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| Case reference | SMC-FIF-002 |
| Application details | Archaeological Evaluation |
| Site address | Court Cave , Doo-Cave and Sliding Cave at MacDuff's Castle and Dovecot and the Caves at East Wemyss |
| Applicant | The SCAPE Trust |
| Determining Authority | Historic Environment Scotland (HES) |
| Local Authority Area | Fife 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 | 28 February 2019 |
| Date of recommendation | 15 March 2019 |
| Decision / recommendation | Clear |

Description of Proposal and Site:

- Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) is sought for small-scale intrusive archaeological excavations and evaluation of Court Cave, Doo-Cave and Sliding Cave - a group of sea caves extending north east from the village of East Wemyss and the remains of Macduff's Castle. The caves contain Pictish symbols, along with other presumed later graffiti and structural works relating to previous use.
- The scheduling designation covers the caves and their contents and the remains of the castle and associated structures; the area protecting Macduff's Castle overlies two of the caves. It includes the dovecot of Macduff's Castle which was located on the shore and has subsequently been lost to coastal erosion.
- The monument is of national importance for its potential to contribute to our understanding of medieval architecture and social organisation and our understanding of Pictish art and ritual.
- The site falls within the Firth of Forth Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).
- The aims of the project is to increase knowledge about the caves' significance in support of management and interpretation aims.

Consultations and Representations:

- No Representations were made during consideration of the application.

- Historic Environment Scotland (HES) have consulted Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) who have advised that there are natural heritage interests of national importance on the site but they will not be affected by the proposal. The site is close to Firth of Forth Special Protection Area (SPA) classified for its wintering wildfowl and waders. SNH have advised it is unlikely that the proposal will have a significant effect on any qualifying interests either directly or indirectly and an Appropriate Assessment was not required.
- 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. The application has been notified to Ministers because Historic Environment Scotland (HES) are minded to grant SMC for controlled archaeological excavations at a scheduled monument which requires some ground disturbance and removal of archaeological deposits which goes beyond the minimum level of intervention which is consistent with conserving what is culturally significant in the monument.
2. The works have been carefully considered by HES. HES consider that, given the size of the trenches relative to the monument, and the proposed excavation methodology, the investigations would not have a material effect on the monument's overall archaeological value. HES have concluded that the proposal is not inconsistent with the principles of minimal intervention and would have a very limited impact on the cultural significance of the monument. HES consider there is high potential that the investigations would generate public benefits of national importance which outweigh the small impact on the national cultural significance of the monument. HES anticipate that the project would assist public and academic understanding of an important Pictish site.
3. HES consider that the project results would inform the future presentation and interpretation of the caves for visitors and local people. The project would also offer educational opportunities for volunteers and students during fieldwork. The fieldwork, and the information gained from it, should enhance appreciation of the value of the monument, both locally and nationally. One of the caves, Sliding Cave, is under threat from coastal erosion and the work would also assist in planning a response to that, which is also assessed as a considerable benefit.
4. HES have concluded that the proposal would have no material effect on the overall significance of the monument and are acceptable in meeting the terms of Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP), and also accounting for other material considerations. HES have recommended that consent is granted without conditions.
5. This SMC application is not considered to 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.