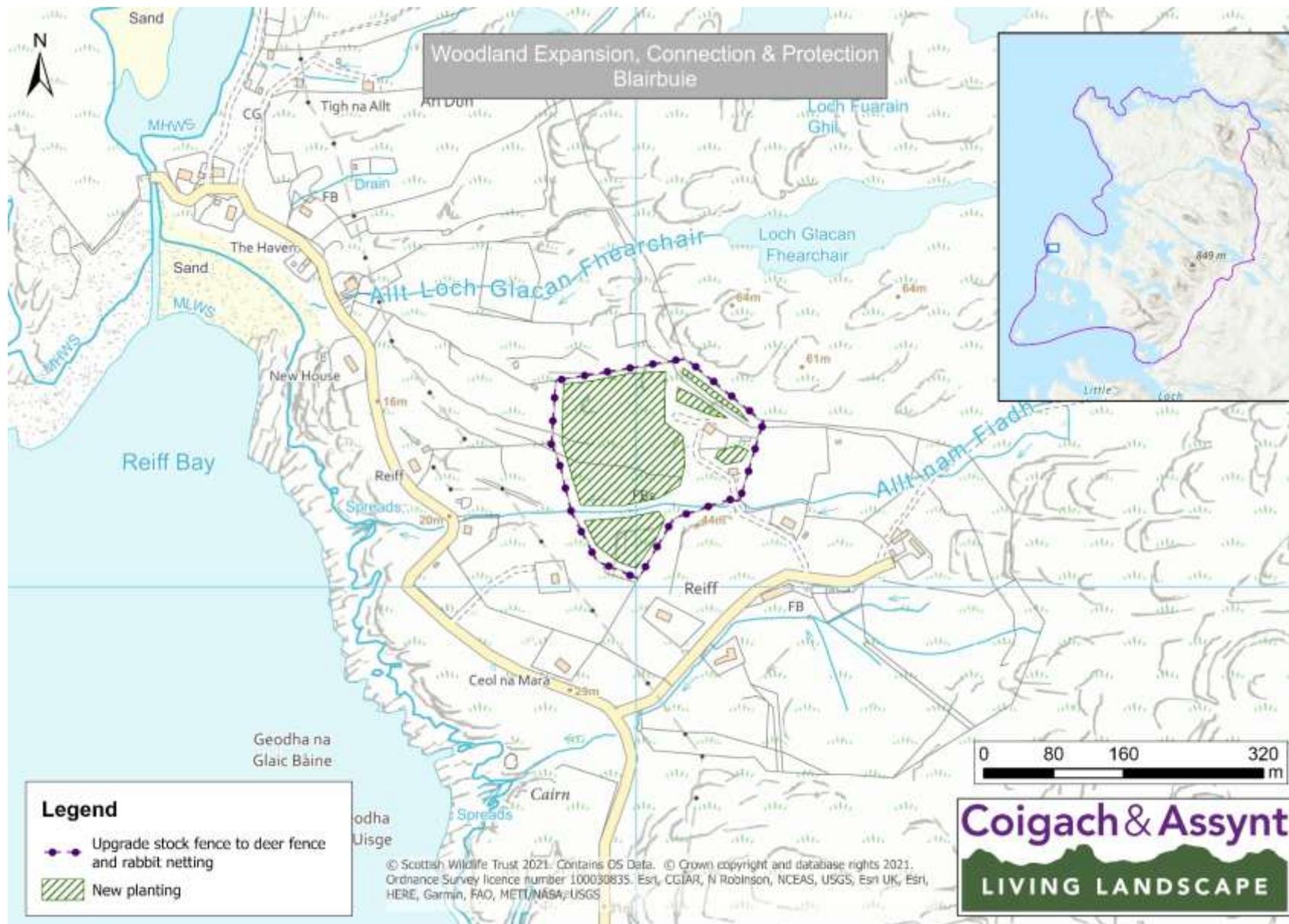


Figure 20. Native Woodland Planting Achiltibuie Gardens



