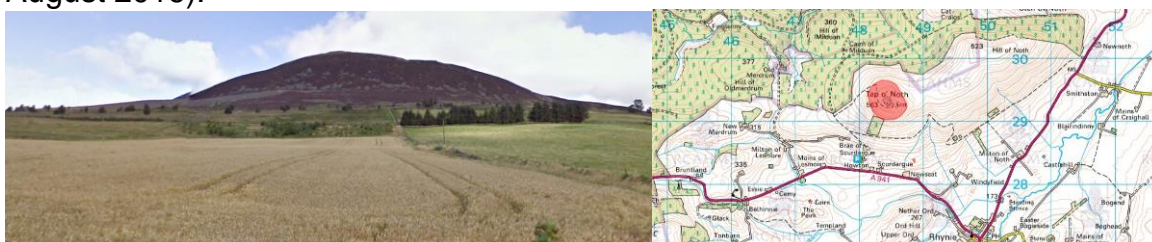


<b>Case reference</b>	SMC-ABS-002
<b>Application details</b>	Evaluative excavations to characterise the fort and interior deposits
<b>Site address</b>	Tap O'Noth hillfort to North west of Rhynie Village, Aberdeenshire
<b>Applicant</b>	Dr Gordon Noble - University of Aberdeen
<b>Determining Authority</b>	Historic Environment Scotland
<b>Local Authority Area</b>	Aberdeenshire Council
<b>Reason(s) for notification</b>	Notification Direction 2015 – works to be granted Scheduled Monument Consent go beyond the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument
<b>Representations</b>	Nil
<b>Date notified to Ministers</b>	6 March 2017
<b>Date of recommendation</b>	28 March 2017
<b>Decision / recommendation</b>	Clear

## Description of Proposal and Site:

- Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) is sought for excavations at Tap o'Noth fort. It is a prehistoric domestic and defensive hillfort which is the second highest in Scotland, lying at a height of 563m OD. It is located on a hill that overlooks the village of Rhynie to the northwest, 20 miles west of Inverurie. The outlook from the summit commands sight of a huge sweep of north-east Scotland.
- The monument comprises two main Iron Age components, a massive vitrified wall around the summit enclosing an area of 85m x 30m and a stone rampart set further down the slope which is 6-8m wide and 3.5m high in places and encloses an area of 16.4 hectares. There is also a possibility that the fort was reoccupied during the Pictish period (7<sup>th</sup> century).
- The works are phased over three years (2017-2019) with a total of seven trenches proposed which aim to fully characterise the hillfort, establish its chronology, test for occupation during the Pictish period and provide contextual value to other excavations in the vicinity of Rhynie (Craw Stane SMC cleared by Ministers in August 2016).

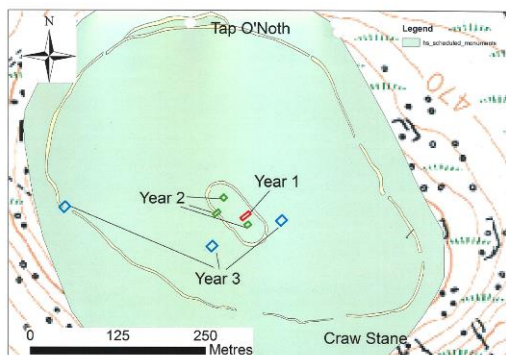


## Consultations and Representations:

- No representations have been received with respect to this application.
- PAD consulted SG Culture and Historic Environment Division following notification and they do not consider that this SMC raises issues of national interest that would merit Ministerial intervention.

## Assessment:

1. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) are minded to grant consent for archaeological excavations which will impact on the Scheduled Monument as the insertion of seven trenches and related ground disturbance goes beyond the minimum level of intervention which is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in the monument. This is a significant departure from policy as set out in section 3.16 of HES' Policy Statement June 2016.
2. The Rhynie Environs Archaeology Project (REAP) forms part of a long running research project called the Northern Picts Project with researchers for the Universities of Aberdeen, Chester and Glasgow. Over the period 2017-2019, the project aims to contextualise key evidence recovered at nearby excavations and characterise a series of hillforts within the landscape context of Rhynie. This application is only covering works at Tap O'Noth, where there has been no full archaeological investigation previously on the scale proposed.
3. The aims of the project are supported by the issues identified in the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (SCARF) and the Scotland's Archaeology Strategy. The excavations will be undertaken by the Northern Picts Project which includes two experienced site directors, team of supervisors, additional site assistants employed from AOC Archaeology all leading selection of volunteers and students. The ratio of experienced to non-experienced diggers will not exceed 1:3.
4. The trenches being opened up over a three season/year period are for research purposes and not for any conservation benefit. Year 1 proposes a single 15m x 5m excavation trench within the interior of the vitrified fort. Year 2 proposes two 10m x 10m trenches within the interior of the vitrified fort (building on previous years findings) and Year 3 proposes two excavation trenches 10m x 10m within the outer fort and a single 10m x 10m trench across the outer rampart and an entrance. Each trench will be deturfed, topsoil and rubble removed by hand with turf reinstated at the end of each excavation.



5. The project has a strong social media presence, a comprehensive public engagement strategy and community activities and links to the artist collective 'Rhynie Woman' who are looking to develop walks around key heritage sites. HES are also providing Archaeology Grant funding for the project.
6. HES considers that, even though the works are extensive, they have been carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed and properly planned. The application accords with sections 3.17, 3.19 and 3.20 of their Policy Statement as the project clearly generates public benefits of national importance which outweighs the impact on the cultural significance of the monument. HES have set a condition to ensure that works planned in Years 2 and 3 remain within the scope of works consented. Some European protected species or habitats have been identified in the vicinity however due to the altitude and exposed nature of the site they are not likely to be affected by these works. The site is not within a SSSI.
7. In summary, the SMC application does not raise any issues of national importance that would merit intervention by Ministers.

**Decision/Recommendation:**

- The application should be cleared back to Historic Environment Scotland to issue the Scheduled Monument Consent with a single condition.