

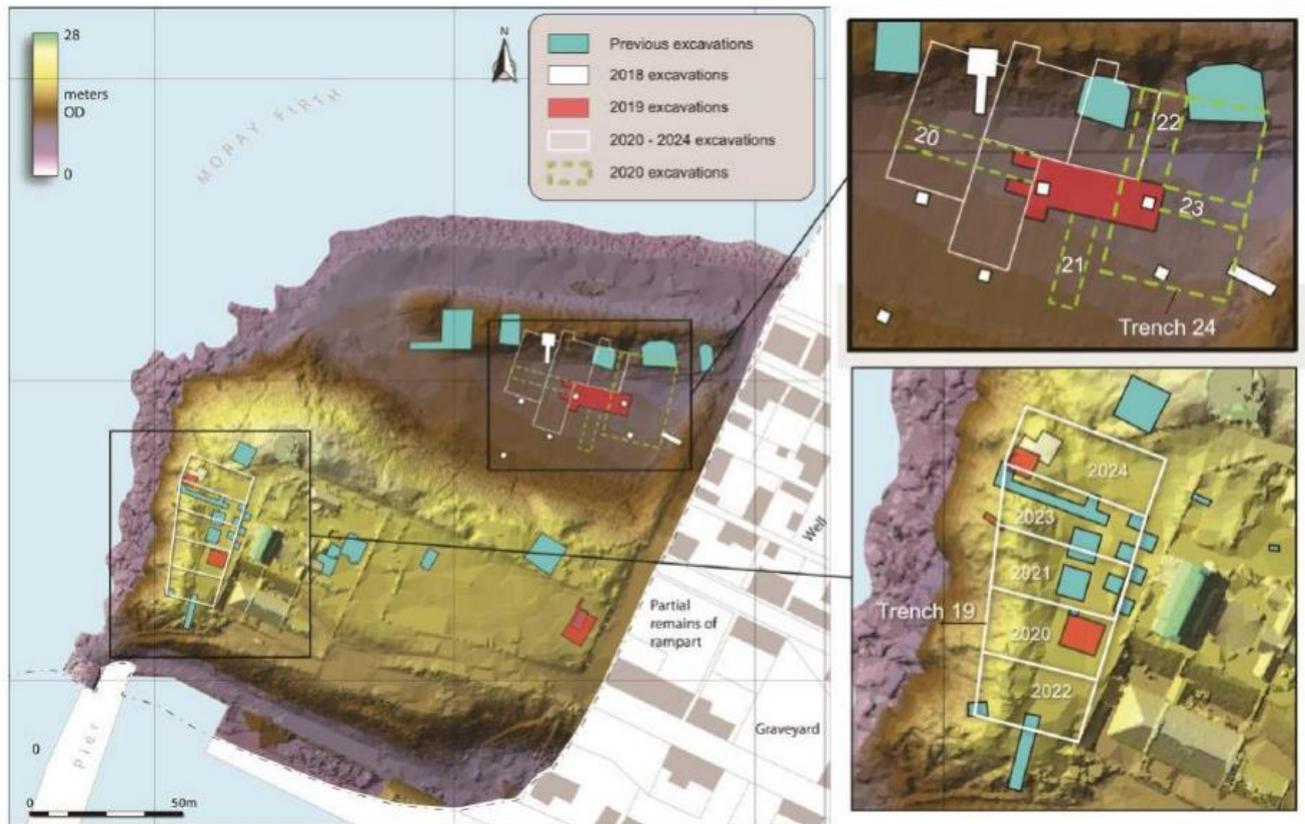


Case reference	SMC-MRY-003
Application details	Open area excavations in advance of coastal erosion
Site address	Burghead fort, graveyard and chapel, including the Clavie (SM2205), Burghead
Applicant	University of Aberdeen
Determining Authority	Historic Environment Scotland (HES)
Local Authority Area	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	19 May 2020
Date of recommendation	9 June 2020
Decision / recommendation	Clear

Description of Proposal and Site:

- Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) is sought for a phase of open area excavations at 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 an area of 150m x 170m, while other remains were demolished as the town expanded in 1808. This application follows on from a series of SMCs undertaken since 2013.
- The monument is of national importance as the site of one of the most impressive early Historic fortresses in northern Scotland. The recent Pictish finds from the site indicate its original status - the site is also significant because of its striking landscape impact. The scheduled area is in three parts: the main area of the fort and ramparts (excluding the area of the former Coastguard station and lookout); the old graveyard on Grant Street with below ground remains of St Aethans Chapel; and Doorie Hill and the Clavie Stone; all outlined in red below.





© University of Aberdeen – Excavation locations

Consultations and Representations:

- No representations were made during the consideration of the application.
- PAD consulted Scottish Government’s Culture and Historic Environment Division (CHED) following notification, who consider the proposed excavations to record further archaeological data as part of the ongoing three year project supported and monitored by HES is important. The opportunities offered for increased public engagement will bring positive benefits for both the local as well as wider communities and there are no issues of significant national importance to raise.

Assessment:

1. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) are minded to grant SMC for the excavation of a series of archaeological evaluation trenches which impacts 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 as part of their Northern Picts and Comparative Kingship Projects. It aims to deliver unprecedented insights into a major centre of early medieval kingship and answer a series of research questions about the development and use of this Pictish elite centre. It follows previous SMC applications to evaluate the site and determine the nature and extent of the archaeological remains at risk from coastal erosion – as indicated in the above illustration.

3. The proposed works involve investigation of five areas in the upper citadel which are most at risk from coastal erosion, aiming to deliver complete excavation and 'preservation by record'. This involves the controlled removal of most or all archaeological remains in an area measuring 45m long by an average of 21m wide. The proposals also include digging evaluation trenches in the lower citadel, opening additional areas and conducting sample excavation. Sample excavation would affect no more than 15% of the archaeological resource in this area, and would be implemented so as to preserve elements of all key contexts investigated in place for future study. Evidence for buildings or structures dating from the Early Historic period has been found in both areas.
4. HES consider that the project team are leaders in the study of Pictish power centres, and their recent work has transformed understanding not only of Burghead but of other enclosed settlements including Tap O' Noth and Mither Tap in Aberdeenshire. The project responds to key research needs identified by the Scottish Archaeological framework (ScARF) and should provide evidence for activities conducted within enclosed sites, connecting interior activity to enclosure sequences and boosting knowledge of early medieval settlement structures in eastern Scotland.
5. HES believes the project would provide a range of engagement opportunities and legacy activities with partners, the Burghead Headland Trust which aims to communicate the excavation process and results to a wide audience. Funding to support the first three years of the programme and post-excavation analysis has been awarded by HES.
6. HES consider the application is, on the whole, carefully considered, based on good authority, sensitively designed, and properly planned. The proposed works are assessed as extensive but respond to the unavoidable circumstances of coastal erosion. Consequently, the proposed works are compliant with HES' Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 3. HES requires further clarification to ensure that the proposed works are appropriate in terms of timescales and post excavation publication so two conditions are to be imposed: (i) to clarify the mechanism for providing updated project designs and a trench plan for each year's work (ii) to provide a costed post excavation research design and identify source of funding. These conditions would enable the application to be considered fully compliant with HES' Scheduled Monument Consent Policy 4.
7. HES believe the proposal is broadly consistent with their relevant policy. However, the proposal is not considered the minimum necessary consistent with conserving the cultural significance of the monument hence the requirement to notify Ministers.
8. In summary, and for the reasons set out above, this 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 Scheduled Monument Consent with two conditions.