



Case reference	SMC-MRY-002
Application details	Assessing the upper citadel for coastal erosion plus evaluative excavation of the fort interior
Site address	Burghead, fort, graveyard and chapel, including the Clavie (SM 2205), Burghead
Applicant	University of Aberdeen
Determining Authority	Historic Environment Scotland (HES)
Local Authority Area	Moray Council
Reason(s) for notification	Notification Direction 2015 – works to be granted Scheduled Monument Consent by Historic Environment Scotland go beyond the minimum level of intervention that is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in a monument
Representations	Nil
Date notified to Ministers	27 November 2018
Date of recommendation	13 December 2018
Decision / recommendation	Clear

Description of Proposal and Site:

- Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) is sought for the excavation of six trenches and three test pits within Burghead fort. The monument comprises the remains of a massive promontory Iron Age hillfort located to the north of Burghead, a planned town overlooking the Moray Firth. The surviving portion of the fort covers about 150 x 170m. Other fort remains were demolished as the town expanded in 1808.
- The monument is of national importance because it is one of the most impressive early Historic fortresses in northern Scotland. It is a high status settlement with Pictish associations and continues to have a striking landscape impact.
- The monument designation comprises three separate sections i), the fort and ramparts [with the Coastguard Station excluded] ii), the old graveyard on Grant Street with below ground remains of St Aethans Chapel; and iii), Doorie Hill and the Clavie Stone; all outlined in red below:

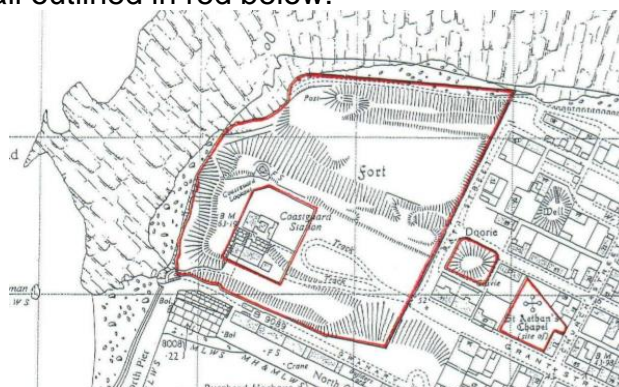




Figure 3a Proposed trenches at Burghead 2018. The previous excavations at Burghead are marked in blue.

(Images above and below taken from University of Aberdeen project design report)



Consultations and Representations:

- No Representations were made during consideration of the application.
- PAD consulted Scottish Government's Culture and Historic Environment Division following notification and they are content and have no further comment to make.

Assessment:

1. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) are minded to grant SMC for archaeological excavation of trenches and test pits which will impact on the scheduled monument as the related ground disturbance and removal of material goes beyond the minimum level of intervention which is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in the monument.
2. The application has been submitted by the University of Aberdeen Department of Archaeology. It forms part of their Northern Picts and Comparative Kingship Project. The project team have been working at Burghead since 2013 and have had regular pre-application discussions with HES. This current application follows on from a previous SMC application for excavations and small scale evaluation [which was notified to PAD in March 2018 (SMC-MRY-001)] along with geophysical survey undertaken in 2013 and evaluative excavation within the coastguard station gardens (*not scheduled*) between 2015-2017.
3. The aims of the project are to answer questions relating to the date, construction and development of the fort ramparts and extent of survival of internal deposits in the upper and lower citadels. It also seeks evidence for the fort's entrance arrangement, the extent and quality of early medieval remains and to examine the extent of coastal erosion to date and its possible future impacts. The works are to be undertaken during 2019. It will be directed by University of Aberdeen archaeology department personnel using experienced excavators, volunteers and archaeology students.
4. The physical impact of the proposed works would be the excavation of trial trenches and test pits to record the wall face of the west rampart which is undergoing coastal erosion, and to provide further information on the survival, location, character and date of archaeological remains across the scheduled area. **Trench 1** measures 3m x 8m and would target a stretch of surviving inner wallface on the upper ward west rampart and re-open a smaller intervention from 2018; **Trench 2** measures 2m x 4m and would be placed to investigate the west rampart about 35m south of Trench 1; **Trench 3** measures 10m x 10m, with 5m x 2m leg to the northwest, would assess the survival of another part of the west rampart; **Trench 4** measures 10m x 10m and would target a previous find spot at the east end of the upper citadel; **Test Pits 5 and 7** would each measure about 2m x 2m with additional stepping through modern deposits where necessary, their features would be mapped, recorded and sample excavated, with the aim of allowing a profile of surviving deposits across the upper ward to be developed; **Trench 6** measures 2m x 4m and would assess survival of the middle rampart between the upper and lower wards, aiming to expose any wallface and recover dating samples from associated deposits; **Trench 8** measures a maximum of 15m x 15m and would assess potential buildings suggested by test pits dug in the lower ward 2018 and **Test Pit 9** measures 2m x 2m and would assess whether early medieval deposits survive outside of the limits of the fort defences. The re-instatement strategy for the trenches/test pits allows for follow-up monitoring and the use of biodegradable matting if necessary.

5. HES consider the proposed excavations would disturb a small part of the monument's overall area and result in an improved understanding of its significance and dating which would be of wide public and academic interest. The investigations respond to key research areas suggested by the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (ScARF), whose Iron Age panel recommends targeted excavation to remedy a lack of dating evidence for enclosed sites, which is currently a severe constraint on understanding them. The project would also offer educational opportunities for volunteers and students and has high potential to inform future interpretation of the site for visitors and local people.
6. HES believe that the research design is generally suitable and sets out a method and timetable for investigations through to publication. However one issue requires to be addressed as there is no proposal to update the research design after fieldwork by producing a Post Excavation Research Design (PERD). The provision of a PERD would enable the application to be considered compliant with paragraph 3.20 of HES' policy statement and a single condition will be imposed to achieve this.
7. Overall, HES consider the benefits of the proposal are considered greater than the negative effects of the removal of some archaeological deposits and is concluded to be broadly consistent with relevant policy. However as the proposed works are not considered the minimum necessary consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in the monument, there is the requirement to notify Ministers.
8. The works would involve controlled archaeological excavation within a relatively small part of a scheduled monument. The excavations are the minimum necessary to achieve the project's objective and would leave the vast majority of the site's archaeological deposits intact. They would not visually alter the monument. It is concluded that they would have no material effect on the overall significance of the monument and are, therefore, not inconsistent with paragraphs 3.16 and 3.18 of the policy statement. However, a PERD needs to be agreed with HES after the excavation. A condition requiring this is necessary to enable the application to be fully compliant with paragraph 3.20 of the policy statement. Three of the proposed trenches are intended to address structures and deposits threatened by coastal erosion, and respond to the policy objective at paragraph 3.21.
9. In summary, the SMC 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 Scheduled Monument Consent with one condition.